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YOUTH EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2018

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A few staff members behind the work at the
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I.   ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACS is pleased to acknowledge the many individuals who contributed to the first annual Foster Care Youth Experience Survey.

We thank New York City Council Member Donovan Richards, who introduced and sponsored the legislation that led to the creation of the survey.

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We thank the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) for its support in the development and dissemination of the survey.

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II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS), in collaboration with Westat, Metis Associates and in partnership with our foster care provider agencies, conducted the first annual Foster Care Youth Experience Survey in accordance with Local Law 146 of 2016, signed by Mayor de Blasio on November 16, 2016. The legislation, which was introduced by City Council Member Donovan Richards, requires the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to provide to all youth in foster care, ages 13 and older, an annual survey regarding their experiences in foster care. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the experiences of youth while in foster care, especially as it pertains to their safety, permanency, and well-being. The survey will be conducted annually hereafter.

A collaborative workgroup led by ACS and Westat-Metis designed the survey to include questions about youths' daily experiences in foster care pertaining to education, employment, health care, connections to family and friends and permanency planning. The survey had a high response rate – nearly half (46%) of all eligible foster youth responded to the survey. This is a very good response rate for surveys of this type, which typically have a response rate of 30-40 percent.[1]

The majority of respondents were residing in family foster care (81 percent), with 17 percent in kinship foster homes and 64 percent in non-kinship foster homes. Nearly half of respondents had spent fewer than three years in foster care, including 13 percent of respondents having spent less than a year in foster care. Fifty-two percent had spent three or more years in foster care. For two-thirds of respondents, their current placement in foster care was their first time in foster care.

EDUCATION:

Almost all of the youth surveyed were in school or a GED program (92 percent). The majority of respondents were in high school. Of those not currently in high school, slightly more respondents were in college than in a GED program or not in school, and 13 percent were in grades 6-8. Nearly half of respondents reported having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Tutoring, applying for college and applying for financial aid/student loans were the three education services most frequently cited as needed by respondents.   Seventy-seven percent of 6th-8th graders and 70 percent of high school students who said they needed tutoring reported they had received it during the past year. The largest unmet need identified by respondents was support for test prep and applying for financial aid; for both, nearly half of respondents who reported needing these supports said that they had not received them in the past year.

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

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Respondents in grades 6-8 also identified support with the high school application process and test preparation as needs. Of these, 78 percent of respondents reported receiving high school application assistance, while 53 percent reported receiving test preparation help.

EMPLOYMENT:

More than one-fourth (26 percent) of respondents reported having a job or paid internship. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported interest in obtaining employment. Unemployed youth who were interested in employment reported needing the most help with finding places that are hiring (66 percent). For nearly every type of reported employment supports identified in the survey, about half of the respondents reported receiving the support, while half reported the need as unmet. The supports that were identified that were most likely to have been reported as unmet were assistance with transportation, which was reported as unmet by 65 percent of respondents, and learning interview skills, which 64 percent of respondents reported not receiving assistance. Youth were also asked whether they receive an allowance: almost three-fourths (71 percent) reported that they were receiving an allowance, while 15 percent reported not receiving an allowance. Some youth (13 percent) reported that the question was not applicable to them.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:

The vast majority of youth said that they felt very supported or somewhat supported by their foster parents or residential facility staff. The survey included questions about the support youth receive from family and friends, foster parents, foster care agency staff and others.   Ensuring that all youth are cared for, connected to and supported by loving adults is the most important goal for ACS and its foster care agencies. It is also understood that it is a normal part of adolescence to separate from, push back on and/or be frustrated by adults in caregiving roles.   A number of questions were asked in different ways in order to try and ascertain youths' feelings about the support they were receiving. When asked to whom they could turn for help, the most frequently cited answers were foster parents (71 percent), residential facility staff (67 percent), friends (63 percent) and a current or previous caseworker (60 percent). Eighty-eight percent of youth in foster/kinship homes and 86 percent of youth in residential/group settings said that they felt very supported or somewhat supported by their foster parents or residential facility staff. When asked if they have someone who makes them feel wanted, someone to listen to them or someone to help them with problems (three different questions), 55-62 percent said most of the time and 29-38 percent said sometimes. Six percent to 9 percent said never. Youth who reported not feeling very supported or not feeling supported at all reported feeling a lack of trust and concern from

their caregivers and feeling unwelcome. Youth who felt very supported described feeling like a member of the family, feeling listened to, feeling supported when they were upset and being able to count on their caregivers.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS:

The majority of youth responded that using social media is their primary social activity, followed by spending time with friends. Youth were asked to describe the social activities in which they currently partake, activities in which they would like to participate and what they perceive as barriers to participation in desired activities. The activity that youth reported the most desire to participate in was spending the night with friends. ACS[2] and OCFS[3] have issued policies that foster care agencies are required to follow to ensure that youth in care are exposed to normative, age appropriate experiences, such as spending the night with friends. Eighty percent of respondents reported having cell phones and access to the internet. Fewer respondents reported having a computer or tablet.

HEALTHCARE AND BASIC FOOD/CLOTHING NEEDS:

Youth were asked about their access to and receipt of health care and the extent to which they feel their basic needs are met. This included the identification of the types of health care they need (such as dental care, sexual health care, etc.). Ninety-three percent of respondents who reported a need for sexual health and family planning care reported receiving it. The highest unmet health care need was for dental care – 14 percent of respondents who reported needing dental care said they were not currently receiving it. Youth were also asked whether their basic needs for food and clothing are being met. About one in five respondents reported having experienced situations in which their needs had not been met in the past year. Immediate outreach was conducted in these cases with youth, foster care agencies and foster parents, including visits by foster care agency staff to placements as appropriate. In-depth follow-up was conducted in each case. In 58 percent of these cases, youth indicated in the follow up that they did have adequate food and clothing and that they had misunderstood the question (e.g., thought it pertained to their experience with their biological families) or reported that they had simply answered this question in the affirmative to "get the survey done." In 39 percent of cases, youth indicated that they had necessary food and clothing, but wanted more clothing from certain brands or particular types of food, needed new seasonal clothing in the normal course or did not want to do their laundry. In these cases, ACS and/or the

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2 The ACS policy, Applying the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard: Supporting Normative Experiences for Children, Youth and Young Adults in Foster Care, provides staff at ACS and its contracted foster care provider agencies with information on the requirements for implementing the reasonable and prudent parent standard found in the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, OCFS regulations, and described in 15-OCFS-ADM-21.

3 New York State Office of Children and Family Services (2015). "Supporting Normative Experiences for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in Foster Care – Applying a Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard." 15-OCFS-ADM-21. https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/OCFS_2015/ADMs/15-OCFS-ADM-21%20%20Supporting%20Normative%20Experiences%20for%20Children,%20Youth,%20and%20Young%20Adults%20in%20Foster%20Care%20-%20Applying%20a%20Reasonable%20and%20Prudent%20Parent%20Standard.pdf

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foster care agencies met with youth and foster parents to resolve these issues. In 3 percent of cases, at the time of follow-up, the youth had been discharged from foster care.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND PERMANENCY PLANNING:

Most respondents reported receiving support from their foster care agency to reach their educational goals (88 percent), plan for permanency (83 percent), connect with their attorney (81 percent), and get ready for a job (77 percent). Sixty-nine percent said they lead or were involved in the development of their permanency plan. However, nearly 30 percent of respondents that reported a need for support finding housing reported that they were not receiving the support.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT:

Youth were asked, "*If you were the Commissioner of ACS, what improvements would you make?*" Ten themes emerged from their responses (listed below in order of frequency, with the first receiving the most responses):

- Provide better emotional and communication support (including use of technology);
- Provide more money/allowances;
- Implement better placement and monitoring practices;
- Hire more qualified and better train staff to undertake their responsibilities in a caring and efficient manner;
- Provide more and better social activities;
- Provide more jobs and housing support to help with aging out of foster care;
- Improve interactions with biological family to ensure that youth return to their families in a more timely manner;
- Provide more education and support;
- Allow more freedom and more opportunities for independent living; and
- Provide more health services and counseling/therapy support.

ACS is currently implementing a range of programs and initiatives to improve youth experiences and outcomes.

ACS is working to improve permanency outcomes for older youth.

As outlined in the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint, ACS is implementing several initiatives to improve reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship outcomes for children and youth in foster care. One of our key initiatives focused on older youth is the **Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation.** WWK is an evidence-

based, child-focused recruitment model in which skilled professionals have the sole mission of finding permanent, loving families for older youth in foster care, youth with special needs and sibling groups. Through an $11 million partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation, 42 WWK recruiters will work over three years to improve permanency outcomes for older youth.

ACS is enhancing foster care placements.

ACS is partnering with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and national child welfare experts to improve the recruitment and retention of foster caregivers specifically for older youth. The **Home Away from Home** initiative places special emphasis on strategies for identifying and engaging caregivers for the teen population. One of the goals of this initiative is to build a quality caregiver model to support older youth in foster care. After six consecutive years of declines in the number of new foster homes recruited, through the first eight months of FY 2018, there were 21% more new foster homes certified compared to the same time period last year. ACS and its foster care providers are also increasing programming in residential settings. In addition, ACS is providing state-of-the-art training and professional development for foster care staff through the ACS Workforce Institute.

ACS is implementing key strategies to improve education outcomes for youth.

The **FirstStar** summer academy at CUNY Staten Island provides academic support to high school students to help them stay on track for high school graduation and prepare for higher education.

The Fostering College Success Initiative, in partnership with CUNY and the New York Foundling provides year-round housing in CUNY dorms along with 24/7 on-site support staff to provide financial, academic and socio-emotional support for foster youth in college. In 2016, ACS expanded our stipend program to include any student in foster care enrolled full-time in a college dorm or approved off campus residence. The weekly stipend is to support living expenses, allowing students to have a normalized college experience and focus on academics.

In order to better support our caregivers, ACS developed the **Foster Parent Guide to Education** to serve as a reference manual to assist foster parents in supporting the educational needs for children and youth in their care from 0-21 years old. The Guide includes information on early education, grade-specific school-age academic program information, special education, college preparation, and other relevant educational information. The Guide further provides distinct information on how to navigate different school systems in New York City and neighboring districts, includes a list of borough-specific resources, and provides strategies to support the educational success of students.

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ACS continues to host our **Annual College Tours** for high school students to expose them to college life and help them choose the most appropriate school. This year, students visited SUNY, CUNY and private college campuses and participated in college access workshops.

ACS is partnering with FedCap to provide the **PrepNOW!** program to enhance the ability of caregivers to proactively prepare foster youth for college. PrepNOW! provides caregivers with tools for developing a college-going culture and building skills that lead to success in academic and professional environments.

ACS is implementing key strategies to improve employment outcomes for youth.

In 2016, ACS established the **Office of Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives** (OEWDI), which is dedicated to expanding programming and resources to improve employment outcomes for youth in care.

ACS is partnering with **The Workplace Center at Columbia University** to provide technical assistance to a cohort of foster care provider agencies via the **Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers (YA WORC)** curriculum. The agencies receive technical assistance and training to develop a labor market strategy specific to their agency. YA WORC builds the capacity of agency staff to prepare youth in foster care for meaningful careers.

Through our new **Drivers Education Program,** older youth in foster care are supported to obtain a driver's license, which provides a normative experience and expands their job options.

ACS has partnered with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to develop the **Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) Plus,** which is specifically targeted to providing internships and work readiness supports for youth in foster care. ACS also partners with DYCD to ensure that hundreds of youth in care are receiving valuable job experience via the **Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).**

ACS partnered with the **Pinkerton Foundation** to launch a **mentored-internship program** across eight foster care agencies to increase the capacity of agency staff to provide guidance and support to youth participating in internships at their foster care agencies.

ACS is implementing new programs to support youth transitioning out of the foster care system.

In partnership with the **Office of Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance, Graham Windham, The Door, New Yorkers for Children, Youth Villages, Children's Aid Society and New York Foundling,** several new programs are helping older youth in care

improve their education and employment outcomes and helping youth develop and maintain networks of support. ACS also has specialized units serving older youth in foster care including expectant and parenting youth and LGBTQ youth.

ACS is actively utilizing the results of the Youth Experience Survey to build upon the efforts described above to support positive outcomes for youth in foster care. The Youth Experience Survey results are also consistent with several of the recommendations of the **Interagency Foster Care Task Force,** which issued its report in March 2018.

ACS' new five-year plan, the Strategic Foster Care Blueprint for FY 2019 – FY 2023 (available on the ACS website), builds upon the 2016-2018 Blueprint and reflects the findings from the Youth Experience Survey, the Task Force recommendations, case reviews, intensive analysis of foster care performance data and input from a range of stakeholders. Specific to older youth, the plan includes strategies pertaining to increasing youth voice, enhancing foster parent recruitment and support, enhancing services and supports for children and families, expanding education, employment and housing supports, building staff capacity and other key strategies. The Youth Experience Survey results will also inform the development and implementation of these efforts moving forward.

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III. INTRODUCTION

A. Background and Purpose of the Survey

ACS and its partners developed, disseminated and analyzed the responses from the first annual Foster Care Experience Survey following the enactment of Local Law 146 of 2016, signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio on November 16, 2016. The law, which was introduced by Council Member Donovan Richards requires the ACS to provide to all youth in foster care, ages 13 and older an annual survey regarding their experiences in foster care. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the experiences of youth while in foster care, especially as it pertains to their safety, permanency, and well-being. The law requires that the survey cover the following topics:

- Access to food and clothing;
- Religious practices;
- Social connectedness (i.e., relationships with foster families, biological families, and friends);
- Personal allowances (i.e., money received on a regular basis from the caregiver, or stipends for participating in agency program);
- Access to technology (i.e., internet and phone);
- Educational needs and progress;
- Participation in extracurricular activities; and
- Any other information they wish to share.

ACS collaborated with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and two experienced child welfare research firms, Westat and Metis Associates, to develop and design the survey. ACS also convened an advisory group that included youth currently and formerly in foster care and representatives from foster care agencies. The advisory group provided guidance on the survey design and content, recommended approaches to conducting the survey and supported the development of a communication plan to maximize the number of survey respondents. The survey was piloted with two provider agencies, beginning in November 2017 to test the effectiveness of the survey platform before going live to youth across all foster care agencies. The survey launched in January 2018 and was open for six weeks.

ACS partnered with foster care provider agencies to disseminate the survey to all eligible youth residing in all types of foster care placements (foster homes, group homes and residential treatment programs). All eligible youth received a letter with instructions on how to access the survey, and ACS worked closely with foster care agencies to implement a

range of strategies to ensure that youth were aware of the survey and encouraged to complete it. The overall response rate was 46 percent, with 1,197 of 2,610 eligible youth completing the survey. This is a very good response rate for surveys of this type, which typically have a response rate of 30-40 percent. [4]

B. Organization of this Report

This section of the report (Section III) describes the background and purpose of the study, the study methodology, a profile of survey respondents and limitations of the study. Section IV presents survey findings on the following topics:

- Help with education, including the education status of youth in foster care, their education plan and needs, and the education support they received;
- Help with employment, including the employment status of youth, the help they need to find jobs, and the help they received;
- Support from family and friends, including persons to whom youth can turn for help when needed, the extent to which they feel supported by foster parents or residential staff, and emotional support they received from others;
- Social interactions and communication, including activities the youth engaged in during their free time, what they would like to do that they are not currently doing, what obstacles they face in engaging in activities outside of school and work, and whether they have access to communication technology;
- Access to health care and satisfaction of basic needs, including the health care the youth receive and whether they had adequate food, clothes, and shoes in the past year; and
- Support from foster care agency and permanency planning, including whether the youth received support needed for independent living, whether they participated in their permanency planning, and whether various individuals supported them in these activities.
- Recommendations from survey respondents, identifying what improvements youth would make if they were the Commissioner of ACS.
- Finally, a copy of the Youth Experiences Survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

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

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C. Survey Methodology

Survey development

Survey development followed a research-informed and participatory approach, including close collaboration between the Westat-Metis team and an advisory group of representatives from ACS, foster care providers and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity. The process began with an extensive review of existing surveys of foster care youth and related literature.[5] Based on the purpose of the study and key issues from the literature, the Westat-Metis team developed a Foster Care Experience Survey matrix, which cross-walked the study research questions by survey content constructs. Drawing from existing foster youth survey instruments, the next step was the development of a comprehensive item bank that mapped to the content matrix, culminating in an initial survey draft. The Westat-Metis team met with the advisory group to review and refine the draft survey instrument.

