Foster Care Success Act
Annual Evaluation Report (2023-24)

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February 2025

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Executive Summary

The Foster Care Success Act (House Bill 22-1374) provides funds to both the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to improve the educational attainment of students in out-of-home placement.

The Act requires CDE to identify specific goals for its Foster Care Education Program (FCEP) to achieve this aim, as well as to report to the Colorado State Board of Education, the Colorado General Assembly, and the public on annual improvement in the educational attainment of youth in foster care. The goals to be specified by CDE fall into three categories: 1) Identification of students in out-of-home placement enrolled in Colorado schools; 2) Tracking outcomes related to student success and educational attainment; and 3) Local service delivery to support educational attainment.

Activities to Increase the Identification of Students in Out-of-Home Placement Enrolled in Colorado Schools

In addition to tracking the number of students in out-of-home placement identified each year, CDE has set forth goals concerning process improvements for assuring mandated training of Colorado Child Welfare Education Liaisons (CWELs) in all public school districts in the state and of Colorado County Caseworkers (CCCs). These goals include tracking mandated training of CWELs and CCCs to improve their identification and service delivery skills. To achieve this aim, CDE has created 8 learning modules concerning the educational rights of students in foster care. The department is currently tracking usage of the modules and will report on the number of CWELs engaging in the training each year. To date (as of January 16, 2025), 116 CWELs (out of 184 CWELs in school districts across the state) have completed all eight Educational Rights for Students in Foster Care modules and an additional 12 have partially completed the training. CDE is considering ways to ensure all CWELs complete the mandatory modules. Moreover, CDE has continued to increase the number of resources available to CWELs and CCCs and to refine a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between CDE and CDHS (the agency tasked with identification of students in out-of-home placement) designed to make data sharing quicker, easier, and more accurate. Finally, CDE staff implementing the department's Foster Care Education Program are continuing work with the CDE data services team to provide in-depth training to CWELs and CCCs to be able to access data from a report pertinent to their district to identify students in out-of-home placement.

Tracking Outcomes Related to Student Success and Educational Attainment

This is the third year CDE is reporting on outcomes related to student success and educational attainment. Each year, data are reported from the previous three years when available, allowing examination of trends across time.

In the 2023-2024 school year, CDE identified 2,478 students eligible for foster care services in the yearly count of students that occurs in October. This is the highest number of students identified over the last five years and is more than were identified prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which disrupted education in a myriad ways, including the identification of students in out-of-home placement.

Overall, students in out-of-home placement saw improved student outcomes in the 2023-2024 school year compared to the previous three years. Of note, 69.0 percent of Language, Math, Science, and Social Studies courses attempted by students in out-of-home placement were passed, a 3.6 percentage point improvement over the 2022-2023 school year. Additionally, more students in out-of-home placement successfully advanced to the next grade level than did the previous year (99.3 percent, a 2.8 percentage point improvement, and the highest rate in four years).

Students in out-of-home placement also saw an increase in four-year graduation and completion rates, with 40.4 percent of eligible graduates (i.e., students anticipated to graduate in 2023-2024) graduating with a regular

high school diploma, and 46.4 percent completing their education by graduating with a regular high school diploma, receiving a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED), or receiving a non-diploma certificate of completion. While this is still far below the four-year state rates of 84.2 percent for graduation and 85.6 percent for completion, it is also a 4.2 percentage point improvement in graduation rate over the 2022-2023 rate and the highest rate in the past four years.

Regarding student mobility, students in out-of-home placement have historically had much higher mobility rates than the state student population. Accordingly, this was the only area where these students saw no improvement in 2022-23 with fewer students staying in one school throughout the year and more students attending three or more schools. Increasing school stability for students in out-of-home placement remains a top priority for CDE. House bill 18-1306 included funding for transportation for students in out-of-home placement to remain in their school of origin. The state can refund up to 80 percent of transportation costs, with districts and counties collaborating to cover just the remaining 20 percent cost.

However, students in out-of-home placement saw improvements in student engagement with an increase in attendance (to 86.4 percent, a 0.6 percentage point improvement over the prior year) and decreases in truancy (to 7.4 percent, a 0.2 percentage point decrease from the prior year and a larger improvement than the state) and dropout (to 4.1 percent, a 1.4 percentage point decrease from the prior year). Students in out-of-home placement still lag behind the state student population in all of these indicators. However, the percentage of foster students who re-enroll after dropping out remains about 10 percentage points higher (with an average of 32.6 percent over the last four years) than the percentage of students in the state student population (24.2 percent in 2023-2024) who do the same.

Finally, of the students in out-of-home placement who graduated or completed their education in 2022-2023, 26.1 percent successfully matriculated (i.e., went into 2- or 4-year higher education institutions or post-secondary programs, enlisted in the military, or entered career and technical education programs). (Data for 2023-2024 are not yet available.) This is comparable to the previous three years (25.2 percent in 2021-2022, 30.4 percent in 2020-2021 and 24.1 percent in 2019-2020) and lower than the three-year statewide average of 52.1 percent (for those students anticipated to graduate in 2021, 2022 and 2023).

FosterEd is a scholarship program that was introduced into the 2022 legislative session that is designed to support students in out-of-home placement with their matriculation into higher education. FosterEd is a last dollar in scholarship that provides tuition and fee waivers for students in out-of-home placement. The state coordinator for foster care education collaborates on presentations with the education navigators at the Department of Higher Education to provide information to professionals about FosterEd that work with students in out-of-home placement.