Once a full draft of the survey instrument was complete, Metis conducted an in-person pre-test with a small group of youth in foster care. The pre-test helped to determine whether respondents interpreted questions as intended and whether the order of the questions could potentially influence responses. The results of the pre-test were used to refine the draft survey. The draft was next reviewed by ACS leadership and further tested with another small group of youth before being finalized.

Westat programmed the online survey and conducted extensive tests to optimize ease of navigation and ensure that skip patterns were accurate. In addition to English, the online survey was available in Spanish, Cantonese, French Creole, and Mandarin.

Survey dissemination

ACS piloted the online survey with two foster care agencies, to further test the survey prior to system-wide dissemination. ACS launched the online survey as a pilot with one provider agency on November 15, 2017. The pilot uncovered

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5   Key sources included the following: The Opportunity PassportTM Participant Survey developed by Child Trends in September 2015; Survey of Georgia's Most Vulnerable Youth, Foster Care Version developed by Metis Associates on behalf of the Georgia Governor's Office for Children and Families (May 2010); National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Instructional Guidebook and Architectural Blueprint (June 2009); The NYTD Data Brief #5, Highlights from the NYTD Survey: Outcomes reported by young people at ages 17, 19 and 21 (Cohort 1) issued in November 2016; The Cby25 Initiative My Services Review and NYTD surveys administered on behalf of the Florida Department of Children and Families (October 2015); The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care written by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago in February 2004; and Young Adult Outcomes in Foster Care Justice, and Dually Involved Youth in New York City published by the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, New York City Office of the Mayor (June 2015).

technical issues with the original survey platform and the survey was reprogrammed utilizing a more user-friendly platform. After a brief pilot with a second provider agency, the final online survey was fully disseminated to all remaining youth in January, 2018.

ACS sent survey packages to all eligible youth via mail and sent a separate email to those for whom an email address was available. The packages included a letter of invitation explaining the purpose of the study and the request for feedback on the youth's experience in foster care. ACS also sent the relevant information to each provider agency, including the youth names and their unique PINs to help support further engagement of youth to complete the survey. All communication materials included phone numbers and email addresses for ACS contacts if the youth had any questions. To encourage survey participation, youth received a $10 gift card upon completion of the survey.

ACS and the provider agencies used a wide range of strategies to follow up with non-respondents. For example, ACS provided weekly updates to the agencies showing overall response rates along with a list of youth who had not yet completed the survey. ACS staff worked with foster care agencies to identify and resolve any barriers and reiterate the importance of completing the survey. Several agencies organized a "Survey Day" and/or encouraged youth to complete the survey during regular peer group meetings. Additionally, ACS established a help desk to respond to youth who had questions.

Survey population and response rates

The study population was comprised of all youth age 13 or older who had been in foster care for at least 90 days as of November 9, 2017. At the time of survey dissemination, there were 2,732 youth identified as eligible to participate in the study. During data collection, provider agencies reported 121 youth who were no longer eligible for the study, mostly because they were discharged from foster care. After removing these youth from the sample, 2,611 youth were eligible to complete the survey. Of course this number changes slightly every day, as youth enter and leave foster care.

Table 1 shows the eligible population of youth in foster care, the number completing the survey, and the response rate. Of the 2,611 youth eligible for the study, 1,197 completed the survey, for a response rate of 46 percent.

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Table 1. Study population, survey respondents, and response rates

	Number of youth eligible for the study	Number of completed surveys	Response rate
All youth	2,611	1,197	45.9%
Gender			
Male	1,155	525	45.5%
Female	1,456	672	46.2%
Age			
13 to 15 years	922	366	39.7%
16 to 18 years	1,185	585	49.4%
19 to 20 years	504	246	48.8%

SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018 and ACS administrative records.

D. Survey Respondent Placement Types and Demographics

This section provides an overview of the demographic characteristics and placement types of the youth responding to the survey and the total population of foster care youth eligible to participate in the survey, based on ACS administrative data.[6] Specifically, the section focuses on three broad sets of questions:

- What are the placement settings of youth ages 13 or older in foster care? How long have they been placed in Foster Care? How many times has the youth been placed in foster care?"
- What are the demographic characteristics of youth in foster care with regard to gender, age, and race/ethnicity?
- How does the profile of survey respondents compare with the profile of all youth eligible for participation in the study?

Placement Type

Of the 1,197 youth responding to the survey, about four in five (81 percent) were placed in either foster homes or kinship family homes (Table 2). Almost two-thirds of the youth were placed in foster homes (64 percent) and an additional

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6   A youth was eligible to participate in the study if he/she was 13 or older and spent at least 90 days in foster care.

17 percent were placed in kinship family homes. Fewer youth were placed in residential treatment centers or group homes (19 percent).

The distribution of survey respondents by placement type was somewhat similar to the distribution of the total youth population eligible for the survey.   For example, about four in five youth (80 percent) were placed in either foster homes (58 percent) or kinship family homes (22 percent).

Length of time in foster care. Based on information available in ACS administrative records, close to half of the survey respondents had been in foster care for fewer than three years, including 13 percent in care for less than one year at the time of the survey distribution and 35 percent in care for one to under three years. Fifty-two percent were in care for three years or more.

The population data on time spent in foster care show a distribution for time ranges that is almost identical to the distribution for survey respondents.

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Table 2. Indicators of placement in foster care: Survey respondents and population eligible to respond to the survey

Placement indicator	Foster care youth responding to survey		Foster care youth in population eligible to participate in survey	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
All youth	**100.0**	**1,197**	**100.0**	**2,611**
Current placement type				
Foster home	64%	767	58%	1511
Kinship family home	17%	199	22%	574
Residential treatment center/Group home	19%	231	20%	520
Unknown	0	0	0	6
Length of time in foster care				
Under 1 year	13%	157	13%	330
1 to under 3 years	35%	418	35%	922
3 to under 5 years	23%	269	22%	586
5 to under 8 years	17%	206	17%	444
8 or more years	12%	147	12%	329
Number of foster care spells				
One	69%	821	68%	1765
Two	23%	275	24%	627
Three or more	8%	101	8%	204
Unknown	0	0	0	15

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding or missing information.
SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018 and ACS administrative records.

Number of foster care spells. As with the population of youth over the age of 13 in foster care overall, the majority of re-spondent youth, over two-thirds, were experiencing foster care placement for the first time, or their first spell. An additional 23 percent of respondents were in their second spell of foster care, meaning they had previously been discharged from care and then reentered care. The remaining 8 percent had been placed into foster care between three to five times.

The population data on the number of placement spells show a distribution that is almost identical to the distribution for survey respondents.

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Demographics

Information on the gender and age of repondents was analyzed from ACS administrative records. Of the 1,197 youth responding to the survey, a slight majority were female, accounting for 56 percent, while males accounted for the remaining 44 percent (Table 3). This distribution is identical to the gender distribution for the 2,611 population of foster care youth eligible for the study.

Close to two-thirds (60 percent) of the youth responding to the survey were in their mid-teens; 28 percent were in the 15 to 16 age group while 32 percent were in the 17 to 18 age group. This distribution is slightly different from the age distribution for the 2,611 population of foster care youth eligible for the study.

Table 3a. Gender and age of survey respondents and population eligible to respond to the survey

Demographic indicator	Foster care youth responding to survey		Foster care youth in population eligible to participate in survey	
All youth	100 %	1,197	100%	2,611
Gender				
Male	44%	525	44%	1155
Female	56%	672	56%	1456
Age				
Under 15 years	19%	233	24%	618
15 to 16 years	28%	335	26%	688
17 to 18 years	32%	383	31%	801
19 to 20 years	21%	246	19%	504

The survey gathered information on the race and ethnicity of youth in foster care.[7] Ethnicity is reported separate from race. Youth who identified themselves as Hispanic accounted for a substantial share of the youth responding to the survey (40 percent). About half (49 percent) were not Hispanic while the remaining 12 percent either left the question unanswered or stated they preferred not to answer.

Youth in foster care also reported their race background. Most of the youth self-identified as belonging to a racial minority group (88 percent). Slightly over half of the survey respondents were Black or African American (52 percent) while Asian and other minority race groups accounted for 36 percent of survey respondents. Whites accounted for only 5 percent, while 7 percent of the youth either did not identify with any race group or left the question unanswered.

It was not possible to compare the racial or ethnic background of survey respondents with the total eligible population of youth in foster care because the survey requested that the information be reported in a different format than that used in ACS' administrative records.

Table 3b. Race/ethnicity of survey respondents

Demographic indicator	Foster care youth responding to survey	
Hispanic		
Yes	40%	473
No	49%	585
Not ascertained	12%	139
Race/ethnicity		
White	5%	63
Black/African American	52%	619
Asian/Other[7a]	36%	435
Not ascertained	7%	80

NA: Data for race/ethnicity are collected in a different format in ACS administrative records.
NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018 and ACS administrative records.

7 ACS' administrative records do not distinguish between race and ethnicity (Hispanic is reported as a race in the New York State CONNECTIONS, the system of record, so data are not available, for example, about the number of youth in care who are Black/African-American and Hispanic).
7a Asian/Other may include respondents who identified "Hispanic" as a racial category, and respondents who identified with multiple racial identities

Data processing and analysis

To create a final analysis file, Westat applied final cleaning procedures to ensure that the data followed logic checks and skip patterns. Once finalized, the data were analyzed and frequencies and graphical summaries were developed to address the research questions and sub-questions within the survey.

E. Limitations of the study

This study is based on a NYC population of youth age 13 and older who had been in foster care for at least 90 days as of November 9, 2017. As with all surveys, the findings are subject to nonresponse bias that stems from youth choosing not to complete the survey. Findings are also subject to response bias from those who may over report "socially desirable" answers and underreport or over report negative feedback, which may lead to a deviation of answers from their true value.

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IV.   SURVEY FINDINGS

A. HELP WITH EDUCATION

There are many factors that affect educational attainment, such as youths' access to education, academic aspirations and the level of support they receive. This section reports on the youths' current education level, their plan to continue their education and the education support needed and received. Specifically, the research questions included the following:

- What is the education background of the youth responding to the survey?
- Do the youth in grades 9 and above have plans to continue their education after school? What support do they need to continue their education?
- Did the youth in grades 9 and above need various types of education services in the past year? Did they receive the services?
- Did the youth in grades 6 through 8 need various types of education services in the past year? Did they receive the services?

A.1   What is the educational background of youth in foster care?

Staying in school and earning a high school diploma or GED is the first step for youth to pursue future educational advancements and self-sufficiency. Almost all of the youth were enrolled in school or a GED program (Figure 1). Consistent with their age distribution, almost two-thirds (62 percent) of the youth were in grades 9 through 12 while 13 percent were in grades 6 through 8. The remaining youth were in college or in a GED or high school equivalency program (9 and 8 percent, respectively), while 8 percent were not in school.

Figure 1. Current education level of youth in foster care

Current Education Status
(N = 1,197)
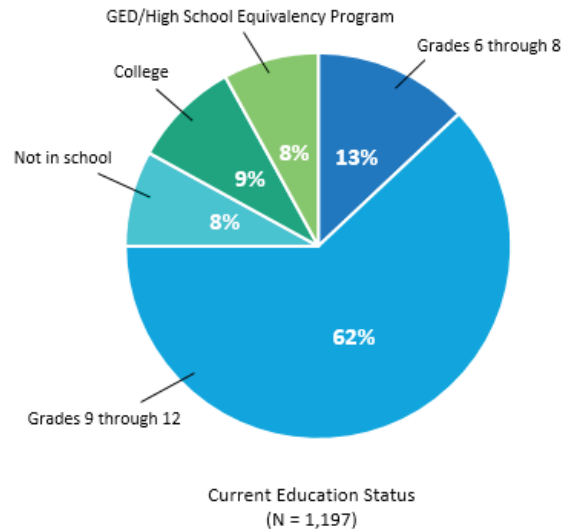
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Many of the youth in foster care need intervention to address challenges in meeting education requirements (Table 4). Close to half (45 percent) of the youth reported having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). When examined by grade level, fewer youth in grades 9 and above had an IEP compared with those in 6th through 8th grade (43 versus 57 percent).

Table 4. Whether youth have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), by grade level

Whether youth have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - IEP status by grade level"	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know/ Not sure (%)	Total number
All youth	45%	43%	12%	1,189
Youth in grades 9 and above	43%	45%	12%	1,037
Youth in grades 6 through 8	57%	32%	12%	152

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018 and ACS administrative records.

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

The survey asked youth in grades 9 and above whether they plan to continue with their education and the type of support needed.

Overall, the youth had high expectations for continuing their education (Table 5). While most (80 percent) of the youth planned to continue with their education, 5 percent did not have this plan. The remaining 16 percent either did not know or were not sure about their plans.

When examined by whether the youth had an IEP, youth expectations for continued education seem to differ by whether they needed intervention for learning difficulties. A slightly lower percentage of youth with an IEP planned to continue their education compared with those who did not need this intervention (78 versus 84 percent).

**Table 5. Whether youth in grades 9 and above plan to continue with education, by IEP status**

Plan by IEP status	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know/ Not sure (%)	Total number
All youth	80%	5%	16%	1,036
Youth with IEP	78%	7%	16%	445
Youth without IEP	84%	3%	13%	461

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018 and ACS administrative records.

Youth who planned to continue with their education after school were asked whether they needed each of four broad types of support: emotional, financial, transportation, and academic support. The most frequently cited need was for financial support; 80 percent of the youth indicated they needed this support to continue with their education (Figure 2). Over two-thirds of the youth also reported a need for transportation and academic support (69 percent and 68 percent, respectively). The youth were less likely to report a need for emotional support although almost half (48 percent) felt they needed this type of support to continue their education.

Figure 2. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting the support needed to continue with education
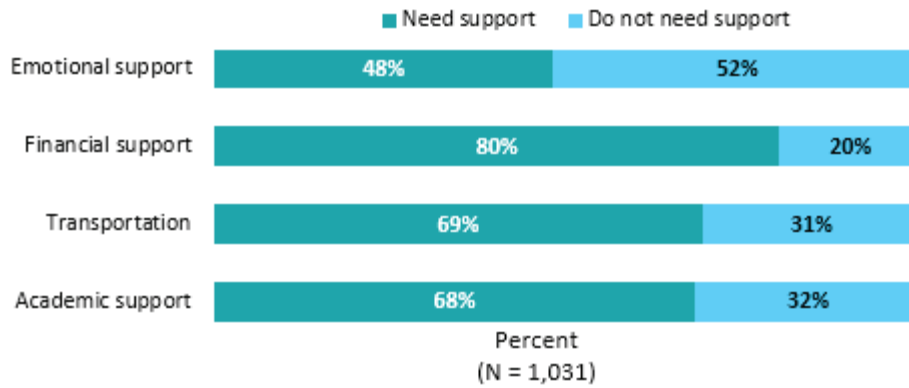
NOTE: Data in this figure are based on the 1,031 youth grades 9 through 12, those enrolled in a GED program, those in college, and those not in school reporting that they plan to continue their education.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

A.3   What education services did the youth need and receive?

The survey asked youth in grades 9 and above 12 whether they needed and received each of six types of education services in the past year.[8] Youth in grades 6 through 8 were asked whether they needed and received each of three types of education services in the past year.

Education services needed and received in the past year: Grades 9 and above

To further explore the need for specific types of education services during the year preceding the survey, youth in grades 9 and above were asked whether they needed and received each of the following services: tutoring, help preparing for the high school equivalency test, help preparing for the SAT or ACT, help applying for college, help applying for financial aid and/or student loans, and help with attending college fairs or tours.

Need for services: Overall, the areas of greatest education need among high school and GED enrolled youth pertained to additional academic instruction, applying for college, and financial support to further their education. Among the 918 youth responding to the question about education services needed over the past year, the most frequently cited need was for tutoring services; 51 percent indicated they needed this service (Figure 3). About one-third of the youth also needed help applying for college (35 percent) and help applying for financial aid and/or student loans (31 percent). The need for other education services over the past year ranged from 27 percent for help preparing for the high school equivalency test to 29 percent for help with attending college fairs or tours.

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8   College enrolled youth were not asked about these types of services because they were not relevant.

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Figure 3. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting education services <u>needed in the past year</u>
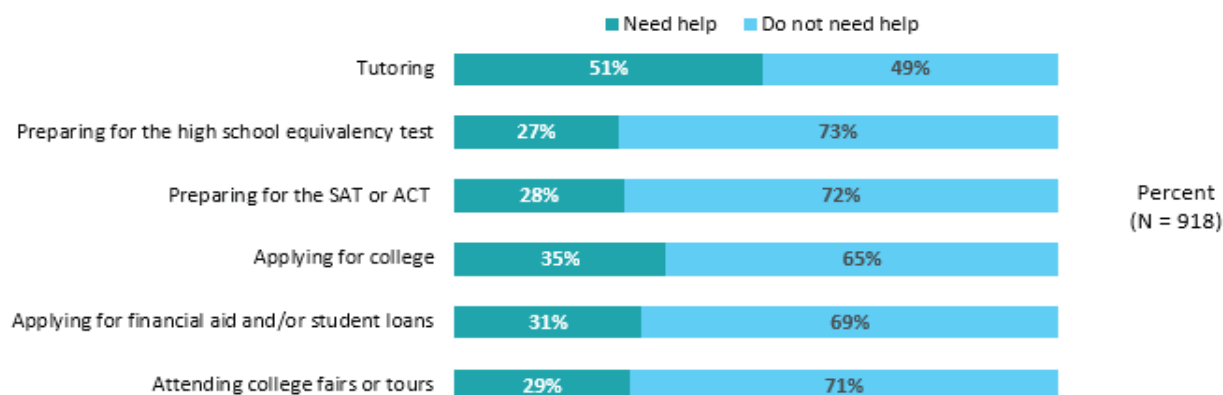
NOTE: Data in this figure are based on the 918 youth grades 9 through 12, those enrolled in a GED program, and those not in school (excluding those in college). SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Extent to which needs were met: The information presented in Figure 4 reflects the extent to which a youth's needs for specific education services in the past year were met or unmet. Overall, there was unmet need for various education services as reported by youth in grades 9 and above. The percentage of youth with unmet education need ranged from 30 percent for tutoring to 52 percent for help applying for financial aid and/or student loans.

Figure 4. Youth in grades 9 and above reporting they <u>received the education services needed in the past year</u>
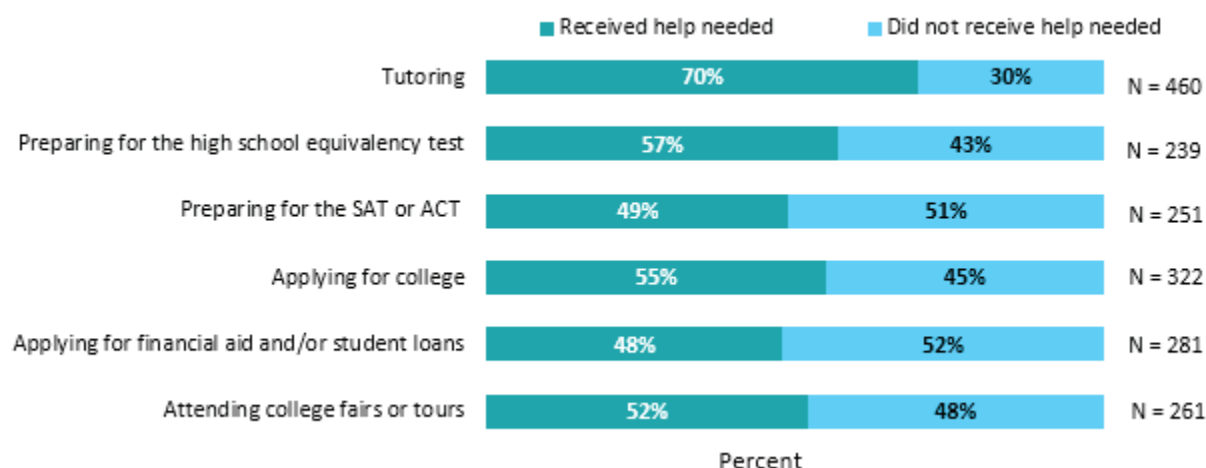
NOTE: For each type of service, percentages are based on the number of youth who reported needing that service in figure 3.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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Specifically, the following results indicate the extent to which youth in grades 9 and above were able to meet their needs for each of the six services examined in the study.

- **Tutoring:** Tutoring was the most needed education service (as reported above), and it was also the most highly met need among foster care youth in grades 9 and above. Of the 460 youth who reported a need for tutoring, 70 percent received the service (i.e., the need was met), while 30 percent did not receive it (i.e., the need was unmet).

- **Preparing for high school equivalency test:** Of the 239 youth who needed this education service, over half (57 percent) received it, while 43 percent did not receive the service.

- **Preparing for SAT or ACT:** About half (49 percent) of the 251 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, while 51 percent did not receive the service.

- **Help applying for college:** Over half (55 percent) of the 322 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, while 45 percent did not receive it.

- **Help applying for financial aid and/or student loans:** While 48 percent of the 281 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, a little over half (52 percent) did not receive the service.

- **Help with attending college fairs or tours:** While 52 percent of the 261 youth who needed this education service reported that they received it, 48 percent did not receive the service.

Educational services needed and received in the past year: Grades 6 through 8

Youth in grades 6 through 8 also reported whether they needed and received each of three services over the past year: tutoring, high school application process, and test preparation (PSAT, specialized high school exam).

Need for services. As with youth in grades 9 and above, those in grades 6 through 8 most frequently cited tutoring as the education service needed in the past year (Figure 5). Among the 150 youth responding to the question, 43 percent indicated they needed this service. Fewer youth reported a need for help with the high school application process (27 percent) or test preparation such as PSAT and specialized high school exam (13 percent).

**Figure 5. Youth in grades 6 through 8 reporting education service needed in the past year**
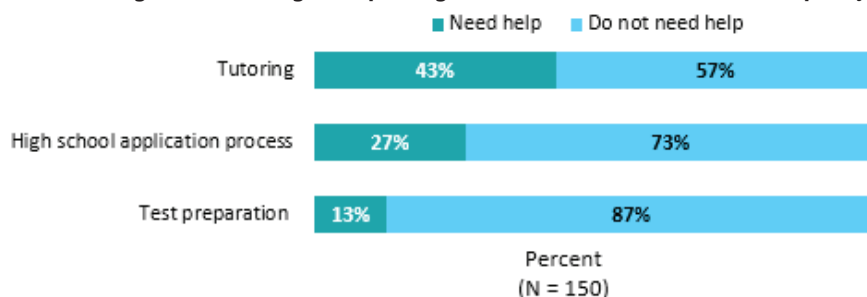
NOTE: Data are reported for youth in grades 8 and under.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Extent to which needs were met. Figure 6 reflects the extent to which youth's needs for specific education services in the past year were met or unmet. Overall, there were relatively low levels of unmet need for education services as reported by youth in grades 6 through 8.

- **Tutoring.** As with older youth, the need for tutoring services was highly met among youth in grades 6 through 8. Among the 64 youth who reported a need for tutoring, about three-fourths (77 percent) received the service (i.e., the need was met), while 23 percent but did not receive it (i.e., the need was unmet).

- **High school application process.** Of the 40 youth who needed this education service, 78 percent received it, while 23 percent did not receive this service.

- **Test preparation** (PSAT, specialized high school exam). Of the 19 youth who needed this education service, 53 percent received it while 47 percent did not receive the service.

Figure 6. Youth in grades 6 through 8 reporting they <u>received the education service needed in the past year</u>
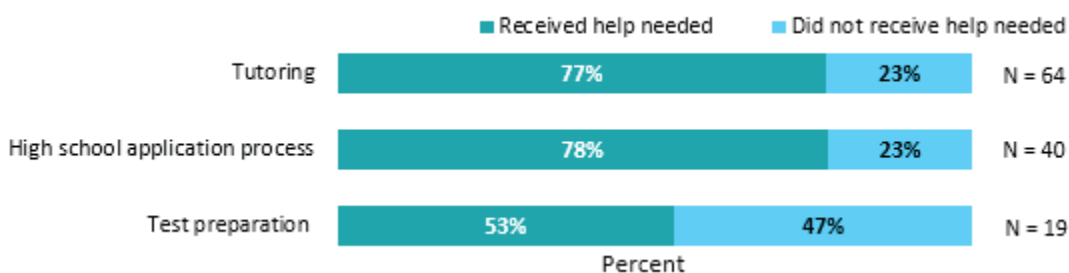
NOTE: For each type of service, percentages are based on the number of youth who reported needing that service in figure 5. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

B. HELP WITH EMPLOYMENT

Research has found that youth who age out of foster care tend to have less stable employment and lower earnings than their peers in the general population, and these trends are associated with many of the unique education and social challenges that foster youth have to face. ACS has significant initiatives underway in partnership with foster care providers, foundations, universities, workforce development organizations and other City agencies to increase internship and other career development opportunities and improve employment outcomes for youth in foster care.   The findings from this survey will be used to further develop, refine and expand these initiatives.

This section reports on the employment status of youth responding to the survey, the help they need finding jobs, whether they receive such help, and the amount of weekly allowance they receive. Specifically, the survey data in this section address the following research questions:

- What is the employment status of the youth responding to the survey and what is their age? How many hours per week do employed youth work?
- Do the unemployed youth want to work? What help do they need in finding a job? Did they receive the help they need?
- How much allowance do the youth receive weekly and how does this vary by employment status?

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

Table 6 shows the distribution of youth in foster care who are actively employed or would like to be employed.[9] Among the 1,001 youth who were employed or would like to be employed, about one in five had a job or paid internship (26 percent) while three in four youth indicated they did not have a job but wanted to work (75 percent).

Table 6. Employment status of youth in foster care, by age group

Employment status	All youth (N=1,001)	Youth age 13 to 15 (N=236)	Youth age 16 to 17 (N=354)	Youth age 18 to 20 (N=411)
Yes, have job/paid internship	26%	8%	23%	38%
No, don't have paid job or internship but want to work	75%	92%	77%	62%

NOTE: Data in this table do not include youth who reported that they were too young to work or did not need a job. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
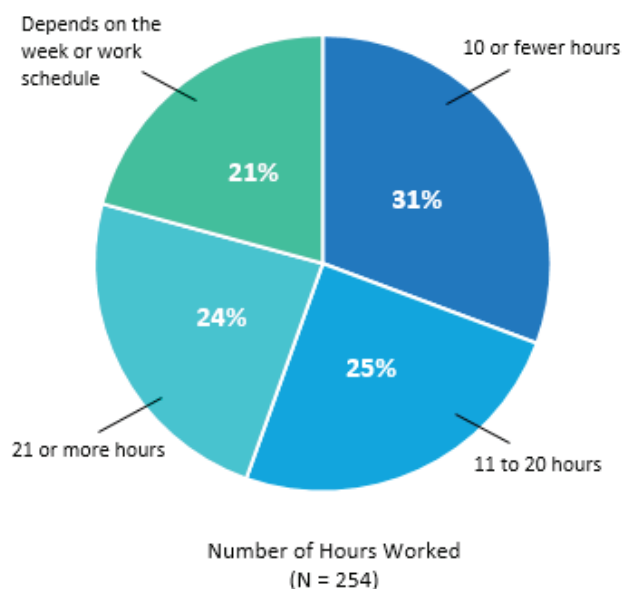SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Consistent with expectations, youth aged 18 to 20 were much more likely to be employed than their younger counterparts, suggesting the potential for higher levels of preparedness among older youth for the job market. More than one-third of youth age 18 to 20 had a job or paid internship compared with 23 percent for the 16 to 17 age group and only 8 percent of for the 13 to 15 age group.

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9   Youth who reported that they were too young to work or did not need a job were excluded from this table (representing 16 percent of the 1,197 foster youth responding to the survey).

The survey asked youth who were employed to indicate the number of hours worked per week. Of the 255 youth who reported having a job or paid internship, about one-third worked 10 hours or less per week, one-fourth worked 11 to 20 hours, and another one-fourth worked more than half-time per week (25 and 24 percent, respectively) (Figure 7). About one-fifth of youth indicated that the number of hours worked depended on the week or their schedules (21 percent).

Figure 7. Youth reporting the number of hours worked per week

Depends on the week or work schedule — 21%
10 or fewer hours — 31%
11 to 20 hours — 25%
21 or more hours — 24%

Number of Hours Worked
(N = 254)

NOTE: Data in this figure are based on the number of youth who reported they had a job.
Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey, 2018.

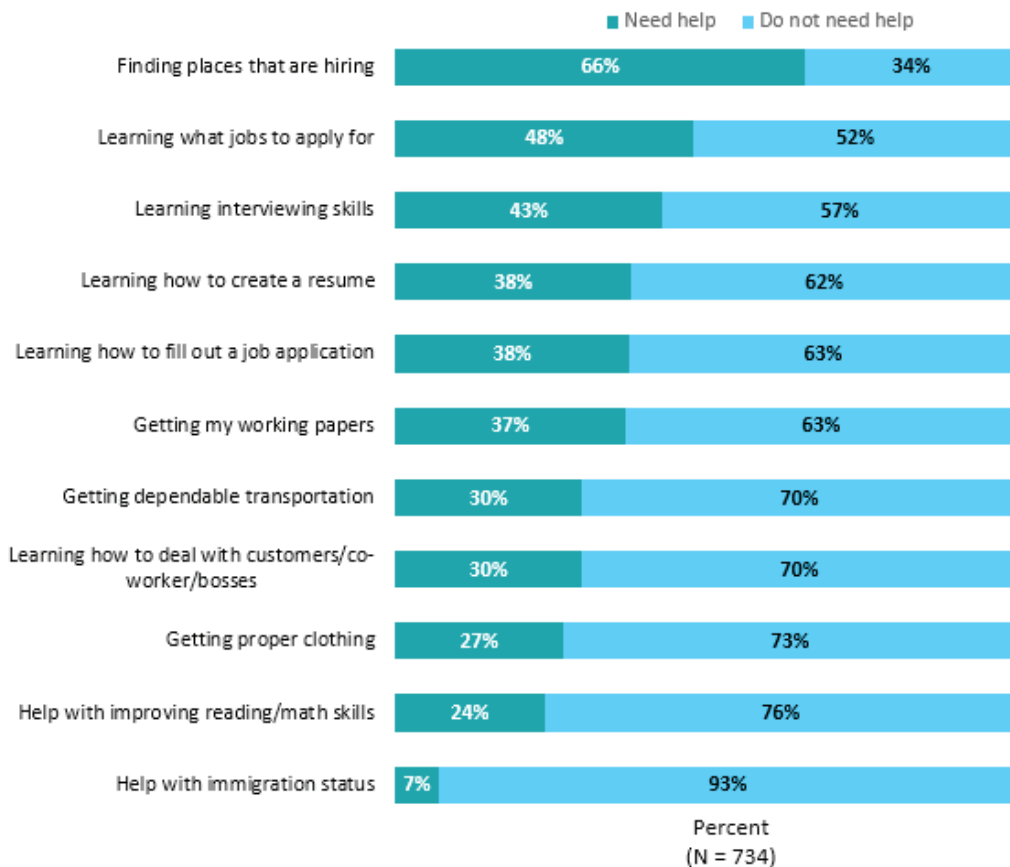*B.2*   *What help did youth need to find a job? Did they receive it?*

The survey asked unemployed youth who wanted to work whether they needed and received a wide range of help in finding jobs. The extent to which youth received the help they needed to find jobs represents the levels to which these needs are met or unmet.

Help needed to find a job. Finding available jobs and being prepared to successfully apply for and obtain those jobs are among the greatest employment-related needs among youth in foster care. The survey data show that unemployed youth who want to work most frequently need help with finding places that are hiring; two-thirds of youth in foster care needed this help with finding jobs. Other employment-related needs in high demand were those related to specific skills or conditions for obtaining the jobs, including:

- Learning what jobs to apply for (48 percent);

- Learning interviewing skills (43 percent);

- Learning how to fill out a job application (38 percent);

- Learning how to write a resume (38 percent); and

- Getting working papers (37 percent).

Fewer youth needed other types of help with finding jobs, ranging from 7 percent for help with immigration status to 30 percent for getting dependable transportation.

Figure 8. Youth reporting the help they <u>needed to find a job</u>

Legend: ■ Need help ■ Do not need help

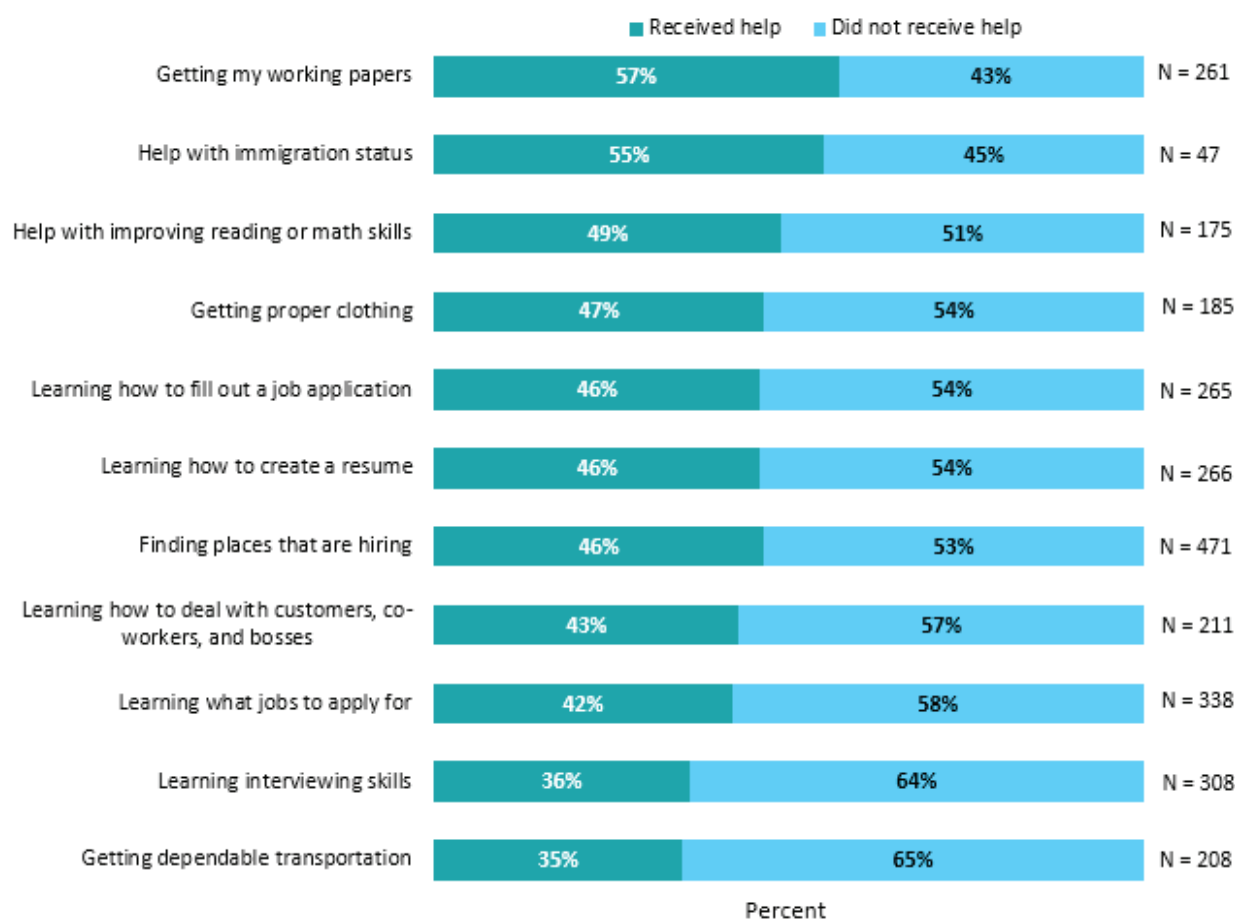|	Need help	Do not need help
Finding places that are hiring	66%	34%
Learning what jobs to apply for	48%	52%
Learning interviewing skills	43%	57%
Learning how to create a resume	38%	62%
Learning how to fill out a job application	38%	63%
Getting my working papers	37%	63%
Getting dependable transportation	30%	70%
Learning how to deal with customers/co-worker/bosses	30%	70%
Getting proper clothing	27%	73%
Help with improving reading/math skills	24%	76%
Help with immigration status	7%	93%

Percent
(N = 734)

NOTE: Percentages are based on youth who reported they did not have a job but would like to find one. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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Extent to which needs were met. While many youths received the help they needed to find jobs, there were relatively high levels of unmet need, which could reflect a gap in programs designed to meet those needs or a lack of awareness by youth that the programs are available. Overall, the survey results suggest that some of the most needed employment-related help also tend to have some of the highest levels of unmet need (Figure 9). ACS' newly-established Office of Employment and Workforce Development Initiatives (described in the Executive Summary section of this report) was developed in 2016 to build the capacity of our provider agencies to better prepare youth for the workforce. Programs such as our partnership with the Workplace Center at Columbia University (Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers) are being implemented by foster care agencies to close the gap on these types of unmet employment needs.

Figure 9. Youth reporting the help they received in finding a job

	Received help	Did not receive help	
Getting my working papers	57%	43%	N = 261
Help with immigration status	55%	45%	N = 47
Help with improving reading or math skills	49%	51%	N = 175
Getting proper clothing	47%	54%	N = 185
Learning how to fill out a job application	46%	54%	N = 265
Learning how to create a resume	46%	54%	N = 266
Finding places that are hiring	46%	53%	N = 471
Learning how to deal with customers, co-workers, and bosses	43%	57%	N = 211
Learning what jobs to apply for	42%	58%	N = 338
Learning interviewing skills	36%	64%	N = 308
Getting dependable transportation	35%	65%	N = 208

Percent

NOTE: For each type of help, percentages are based on youth who reported they needed that help. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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For each of the most frequently reported employment-related need in Figure 8, the following results from Figure 9 reflect whether the extent to which the need was met or unmet:

- **Finding places that are hiring.** Of the 471 youth who needed help in finding places that are hiring, less than half (46 percent) received the help, while 53 percent did not have this need met.

- **Learning what jobs to apply for.** Of the 338 youth who needed this help, less than half (42 percent) received it, while 58 percent needed but did not receive the help.

- **Learning interviewing skills.** Of the 308 youth who needed this help, only 36 percent reported having this need met, while the remaining two-thirds did not have this need met.

- **Learning to create resume.** Of the 266 youth who needed this help, 46 percent received it, while the remaining 54 percent did not receive the help.

- **Learning to fill out job application.** Of the 265 youth who needed this help, 46 percent received it, while the remaining 54 percent did not receive the help.

- **Getting working papers.** Of the 261 youth who needed this help, a majority (57 percent) reported having this need met, while the remaining 43 percent did not have this need met.

The youth also had high levels of unmet need in getting dependable transportation (65 percent) and learning how to deal with customers, co-workers, and bosses (57 percent). The percentage of youth with other unmet employment-related needs ranged from 43 percent for help getting working papers to 45 percent for help with immigration status.

B.3 **How much weekly allowance do youth receive?**

The survey asked youth about the allowance they receive weekly. Table 7 shows the amount of allowance for all youth, youth reporting they had a job or paid internship, and those without a job or paid internship.

Table 7. Weekly allowance by employment status of youth in foster care

Allowance ($)	All youth (N=1,181)	Youth with a job or paid internship (N=254)	Youth without a job or paid internship (N=920)
None	15%	16%	15%
$1 to $15	22%	15%	25%
$16 to $30	25%	22%	26%
More than $30	24%	29%	23%
Not applicable	13%	17%	12%

NOTE:. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Of the 1,181 youth providing information on the amount of weekly allowance they received, about one-fourth received more than $30, an additional 25 percent received $16 to $30, and 22 percent received $1 to $15. Fewer youth reported no allowance (15 percent), and 13 percent indicated that the question was not applicable to them, which the youth could have interpreted to mean that they did not need an allowance or that no allowance was made available to them. New York State foster care regulations require that each child in foster care receive a regular allowance appropriate to their age, but does not specify the amount or frequency.

The results were mixed when the amount of weekly allowance was examined by whether the youth had access to other sources of income such as earned income or paid internship. For example, counter to expectations, youth with a job or paid internship were more likely to receive high allowances than youth without this additional source of income; 29 percent of employed youth compared with 23 percent of unemployed youth receives allowances of more than $30. Youth in foster care who are over the age of 16 are encouraged to participate in workshops that focus on developing independent living skills, including preparing for employment. Participating youth receive a stipend for participation, which may have been received or perceived as an allowance by some youth, and may explain why youth with employment or an internship reported receiving higher allowances.

C. SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

While the presence of a consistent and loving adult and the social bonds from solid friendships are important for nurturing the emotional and social development of all youth, these conditions are critical for youth in foster care who have experienced abuse and neglect and face unique challenges. Ensuring that all youth are cared for and connected to loving adults is the most important goal for ACS and its foster care agencies. It is also understood that it is a normal part of adolescence to separate from, push back on and/or be frustrated by adults in caregiving roles. As described in the ACS Foster Care Strategic Blueprint, ACS has significant initiatives underway to enhance the quality of caregiving and support for all youth in foster care, and particularly older youth. The findings from this part of the survey will be used to inform this critical work moving forward.

To explore the extent to which youth receive the social and emotional support from the people in their lives, this chapter presents data to address the following research questions:

- To whom do youth in foster care turn for help when they need it? Do they turn to foster parents or residential facility staff?

- To what extent do youth in foster care feel supported by foster parents or residential facility staff?

- To what extent do youth receive support for their emotional well-being?

C.1   To whom do youth turn for help when they need it?

The survey asked youth to indicate whether they had each of 16 individuals in their lives to whom they could turn when they needed help. The list included foster parents and residential staff and many other family or relatives as well as friends, case or social workers, and other individuals who may be part of the youths' lives.

Foster parents and residential staff. Survey data are analyzed separately depending on whether the youth are in foster homes/kinship family homes or in residential treatment centers/group homes. Depending on their placement type, the ultimate caregivers for youth are either foster parents or residential facility staff who are expected to play a major role in their lives. The survey data show that more than two thirds of the youth across placement type felt that they could turn to their caregiver for help if they need it (Figure 10). A slightly larger percent of youth in foster homes or kinship family homes felt this way towards their foster parents (71 percent) compared with 67 percent of youth in residential
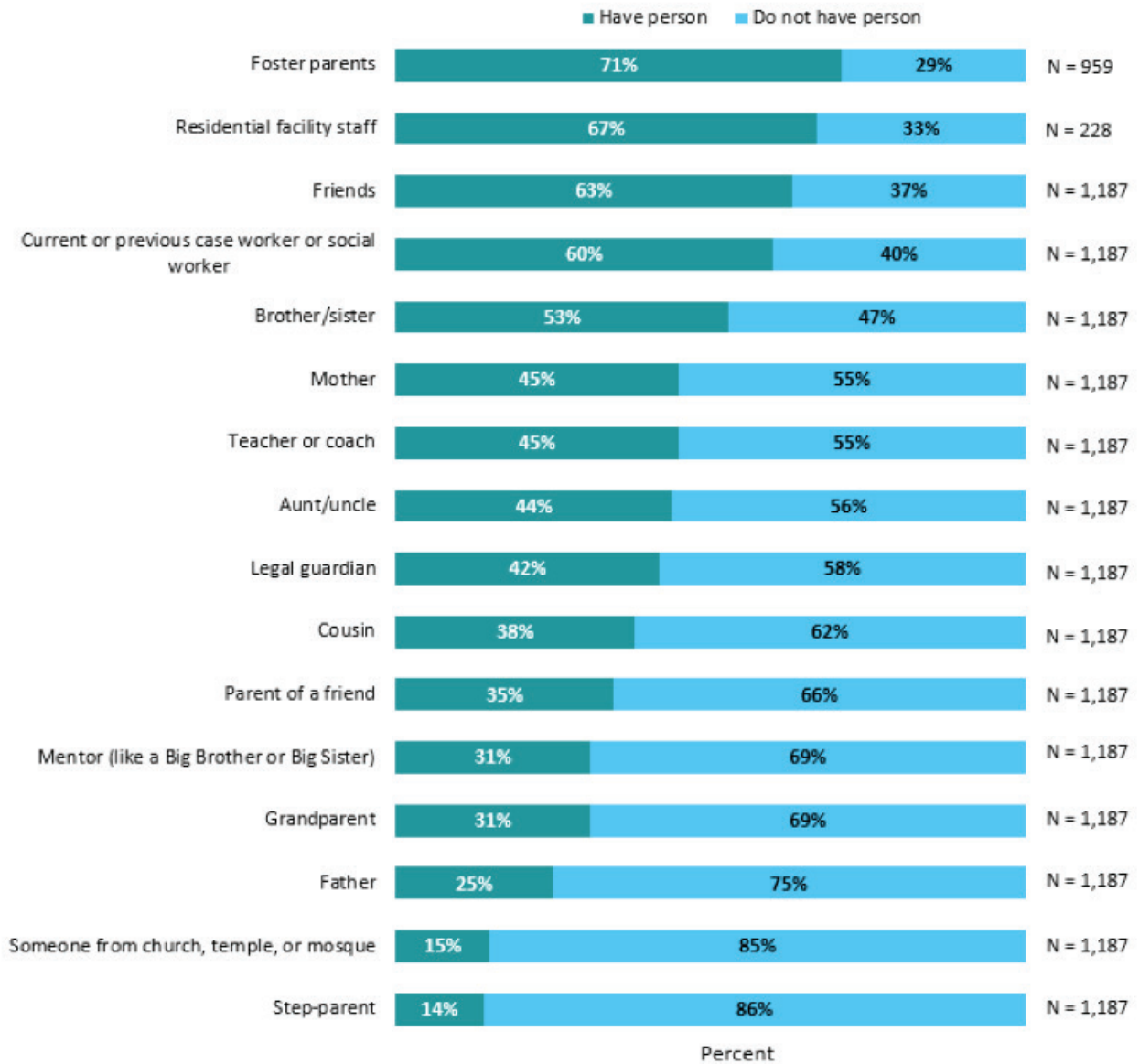
settings or group homes. As described in the next section below, when youth were asked a more detailed question –
to what extent foster parents and residential/group home staff were supportive, 88 percent of youth in foster/kinship
homes and 86 percent of youth in residential/group settings said that they felt very supported or somewhat supported.

Other individuals to whom youth could turn for help. Youth in foster care also identified other family, friends, agency
staff, and other individuals in their lives to whom they could turn to for help when needed. Next to foster parents
and residential facility staff, youth identified their friends and current or previous caseworkers or social workers as
individuals with supportive roles in their lives; 63 percent turn to friends and 60 percent turn to caseworkers or social
workers for help in times of need. More than half of the youth also turn to brothers or sisters for this support.
Although less commonly reported by respondents, other individuals with an important role in the lives of youth include
mothers, who were reported to be a source of support by 45 percent of respondents,   legal guardians, teachers or
coaches, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

(Fig 10 appears on next page)

Figure 10. Youth reporting the persons in their lives they could turn to for help when needed

■ Have person   ■ Do not have person

Person	Have person	Do not have person	N
Foster parents	71%	29%	N = 959
Residential facility staff	67%	33%	N = 228
Friends	63%	37%	N = 1,187
Current or previous case worker or social worker	60%	40%	N = 1,187
Brother/sister	53%	47%	N = 1,187
Mother	45%	55%	N = 1,187
Teacher or coach	45%	55%	N = 1,187
Aunt/uncle	44%	56%	N = 1,187
Legal guardian	42%	58%	N = 1,187
Cousin	38%	62%	N = 1,187
Parent of a friend	35%	66%	N = 1,187
Mentor (like a Big Brother or Big Sister)	31%	69%	N = 1,187
Grandparent	31%	69%	N = 1,187
Father	25%	75%	N = 1,187
Someone from church, temple, or mosque	15%	85%	N = 1,187
Step-parent	14%	86%	N = 1,187

Percent

NOTE: Percentages for youth reporting on foster parents are based on the 959 youth in foster homes or kinship family homes that responded to the question on people to whom they could turn. Percentages for youth reporting on residential facility staff are based on the 228 youth in residential treatment centers or group homes that responded to the question on people to whom they could turn. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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C.2   To what extent are foster parents and residential facility staff supportive and in what ways?

To explore the significance of individuals with major caregiving roles in the lives of foster care youth, the survey asked about the extent to which youth felt supported by their foster parents or residential facility staff, and to elaborate on their responses in the text boxes provided.

Extent of support. Overall, youth in foster homes or kinship homes reported higher levels of support than those in residential treatment centers or group homes (Table 8). Most of the youth in foster or kinship family home felt very supported by their foster parents (61 percent) while fewer than half of the youth in residential treatment centers felt the same way about the facility staff (46 percent). This trend is consistent with the findings reported earlier on the individuals to whom youth can turn for help.

Table 8. Youth reporting the extent to which they feel supported by foster parents or residential facility staff

Response	Youth in foster or kinship family home (N=956)	Youth in residential treatment center or group home (N=229)
Yes, very supported	61%	46%
Yes, somewhat supported	27%	40%
No, not very supported	7%	8%
No, not supported at all	5%	6%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCES: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Narrative about the youths' perception of support.

Regardless of their response about the extent of support received from foster parents and residential facility staff, the youth were asked to comment further on their responses.

Responses from those who felt very supported (483 text responses) by their foster parents or residential staff suggested positive experiences related to the following broad themes:

- **Emotional support.** Youth felt cared for because they were treated like a member of the family, they felt wanted and supported, they felt they were being listened to and understood, and they felt supported when they were sad or upset.

- **Help in meeting needs.** Youth felt they were getting help in meeting their needs in several areas, including help in reaching education goals, help with applying for jobs and getting to appointments, and assisting with childcare.

- **Communication with their caregivers.** Youth experienced positive and frequent communication with caregivers. The caregivers also "stayed on top of them" to ensure they were meeting their responsibilities, they provided valuable advice and guidance for future planning, and they pushed them to improve.

- **Availability/reliability of caregivers.** Youth could count on caregivers to be available and to help them solve problems.

Responses from those who felt somewhat supported or not very supported (243 text responses) by their foster parents or residential staff repeated many of the positive feedback listed by those who felt very supported. The most commonly reported negative feedback include the following themes:

- **Emotional support.** Youth felt they were not always listened to, they did not feel treated like a family member, or they did not feel cared for.

- **Help in meeting needs.** Youth felt their needs for food, clothing and money were not being met, they received help from some staff but not others, and there were limits to which the caregivers provided for them.

- **Communication with their caregivers.** Youth sometimes argued with their caregivers or they hardly ever talk, they do not get along with some residential staff, and there is a lack of communication.

- **Availability/reliability of caregivers.** Staff were not always available or willing to help, and caregivers did not have enough time to pay attention to the youth.

Responses from those who felt not supported at all by their foster parents or residential staff were generally negative (45 text responses) and included the following themes:

- **Lack of trust.** Youth did not trust their foster parents and they feel like staff are against them or "trying to set them up."

- **Emotional support.** Youth did not feel supported, they felt foster parents and agency staff do not care about them, they reported not feeling welcome, they felt unwanted and like a burden, and they felt emotionally abused or neglected.

- **Help in meeting needs.** Youth felt like their caregivers do not care about their education or future, did not feel emotionally supported/cared for, or welcome; or reported feeling unwanted or like a burden.

- **Communication.** Youth experienced a breakdown in communication with foster family or agency staff, they did not get along with caregivers, and agency staff did not call or visit.

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C.3   To what extent do youth receive emotional support?

Emotional support is especially important for the well-being of youth as they deal with their histories of abuse and neglect and the unique challenges of being in foster care. The survey gathered information about three indicators of emotional support: the extent to which youth have someone to help them with their problems, the extent to which they have someone to listen to them, and the extent to which they have someone that makes them feel wanted. One observation from the youth responses to these questions is the noticeable high number of survey respondents who chose not to give an answer, possibly because the questions were perceived as too personal. As with a few other survey items that may be considered sensitive (e.g., healthcare treatment for drug or alcohol use), item nonresponse on emotional support was considerably higher than the norm for other questions in this survey, which typically accounted for less than 1 percent of the youth that completed the survey.

Overall, a majority of the youth in foster care had someone to help them with problems, listen to them, and makes them feel wanted most of the time. For example, in response to the question of the extent to which a stated situation was true for them, almost two-thirds (62 percent) of the foster care youth reported that they had someone who makes them feel wanted most of the time, while 29 percent had someone to provide this support some of the time. Similarly, 60 percent had someone to listen to them most of the time and 55 percent had someone to help them with problems most of the time.   However, one-third of youth reported that such support is available sometimes or never.

Figure 11. Youth reporting various situations that are true for them
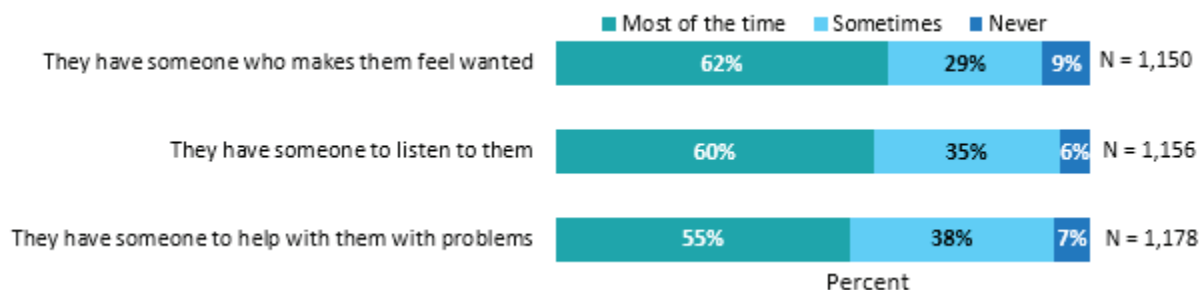
NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

D. SOCIAL INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION

Involvement in social and extracurricular activity has important and well-documented impact on the social and psychological development of youth. Early participation in activities such as team sports and social clubs, for example, provide many opportunities to grow socially and emotionally. ACS and foster care agencies work to ensure that youth in foster care have normative experiences. Examples include supporting youth to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports teams and school clubs, assisting youth to obtain their driver's license, and helping youth to connect to employment opportunities. The findings from this part of the survey will be utilized to inform this work moving forward.
To explore the extent to which foster care youth are engaged in activities that can enhance current relationships and build new social connections, the survey gathered information to answer the following research questions:

- Do youth engage in various social activities during their free time?

- What activities would youth like to do that they are not currently doing?

- What stops them from being able to do things outside of school or work?

- Do youth have access to various communication technologies?

D.1 Do youth engage in various social activities?

Using social media and spending time with friends are the two most popular pastime social activities for youth in foster care (Figure 12). Of the 1,188 youth responding to the survey questions on how they spend their free time, most (84 percent) reported that they use social media (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter) and over three-fourths (77 percent) spent time with friends.

Other popular pastime activities for the youth also suggest high levels of social connectedness with friends and the frequent use of technologies. A majority of foster care youth played video games (57 percent), while substantial numbers spend the night with friends (46 percent) and go on dates (42 percent) during their free time.
Foster care youth were less likely to spend their free time with sports teams or other extracurricular activities that were school- or community-based activities. The percentage of youth participating in these activities ranged from 22 percent for school clubs to 30 percent for sports teams and 34 percent for afterschool or weekend school events.

Figure 12. Youth reporting the activities in which they participated during their free time
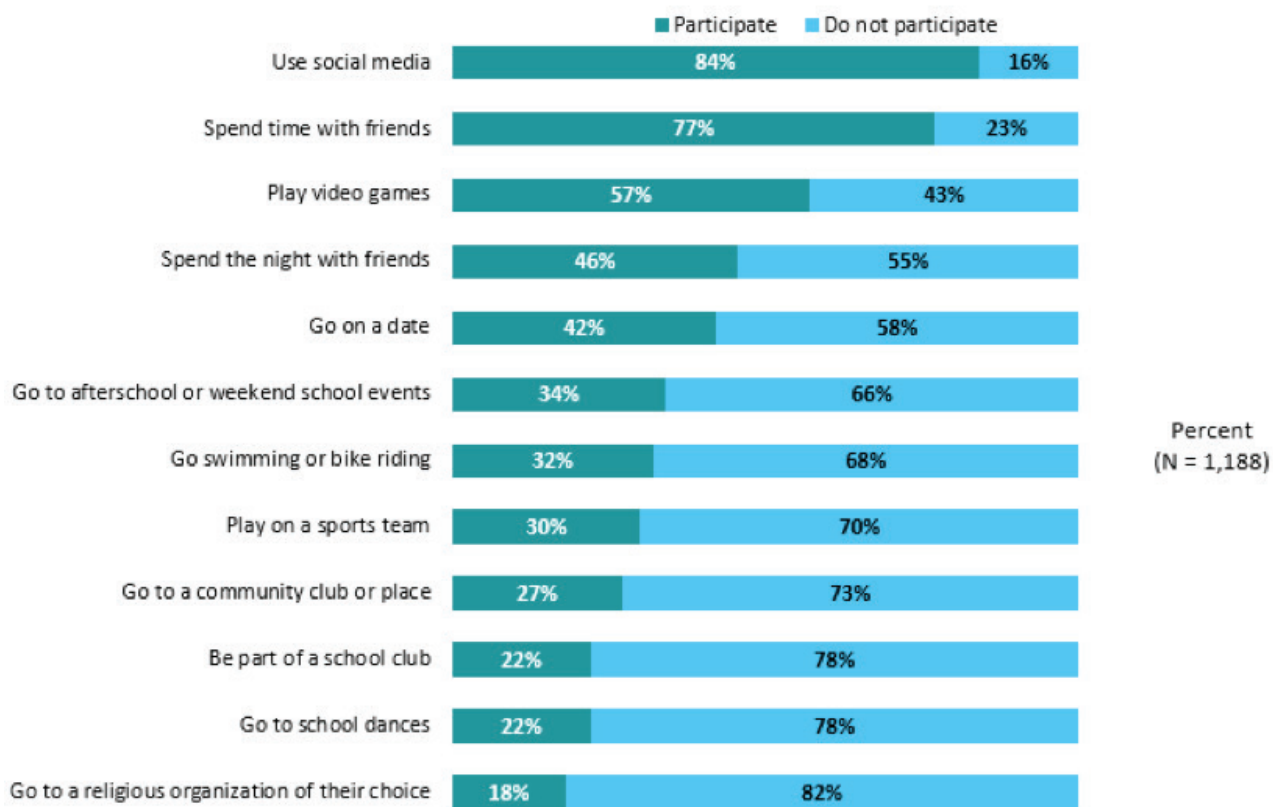
NOTE: For each type of activity, percentages are based on the number of youth who reported that they did not participate in the activity in Figure 12 Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

D.2 *What activities would youth like to do that they are not currently doing?*

Youth who were not engaged in an activity listed in Figure 12 above were asked whether they **would like to** participate in that activity. Thus, the information presented for each activity in Figure 13 represents the level of unmet need for that social activity.

Although spending time with friends and spending the night with friends were among the most popular activities in which foster care youth participated, they were also the areas of greatest unmet need for the youth. Among the

651 youth who did not report spending the night with friends, almost half indicated that they would like to do these sleepovers. Similarly, 43 percent of the 279 youth who did not spend time with friends indicated that they would like to engage in this activity during their free time.

Foster care youth also reported substantial levels of unmet need in other areas of social activities; 37 percent of the youth who did not go swimming or bike riding would like to participate in those activities, while about one-third of those who did not play on sports teams or go on dates indicated they would like to participate in these activities. The levels of unmet need in other social activities ranged from 9 percent for going to a religious organization of their choice to 25 percent for going to a community club or place and 30 percent for using social media.

Figure 13. Youth reporting the activities they would like to participate in during their free time
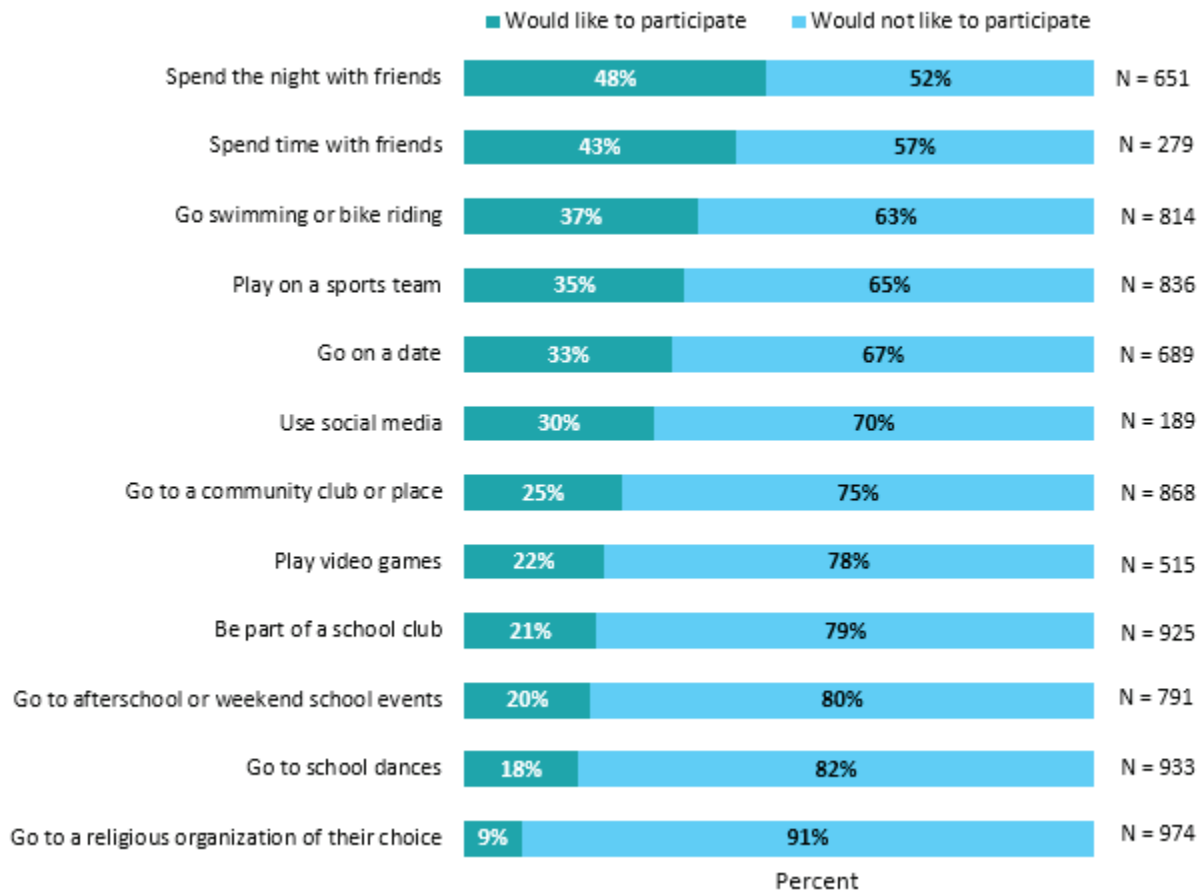
NOTE: For each type of activity, percentages are based on the number of youth who reported that they did not participate in the activity in Figure 12. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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D.3   **What is holding youth back from doing things outside of school or work?**

To explore potential barriers to youth participation in activities outside of school or work, the survey asked whether foster care youth experienced transportation or financial difficulties, whether they had to care for a child, and whether they were not allowed by their foster parents or residential facility staff to engage in the activities.

Financial difficulties was the most commonly reported barrier for the 1,153 youth who responded to the question of what is holding them back from participating in activities outside of school or work; over one-third of the youth reported they did not have enough money (Table 9). New York State foster care regulations require that each child in foster care receive a regular allowance appropriate to their age, but does not specify the amount or frequency. A substantial percentage of the youth also reported that they had no transportation (17 percent).

Among youth living in residential treatment centers or group homes more than one-fourth of the 221 youth indicated that program rules tend to hold them back from participating in activities outside of school or work. Of the 932 youth living in foster homes or kinship family homes, 8 percent reported that they are held back by foster parents.

Table 9. Youth reporting what is holding them back from doing things outside of school or work

Difficulty	Yes, holding youth back (%)	No, not holding youth back (%)	Number responding
No transportation	17%	83%	1,153
Not enough money	35%	65%	1,153
Have to look after child	5%	95%	1,153
Not allowed by foster parent[1]	8%	92%	932
Not allowed by rules in the program[2]	28%	72%	221

1Data are based on the 932 youth in foster homes or kinship family homes who responded to the survey question.
2Data are based on the 221 youth in residential treatment centers or group homes who responded to the survey question.
NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018

D.4   ***Do youth have access to communication technologies?***

Access to various communication technologies could affect the extent to which youth could maintain and/or establish social relationships with peers and other individuals in their lives. Access to desktop computers, laptops, or tablets also has implications for the extent to which youth could engage in independent school- or work-related research and other

activities. The survey data suggest widespread access to communication technology among foster care youth. Most foster care youth have access to cell phones and the Internet; about four out of five youth reported this access. In addition, a majority of the youth have access to landline phone services (60 percent). Fewer youth have access to desktops, laptops, and tablets (38 to 44 percent).

Figure 14. Youth reporting access to communication technology
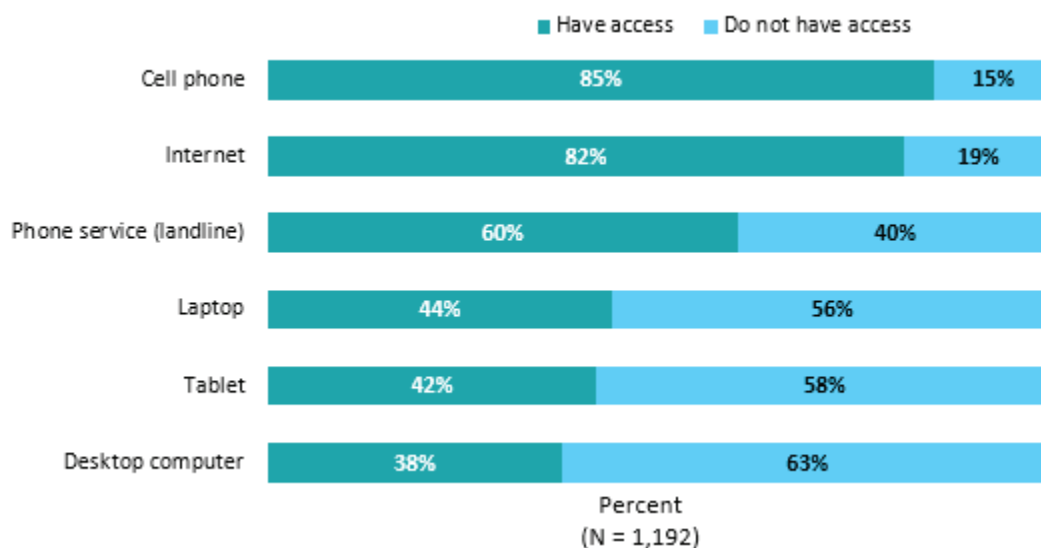
NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

E. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND SATISFACTION OF BASIC NEEDS

Healthcare and access to adequate food and clothing are a basic necessity for all youth, especially for youth who have entered foster care because of abuse or neglect. Although the majority of youth in foster care have access to Medicaid or other healthcare benefits to address their health challenges, research has documented that children in foster care have much higher rates of developmental disorders, medical disorders such as dental and vision problems, and a wide range of behavioral disorders compared with those who are not in foster care.[10]

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10   Center for Medical Health Services and Center for Substance Abuse for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2013

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To explore the extent to which foster care youth meet healthcare and basic needs, survey data are presented to address two broad research questions:

- What healthcare services do foster care youth need and receive?

- To what extent are they able to satisfy basic needs for adequate food and clothing? How does this vary by placement type?

E.1   What healthcare services do youth need and receive?

The survey asked youth whether they are getting the healthcare they need for physical, dental, emotional, overall health, sexual health, and alcohol or drug use. Overall, the item nonresponse rates for these items were relatively high compared with other survey questions, probably because of the sensitive nature of some of the questions. For each of the healthcare services examined, responses from the youth were used to create two indicators: whether the youth needed the service and whether they received what they needed.

Healthcare services needed. The most prominent healthcare needs among foster care youth were for physical and dental services (Figure 15). Almost all of the youth reported a need for physical healthcare services (95 percent) and dental services (93 percent). Other healthcare needs in high demand were those related to overall health and emotional health; about four out of five youth needed these services. More than half of the youth needed care for sexual health or family planning while 27 percent needed care for alcohol or drug use. While many youth identified the "need" for these types of healthcare services (Figure 15), the vast majority reported actually receiving these services, as 92 percent reported that their physical healthcare needs were being met and 86% reported that their dental needs were being met (Figure 16).

Additionally, although the need for alcohol and drug use intervention and healthcare services for sexual health or family planning were the least cited (see Figure 15), almost all of the youth who needed these services were able to obtain them (Figure 16). For example, of the 626 youth who needed healthcare services for sexual health or family planning, 93 percent obtained the service.

Figure 15. Youth in foster care reporting whether they <u>needed various types of health care</u>
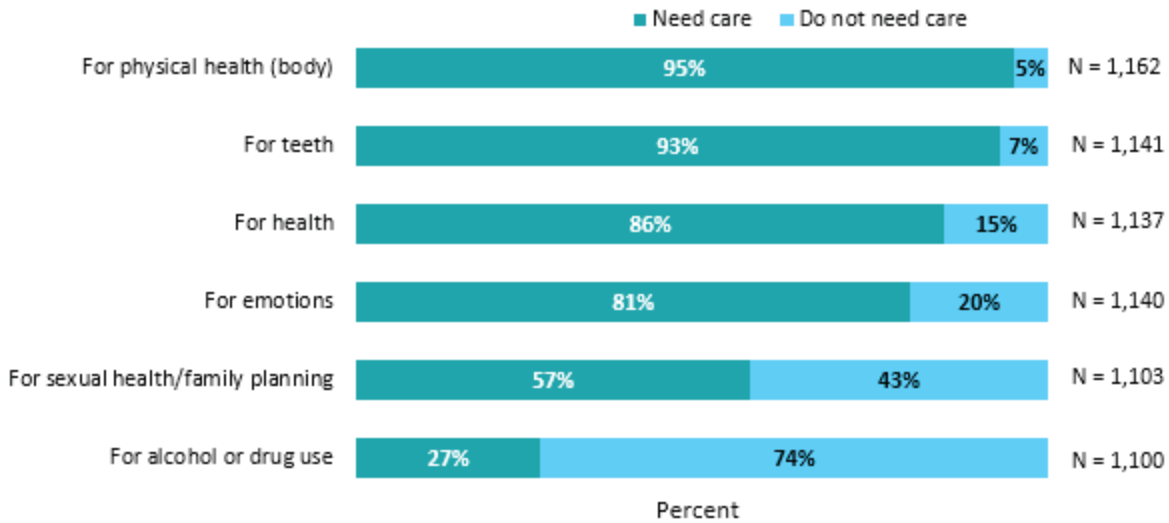
NOTE: For each type of care, percentages are based on youth who responded to the questions. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Figure 16. Youth in foster care reporting whether they <u>received various types of health care</u>
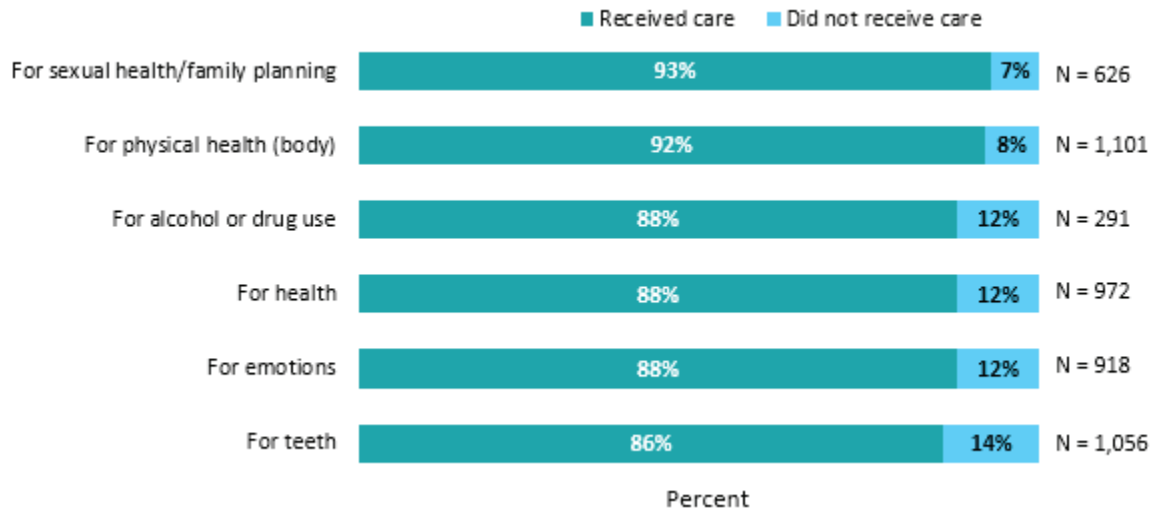
NOTE: For each type of care, percentages are based on youth who reported they needed that they needed the care in figure 15. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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E.2   Are basic needs for food and clothes being met?

As a strategy for identifying any youth in concerning or urgent situations, the survey included four questions regarding basic needs for food, clothing and shoes. Youth responses to these questions were monitored on a daily basis during data collection. ACS immediately contacted youth if the answer to any of the four questions was affirmative. Additional follow up was conducted with foster care agencies, placements and foster parents as appropriate.

Approximately one-fifth of survey respondents identified a concern with food, clothing or shoes in the previous year. As shown in the chart below, 23 percent of youth reported clothing concerns, 21 percent concerns with shoes and 19 percent identified food concerns.

In depth follow-up was conducted in each case. In 58 percent of cases, youth indicated in the follow up that they did have adequate food and clothing, and that they had misunderstood the question (e.g., thought it pertained to their experience with their biological families) or reported that they had simply answered this question in the affirmative to "get the survey done." (To encourage survey participation, youth received a $10 gift card upon completion of the survey. This incentive may have resulted in some youth rushing through certain survey questions). In 39 percent of cases, youth indicated that they did have necessary food and clothing, but wanted more clothing from certain brands or particular types of food, needed new seasonal clothing in the normal course or did not want to do their laundry. In these cases, ACS and/or the foster care agencies met with youth and foster parents to resolve these issues. In three percent of cases, at the time of follow-up, the youth had been discharged from foster care.

Figure 17. Youth reporting basic needs issues in the past year
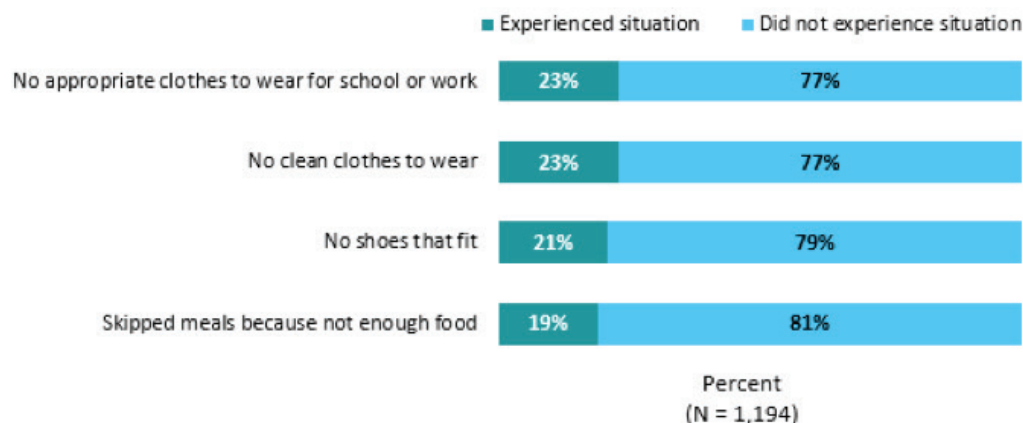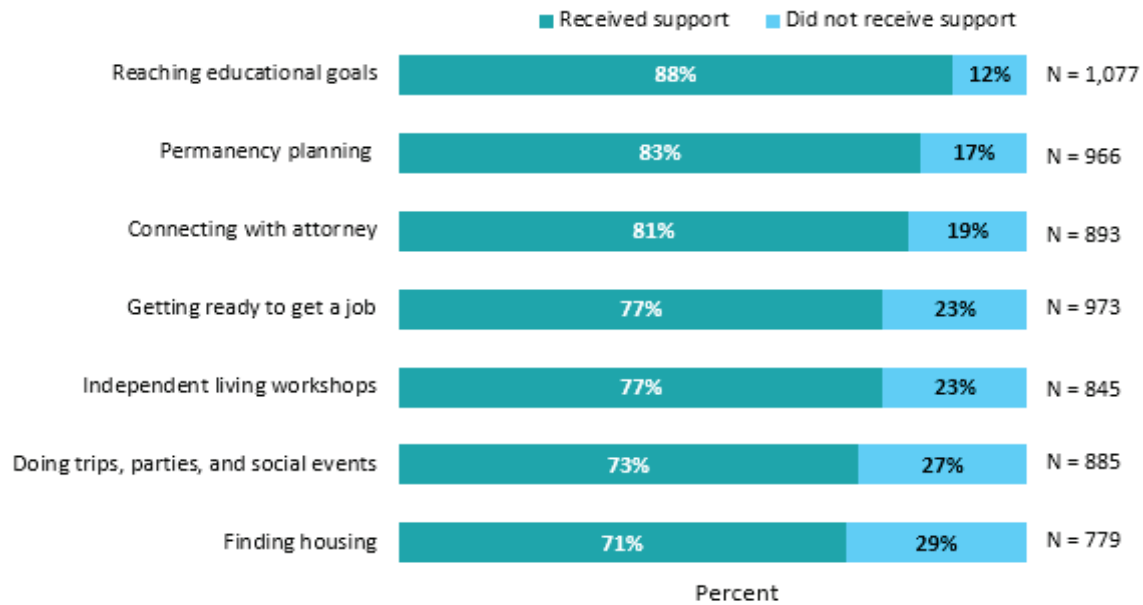

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

F. SUPPORT FROM FOSTER CARE AGENCIES

A core goal in foster care is to ensure a safe and stable home in which children and youth are provided with the support needed to build a solid relationship with a nurturing caregiver. In this regard, foster care agencies play a critical role in guiding youth and their families toward the most beneficial permanency plan. Thus, it is necessary for agencies to start permanency planning early and to include the youth for their own future. As part of this role, foster care agencies are expected to provide related support services to promote self-sufficiency, such as helping youth realize their education goals and acquiring the requisite skills for finding employment. ACS has intensive initiatives underway to improve permanency outcomes for older youth and increase youth engagement. ACS will use the findings from this survey to advance this critical work.

To explore the extent to which foster agencies provide timely and relevant support services for the youth in their care, the survey was designed to address the following research questions:

- What support services do youth need and receive from their foster agencies?

- To what extent are youth involved in their permanency planning?

- Who supports the youth in their permanency planning?

F.1   *What support services do youth need and receive from foster agencies?*

The survey asked youth whether their foster care agencies provide them with seven types of support related to education goals; getting ready for jobs; permanency planning; independent living workshops; trips, parties, and social events; housing; and connecting with attorneys. As with a few other sensitive questions in the survey, the item nonresponse rates for some of these items were relatively high compared with other survey questions, possibly because some youth were hesitant to provide negative feedback about support from their agencies. For each type of support, the survey responses were used to create two indicators of agency support: whether the youth needed the support and whether they received what they needed. For those who answered that they needed certain supports, a high percentage (71 - 88 percent) were receiving those supports.

Support services needed. The survey data showed high levels of need across the various types of support (Figure 18). The areas of greatest need for support from foster agencies were in reaching education goals, getting ready for a job, and permanency planning, all of which have important implications for transition out of foster care and preparing for independent living. Almost all of the youth needed agency support for reaching education goals (93 percent) and most needed support for job preparation and permanency planning (87 and 86 percent).

The percentage of youth needing other types of agency support examined in the survey was also relatively high. About four out of five youth needed to be connected with their attorneys and participate in trips, parties, and social events. In addition, more than three-fourths of the youth needed to participate in independent living workshops while 71 percent needed support in finding housing.

Fig 18. Youth reporting whether they needed various types of support from foster agencies
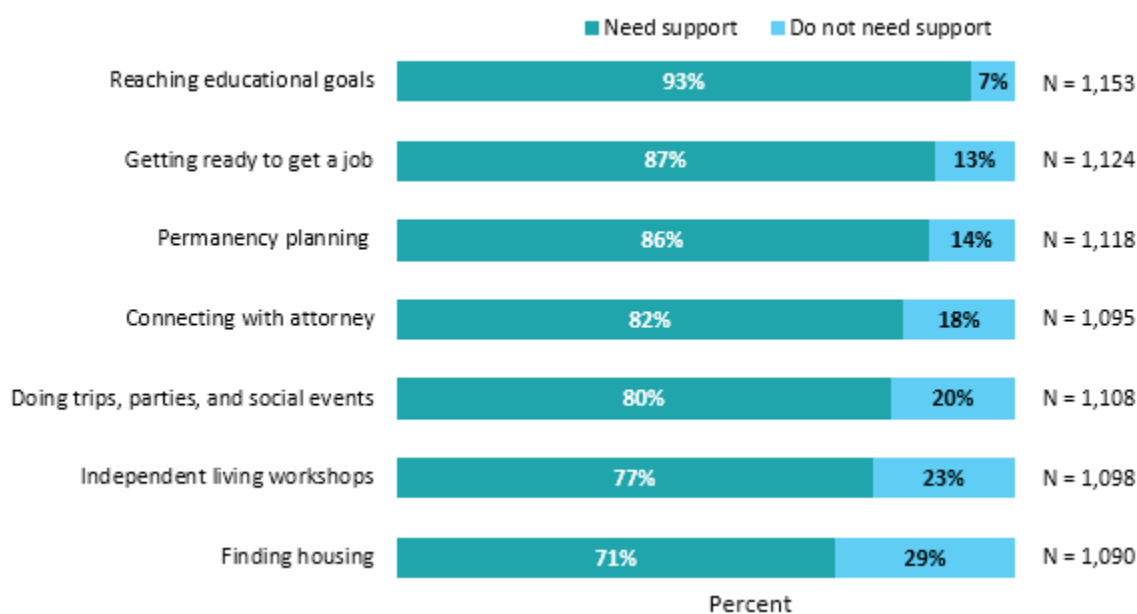
NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

Extent to which the needs for agency support were met. The survey data suggest that while most youth received what they needed for the various types of support, there were some substantial levels of unmet need (Figure 19).

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Fig 19. Youth reporting whether they <u>received various types of support from foster agencies</u>

NOTE: For each type of agency support, percentages are based on youth who reported they needed that they needed the support in figure 18. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

The following findings highlight the areas in which foster care youth experienced the highest levels of unmet need for services from foster agencies, some of which were important for promoting stability and self-sufficiency.

- While 71 percent said that they received the **housing support** they needed from foster agencies, 29 percent said they did not receive this support.

- While 73 percent were given opportunities to participate in **trips, parties, and social events**, 27 percent said they were not.

- While 77 percent received the support they needed in **finding jobs,** 23 percent said they did not receive this support. The distribution is similar for those who needed to participate in **independent living** workshops.

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

Figure 20 shows the distribution for various levels of youth involvement in their permanency planning. More than two-thirds of the youth in foster care either led the making of their permanency plan or were involved in this activity. Of the 1,169 youth responding to this survey item, 39 percent led the making of their permanency plan while another 30 percent were part of their permanency plan but did not lead it. However, about one quarter of the foster care youth said they did not know about their permanency plan while a few knew about the plan but were not a part of this plan (7 percent).

Figure 20. Youth reporting on their involvement in their permanency plan
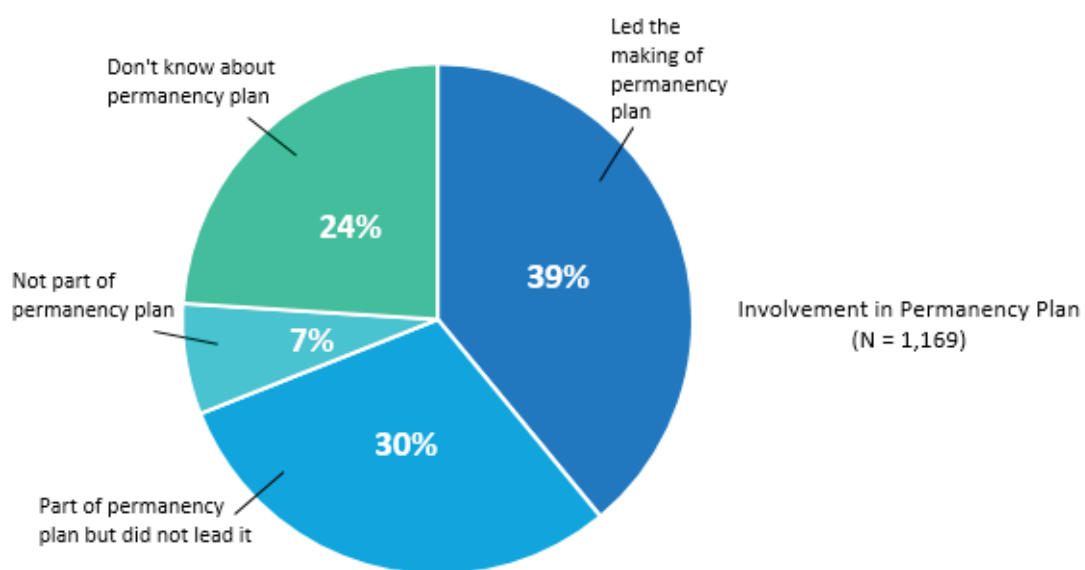
NOTE: For each type of agency support, percentages are based on youth who reported they needed that they needed the support in figure 18. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

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

Youth who were involved in the making of their permanency plans were asked to identify the individuals who supported them in this endeavor. Foster care youth most frequently identified their caseworkers at the foster agencies as the individuals that supported them in their permanency planning (80 percent). In addition, 60 percent identified their lawyers as providing support in permanency planning.

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About two-thirds of the youth in foster homes or kinship family homes reported that their foster parents helped them with their permanency planning. This level of support from residential staff was similar for youth who lived in residential treatment centers or group homes.

Table 11. Youth reporting whether various individuals supported them in their permanency planning

Individual	Provided support (%)	Did not provide support (%)	Total number
Lawyer	60%	40%	892
Teacher	9%	91%	892
Birth parent	28%	72%	892
Case worker at foster agency	80%	20%	892
Foster parent	65%	35%	719
Residential staff	67%	34%	173

NOTE: Percentages for foster parents are based on the number of youth in foster homes or kinship family homes that responded to the question on whether their foster parents help them in their permanency planning. Percentages for residential staff are based on the 719 youth in residential treatment centers or group homes that responded to the question on whether residential staff help them in their permanency planning. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
SOURCE: Foster Care Experience Survey: 2018.

G. Recommendations from Youth in Foster Care

To capture the youths' perceptions and opinions about what needs to be changed to improve the foster care system, the survey included the following question: ***If you were the Commissioner of ACS, what improvements would you make?*** 883 youth – over 73 percent of those who responded to the survey – provided additional feedback in this section. The following themes emerged from the responses (listed in order of frequency, with the first receiving the most responses):

- Provide better emotional and communication support (including use of technology);

- Provide more money/allowances;

- Implement better placement and monitoring practices;

- Hire more qualified and better train staff to undertake their responsibilities in a caring and efficient manner;

- Provide more and better social activities;

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- Provide more jobs and housing support to help with aging out of foster care;

- Improve interactions with biological family to ensure that youth return to their families in a more timely manner;

- Provide more education and support;

- Allow more freedom and more opportunities for independent living; and

- Provide more health services and counseling/therapy support.

Communication and emotional support

The youth listed some important changes in placement and monitoring that they would make if they were the Commissioner of ACS. For example, potential changes included the following:

- Ensure that foster parents and residential staff are honest and trustworthy;

- Ensure that agency staff communicate more regularly, return calls, interact with and listen to kids, their foster parents and their families, and include them in decision making/planning for their future;

- Allow kids to have phones to communicate with family and to use their phones during the week and not only on weekends;

- Ensure that youth spend more time with caseworkers and try to ensure that the youth have the same social worker the entire time in placement; and

- Obtain frequent feedback from youth about how the agency is helping them.

More money and/or allowance

Money was a frequently cited topic of concern and potential change for the youth, especially as it relates to the youths' ability to make purchases for basic needs and activities or entertainment. Potential changes cited by youth included the following:

- Make more money available for food, clothing, and shoes;

- Make funds directly available to the youth and provide money for youth to spend on social activities and trips; and

- Put systems in place to ensure that foster parents are giving the youth money.

Better placement practices and monitoring

The youth listed some important changes in placement and monitoring that they would make if they were the Commissioner of ACS. For example, these potential changes included the following:

- Ensure that foster parents are genuine and caring;

- Conduct careful screening/background checks of foster parents and check to make sure foster parents are using the money for its intended purposes;

- Have staff check in more regularly with foster youth, ideally on a weekly basis;

- Try to match the background of foster youth with their foster families and keep siblings together at all costs;

- Implement a better system to move kids more quickly out of group homes into foster care;

- Make sure residential and foster homes are safe and secure, the needs of foster youth are met; there is no occurrence of abuse, and investigate youth complaints in a serious manner;

- Make residential placements more fun and do not implement too stringent rules/regulations; and

- Avoid placing younger kids together with older kids.

Residential and agency staff

Youth reported that they would make changes to ensure a more highly qualified, caring, and hard-working staff at residential treatment centers, group homes, and other foster care agencies. These potential changes included the following:

- Supervise agency workers to make sure they are doing the job they are hired to do;

- Hire sincere, caring, interactive and hardworking social workers and residential staff with integrity; and

- Ensure workers are trained and especially supportive of youth with disabilities.

More and better activities and trips

Many youth in foster care mentioned social activities and trips as important areas for potential change if they were the Commissioner of ACS. For example, the youth indicated they would do the following:

- Offer a wide a variety of activities that help to make children feel engaged and a sense of belonging, such as dance teams, sports, studio time, performing arts, social events, trips, games, parties, movie tickets, summer camps, and social clubs;

- Increase the budget for trips and provide more opportunities/activities and provide transportation; and

- Provide more center days where kids have lunch and lively discussions.

Jobs and housing support to help the "aging out" process

Youth in foster care indicated they would provide more and better support for jobs and housing so that foster youth could be better prepared to transition into independent living. These potential changes included the following:

- Provide services/workshops to better prepare youth for independent living, including areas such as housing support, summer jobs, career readiness and job placement training, transition to college, scholarships, and incentives for success; and

- Provide housing in better communities, make improvements to transitional housing and improve the process of applying for housing.

Family visits and relationships with biological families

Potential changes to enhance relationships with biological families included the following:

- Increase the number of home passes and visits with family and friends and allow youth to go out with family during visits, including providing opportunities to visit family out of state;

- Re-evaluate the youths' needs with a focus to help families reunite quickly;

- Clarify KinGAP laws so that more kids get out of foster care in a timely manner; and

- Make the adoption process quicker.

Education support

Many of the youth identified education as one of the key areas in which they would implement changes if they were the Commissioner of ACS. These include the following:

- Provide laptops and tablets and resources (e.g., workshops, mentors, financial aid or scholarships) to encourage youth to pursue higher education;

- Make educational support programs more fun and interesting in order to engage the youth and award achievement with incentives;

- Provide well-planned workshops to educate youth for life, including information on how on personal finances, independent living skills and transitioning to college or the workforce; and

- Provide more education support for youth with disabilities.

Increased freedom and independence

Many youth indicated they would make changes to ensure more freedom and independence among foster youth. These included the following:

- Allow older youth to spend nights with friends without the need for clearance;

- Allow more freedom/independence for older youth, especially those in residential placements;

- Help youth get jobs and choose their foster homes;

- Make the process easier for youth to sign themselves out of care; and

- Provide independent living cottages for those who plan on doing right for their future.

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Healthcare and counseling/therapy for youth and families

Many youth identified healthcare and counseling/therapy services as areas they would change to make these services more available to all youth in foster care, their foster caregivers, and their biological families. These potential changes included the following:

- Make programs and specialized services, including family therapy, available to help parents and foster parents of children with mental health problems and impacted by trauma;

- Provide more emotional support needed for success in school; and

- Allow foster youth to continue with current doctor after placement in foster care, and provide more assistance with doctors' appointments for youth in residential care or group homes.

V. CONCLUSION

This survey provided rich information regarding the experiences of older youth in foster care. Building upon current initiatives to support positive outcomes for youth in foster care, the results of this survey have informed ACS' new five-year plan, the Strategic Foster Care Blueprint for FY 2019–FY 2023 (available on the ACS website), which includes targeted strategies aligned with the survey findings.

While ACS has made significant gains in addressing the needs of children and youth in foster care, important opportunities remain to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families. The next phase of this work has been outlined in ACS' next iteration of the Foster Care Strategic Blueprint for FY 2019-FY 2023. The five-year Blueprint builds upon the progress made on the FY 2016-FY 2018 Blueprint, and is informed by the findings of the Foster Care Youth Experience Survey, recommendations of the Interagency Foster Care Task Force, case review findings, our examination of older youth permanency and input from key stakeholders.

The ACS Foster Care Blueprint FY 2019-FY 2023 is organized into five major categories:

1. **Improving Permanency Outcomes**

    During the last two years, ACS implemented a range of targeted strategies through our *No Time to Wait* initiative designed to reduce children's length of stay in care and improve reunification, adoption and kinship guardianship outcomes. There is a specific focus on achieving permanency for older youth in foster care.

2. **Improving Foster Care Placements to Enhance the Well-Being of Children**

    ACS' *Home Away from Home* (HAFH) initiative is focused on increasing placement with kin and redesigning the way foster parents are recruited and supported. A portion of this work is dedicated to identifying resources for older youth in foster care. This work will continue and expand under the five-year plan.

3. **Improving Health, Mental Health and Education Services for Children in Foster Care**

    Ensuring the well-being of children in foster care is a critical element of the permanency process. Through the five-year plan, ACS will continue to build on our current strategies and enhance out partnerships with our sister City agencies DOE, DYCD, DOHMH and other key partners to implement new strategies to support better health, mental health and educational outcomes for children in foster care.

4. **Improving Outcomes for Older Youth**

    ACS is working to improve permanency outcomes and reduce the numbers of youth that age out of care. Nationally, we know that youth aging out of foster care have poorer educational outcomes and college attendance, persistence and graduation rates than their peers, and face high rates of unemployment as adults. ACS has significant education, internship, college and career initiatives underway designed to improve outcomes for older youth in foster care. The five-year plan builds on these initiatives to help youth transition successfully to adulthood.

5. **Building Systemic Capacity**

    ACS has made significant investments to provide cutting-edge training, technical assistance and case consultation functions to support our foster care providers. Major investments have also been made to maintain low caseloads and implement trauma screening and trauma-informed services. Through the five-year plan, ACS will provide additional tools that support the work of our foster care providers. Significantly, ACS will also be undertaking a comprehensive assessment of community needs, the current service array and best practices to inform the re-procurement of all foster care services (including family foster care and residential services).

ACS will use the results of the annual Foster Youth Experience Survey to analyze and build upon our existing strategies and identify opportunities to improve services and supports provided to youth in foster care.

APPENDIX A: YOUTH EXPERIENCES SURVEY

ACS is conducting a survey of youth in foster care so that we can learn more -- directly from you -- about your experiences in foster care. The information that you provide will help us improve foster care placements and the services and supports that you receive. Your input is critically important and we thank you for taking a few minutes to complete this survey. ACS may follow up with you if your answers lead us to think that there are safety or health issues.

If you have any safety concerns or general questions, either call 212-341-3500 or email us at Fps.SurveyHelp@acs.nyc.giv. After submitting your completed survey, please see your case planner for your gift card.

Youth PIN:

You can find your Youth PIN number on the cover letter to this survey. If you don't know your PIN number, please email Fps.

1. **Where do you live?** (Check one answer.) [SORTING/SCREENING QUESTION]

   ☐   Foster Home

   ☐   Kinship Family Home (with relative or family friend)

   ☐   Residential Treatment Center

   ☐   Group Home

Help With Your Education

2. **What grade are you currently in?** (Check one) [DROP DOWN MENU WITH GRADES 1–12; COLLEGE; GED/HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM; NOT IN SCHOOL]

3. *Do you have plans to keep going with your education after school?* [ADD SKIP PATTERN BASED ON Q2, ASK QUESTION OF: GRADES 9-12, COLLEGE, GED/HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM, AND NOT IN SCHOOL]

☐   Yes

☐   No

☐   Don't know or not sure

4. **What additional support, if anything, would you need to continue your education after high school?** (Check one answer in each row.) [ADD SKIP PATTERN FROM Q2, ASK THIS QUESTION ONLY OF GRADES 9-12, COLLEGE, GED/HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM, AND NOT IN SCHOOL]

	Yes	No
Emotional support	☐	☐
Financial support	☐	☐
Transportation	☐	☐
Academic support	☐	☐
Other (specify): _____	☐	☐

5. **In the past year, did you NEED any of these services?** (Check one in each row. If you do not need a service or if it does not apply to you, check 'No.') [ADD SKIP PATTERN FROM Q2, ASK THIS QUESTION ONLY OF GRADES 9-12, GED/HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY PROGRAM, AND NOT IN SCHOOL]

	Yes	No
Tutoring	☐	☐

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	Yes	No
Help preparing for the high school equivalency test	☐	☐
Help preparing for the SAT or ACT (college readiness tests)	☐	☐
Help applying for college	☐	☐
Help applying for financial aid and/or student loans	☐	☐
Help with attending college fairs or tours	☐	☐

6. [PROGRAM NEEDED SERVICES ONLY FROM Q5 →] **In the past year, did you RECEIVE these services?** (Check one in each row.)

	Yes	No
Tutoring	☐	☐
Help preparing for the high school equivalency test	☐	☐
Help preparing for the SAT or ACT (college readiness tests)	☐	☐
Help applying for college	☐	☐
Help applying for financial aid and/or student loans	☐	☐
Help with attending college fairs or tours	☐	☐

7. **In the past year, did you NEED any of these services?** (Check one in each row. If you do not need a service or if it does not apply to you, check 'No.') [ADD SKIP PATTERN TO Q2, ASK THIS QUESTION ONLY OF GRADES 1-8]

	Yes	No
Tutoring	☐	☐
High school application process	☐	☐
Test preparation (PSAT, Specialized High School exam)	☐	☐

8. [PROGRAM NEEDED SERVICES ONLY FROM Q7→] **In the past year, did you RECEIVE these services?** (Check one in each row.)

	Yes	No
Tutoring	☐	☐
High school application process	☐	☐
Test preparation (PSAT, Specialized High School exam)	☐	☐

9. **Do you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or receive special education services?**

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know/not sure

Help with Finding a Job

10. **Do you have a paid job or paid internship?** (Check one)

☐ Yes, I have a job or a paid internship → ASK Q11, THEN SKIP TO Q14
☐ No, I am too young to have a job → SKIP TO Q14

☐ No, I do not have a job or paid internship but I want to work → SKIP TO Q12

☐ No, I do not need a job → SKIP TO Q14

11. **On average, how many hours a week do you work?** (Check one answer.)

☐ Less than 6 hours	☐ 21 to 25 hours
☐ 6 to 10 hours	☐ 26 to 30 hours
☐ 11 to 15 hours	☐ 31 or more hours
☐ 16 to 20 hours	☐ It depends on the week or on my schedule.

12. **What help, if any, do you need to find a job?** (Check all that apply.) [THIS Q DISPLAYS ONLY TO THOSE WHO WANT TO WORK FROM Q10]

☐ Help with getting my working papers	☐ Finding places that are hiring
☐ Help with getting dependable transportation	☐ Learning how to fill out a job application
☐ Help with getting proper clothing	☐ Learning how to deal with customers, co-workers, and bosses
☐ Learning how to create a resume	☐ Help with improving my reading or math skills (e.g., tutoring)
☐ Help with immigration status	☐ Learning interviewing skills
☐ Learning what jobs to apply for	☐ Other (please specify): _____
	☐ None of the above

13. **What help are you getting to find a job?** (Check all that apply.) [THIS Q DISPLAYS ONLY TO THOSE WHO WANT TO WORK FROM Q10]

☐ Help with getting my working papers   ☐ Finding places that are hiring

☐ Help with getting dependable transportation   ☐ Learning how to fill out a job application

☐ Help with getting proper clothing   ☐ Learning how to deal with customers, co-workers, and bosses

☐ Learning how to create a resume   ☐ Help with improving my reading or math skills (e.g., tutoring)

☐ Help with immigration status   ☐ Learning interviewing skills

☐ Learning what jobs to apply for   ☐ Other (please specify): _____

                                          ☐ None of the above

Getting Support from the People around You

14. **Are there people in your life that you can turn to for help when you need it?** (Please check one in each row.) [FOSTER PARENT AND RESIDENTIAL STAFF RESPONSE OPTIONS WILL BE INCLUDED BASED ON RESPONSE TO Q1]

	Yes	No
Mother	☐	☐
Father	☐	☐
Step-parent	☐	☐
Grandparent	☐	☐
Aunt/Uncle	☐	☐
Brother/Sister	☐	☐
Cousin	☐	☐
Foster parent (or former foster parent)	☐	☐
Residential staff	☐	☐
Legal guardian	☐	☐
Teacher or coach	☐	☐
Current or previous case worker or social worker	☐	☐
Mentor (like a Big Brother/Big Sister)	☐	☐
Someone from church, temple, or mosque	☐	☐
Parent of a friend	☐	☐
Friends	☐	☐
Other (describe) _____	☐	☐

15. **In general, do you feel supported by your foster parents or residential facility staff?** (Check one answer.)

☐ Yes, very supported   ☐ Yes, somewhat supported

☐ No, not very supported   ☐ No, not supported at all

16. **Can you please say more about your answer?**

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17. Which of these are true for you? (Check one answer in each row.)

	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
I have someone to help me with my problems	☐	☐	☐
I have someone to listen to me	☐	☐	☐
I have someone who makes me feel wanted	☐	☐	☐

18. Are you able to use the following where you live? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Phone service (landline) ☐ Laptop

☐ Cell phone ☐ Tablet (e.g., iPad)

☐ Internet ☐ None of these → WHY DON'T YOU HAVE ACCESS?

☐ Desktop computer

19. What do you do in your free time? (Check one answer in each row.)

	Yes, I do this	No, I don't do this
Use social media (facebook, instagram, snapchat)	☐	☐
Play video games	☐	☐
Be a part of a school club	☐	☐
Go on a date	☐	☐
Go to school dances	☐	☐
Play on a sports team	☐	☐
Go to a community club or place	☐	☐
Go to a religious organization of my choice	☐	☐
Spend the night with my friends	☐	☐
Go to afterschool or weekend school events	☐	☐
Spend time with my friends	☐	☐
Go swimming or bike riding	☐	☐
Other (please specify): _____	☐	☐

20. Here is what you said you are not doing. What would you LIKE to do? (Check one in each row.)
[PROGRAM QUESTION TO SHOW ONLY THE ITEMS IN Q19 THAT ARE 'NO' OR BLANK]

	Yes, I would like to do this	No, I'm not interested in this
Use social media (facebook, instagram, snapchat)	☐	☐
Play video games	☐	☐
Be a part of a school club	☐	☐
Go on a date	☐	☐
Go to school dances	☐	☐
Play on a sports team	☐	☐
Go to a community club or place	☐	☐
Go to a religious organization of my choice	☐	☐
Spend the night with my friends	☐	☐
Go to afterschool or weekend school events	☐	☐
Spend time with my friends	☐	☐
Go swimming or biking	☐	☐

	Yes, I would like to do this	No, I'm not interested in this
Other (please specify): _____	☐	☐

21. Is anything stopping you from doing things outside of school or work? (Check all that apply.)

☐ I do not have transportation

☐ I do not have the money

☐ I have to look after a child

☐ I am not allowed by my foster parent [MAY BE SKIPPED BASED ON Q1]

☐ I am not allowed by the rules in the program where I live [MAY BE SKIPPED BASED ON Q1]

☐ Other (specify): _____

☐ Nothing stops me from doing things outside of school or work

Your Health and Experiences in Care

22. Right now, are you getting the health care you need? (Check one answer in each row.)

	Yes, I am getting what I need	No, I am not getting what I need	I don't need this
For my physical health (body)	☐	☐	☐
For my emotions	☐	☐	☐
For my eyes	☐	☐	☐
For my teeth	☐	☐	☐
For alcohol/drug use	☐	☐	☐
For sexual health/ family planning	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify): _____	☐	☐	☐

23. How much allowance do you get each week? (Check one answer.)

☐ $0 or nothing

☐ $1 - $9

☐ $10 - $15

☐ $16 - $20

☐ $21 - $25

☐ $26 - $30

☐ More than $30

☐ Not applicable

24. **My foster agency supports me with:** (Check one answer in each row.)

	Yes, I am getting what I need	No, I am not getting what I need	I don't need this
Reaching my educational goals	☐	☐	☐
Doing trips, parties, and social events	☐	☐	☐
Getting ready to get a job	☐	☐	☐
Permanency planning (plan for after leaving foster care)	☐	☐	☐
Independent living workshops	☐	☐	☐
Finding housing	☐	☐	☐
Connecting with my attorney	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify): _____	☐	☐	☐

25. Were you a part of making your permanency plan (plan for after leaving foster care)? (Check one answer.)

☐   Yes, I led the making of my permanency plan

☐   Yes, I was a part of making my permanency plan BUT I did not lead it

☐   No, I was NOT a part of making of my permanency plan

☐   I do not know about my permanency plan → SKIP TO Q27

26. **Who supports you in your permanency planning?** (Check all that apply.) [RESIDENTIAL STAFF AND FOSTER PARENT OPTIONS WILL BE INCLUDED BASED ON RESPONSE TO Q1]

☐   My lawyer   ☐   Birth parent

☐   Foster parent   ☐   Case worker at my foster care agency

☐   Residential staff   ☐   Other (please specify): _____

☐   Teacher   ☐   No one supports me in my permanency planning

About You

27. How do you describe yourself? (Check all that apply.)

☐   American Indian or Alaska Native   ☐   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐   Asian   ☐   White

☐   Black, African American, or African   ☐   Other (please specify): _____

                                                                     ☐   I don't identify

28. What is your ethnicity? (Check one answer.)

☐   Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

☐   Middle Eastern or North African

☐   None of the above

☐   Prefer not to answer

29. **Can you practice your religion where you live right now?** (Check one answer.)

☐   Yes

☐   No → WHY NOT? _____

☐   I do not have a religion

30. **In the past year, were there times when you:** (Check one answer in each row.) [MANDATORY QUESTIONS; ACS WILL BE ABLE TO TRACK AND CONTACT YOUTH BASED ON PIN]

	Yes	No
Skipped meals because you did not have enough food?	☐	☐
Did not have clean clothes to wear?	☐	☐
Did not have appropriate clothes to wear for school or work?	☐	☐
Did not have shoes that fit you?	☐	☐

31. **If you were the Commissioner of ACS, what improvements would you make?**

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32. **Is there anything else you would like to tell us?**

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If you have questions, comments, or concerns, either call 212-341-3500 or email us at Fps.SurveyHelp@acs.nyc.gov

Thank you for completing this survey!
Please see your case planner for your gift card.

Administration for Children's Services