In examining these data, it is important to note that the number of students in out-of-home care each year is small, leading to more variability in rates than is typically found in larger groups. Given the improvements seen in every metric examined except mobility, a priority for the coming year will be helping students in out-of-home placement maintain school stability.

Local Service Delivery to Support Educational Attainment
CDE is committed to increasing knowledge in schools about best practices for supporting the educational attainment of students in out-of-home placement. In line with this, CDE has continued to increase the amount of information available to new CWELs through onboarding, a yearly Back-to-School training, and publicly available documents surrounding the educational rights of students in out-of-home placement. In addition, CDE's FCEP created a dispute log to track trend data around the types of disputes that occur between local education agencies and county human service offices. This is intended to inform areas of needed technical assistance and further training.

Introduction

CDE's Foster Care Education Program

The Foster Care Education Program (FCEP) at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) supports students in out-of-home placement and was created by the Foster Care Success Act. "Foster care" is defined in § 19-1-103(66), C.R.S. as "the placement of a child or youth into the legal custody or legal authority of a county department of human or social services for physical placement of the child or youth in a kinship care placement; supervised independent living placement, as defined in section 19-7-302; or certified or licensed facility, or the physical placement of a juvenile committed to the custody of the state department of human services into a community placement." Importantly, due to the way the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), the agency with jurisdiction over the foster care program in Colorado and with whom CDE has a data sharing agreement, collect data, this report includes not just students in legally defined foster care, but all types of out-of-home placement which includes, but is not limited to, licensed congregate care settings such as group homes, residential child care, detention, youth correction, and psychiatric facilities, as well as family-like settings such as foster care, certified and non-certified kinship placements, and youth in independent living arrangements. Placement out of the home could be brief, such as a few days, or might occur across multiple years.

Where possible, CDE works with Colorado public school districts and other local education agencies (LEAs) to ensure that the federal and state educational rights of students in out-of-home placement are met. In some instances (e.g., in youth correctional facilities and detention centers, which youth can be placed in for part or all of a school year), CDE has no jurisdiction over students' educational experiences. Students enrolled in public school who have been identified as foster care have the right to remain in their school of origin when there is a change in school due to a change in placement. Additionally, these students have the right to immediate enrollment if moving schools is determined to be in their best interest, as well as receiving free meals and having school fees waived. CDE ensures that each school district in Colorado has a designated Child Welfare Education Liaison (CWEL). CWELs serve as the single point of contact to help facilitate school stability and seamless transfers for students in an out-of-home placement. CWELs also coordinate with county child welfare agencies in providing, arranging, and funding transportation to the school of origin or facilitating school transfers. More information on CWELs and CDE's Foster Care Education Program can be found at: https://www.cde.state.co.us/studentsupport/fostercare_index.

Key to this work is supporting the school stability of students in out-of-home foster care placement. Overall, students who experience (or are at risk of experiencing) multiple school moves during their K-12 education outside of regular grade promotion are at-risk for not reaching their educational potential. This includes, and is not limited to, youth in out-of-home placement and is linked to several negative consequences such as stress, lower test scores, four to six months of education loss with each move, loss of credits/coursework, and loss of peer groups and relationships with trusted adults (see end notes 1 to 5 for sources).

Colorado data trends show that students in out-of-home placement continue to experience lower graduation rates and completion rates as well as higher dropout rates and mobility rates compared to their peers. Given this, identification of and provision of support to students in out-of-home placements is crucial. The state agencies concerned with health and education are working together to improve internal processes surrounding students in out-home placements to ensure that they are given every opportunity to succeed.

The Foster Care Success Act

In 2022, the Colorado General Assembly passed House Bill 22-1374, the Foster Care Success Act. This law improves identification and outcomes of students in out-of-home placement through improved tracking and process improvements at the state level. Outcomes to be examined each year include identification of students in out-of-home placement enrolled in Colorado schools and student success and educational attainment.

Process improvements outlined by the law include strengthening local service delivery to support educational attainment. On an annual basis CDE will provide local education agency personnel and CWELs with professional development opportunities that will include training for CWELs and Colorado County Caseworkers (CCCs) to be renewed once every two years after the initial training.

Goals Developed for the Foster Care Education Program (FCEP) at CDE

The Foster Care Success Act required CDE to identify specific goals for FCEP to improve the educational attainment of students in out-of-home placement, as well as to report to the Colorado State Board of Education, the Colorado General Assembly, and the public on annual improvement in the educational attainment of youth in out-of-home placement. The goals fall into three categories: 1) Identification of students in out-of-home placement enrolled in Colorado schools, 2) Tracking outcomes related to student success and educational attainment, and 3) Strengthening local service delivery to support educational attainment. Goals are outlined and reported on in the following sections.

Reporting Requirements

The authorizing legislation requires reporting of the outcomes outlined above to the State Board of Education and the Colorado Legislature by February 1st of each year. This report is intended to meet the statutory reporting requirements outlined in House Bill 22-1374 through the analysis of state and student-level information annually submitted to CDE and the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) by schools, districts and county offices. *See Appendix: Definitions for a list of commonly used terms throughout the report.*

Identification of Students in Out-of-Home Placement Enrolled in Colorado Schools

In addition to tracking the number of students in out-of-home placement identified each year (reported on in the next section), CDE has set forth goals concerning process improvements for assuring mandated training of CWELs and CCCs to assist in identifying and ensuring the educational rights and legal requirements of children and youth in out-of-home placement, as specified in the federal "Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008", P.L. 110-351, as amended; the federal "Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965" (ESEA), 20 U.S.C. sec. 6301 et seq., as amended; and Colorado House Bill 22-1374.

Mandated Training of Colorado Child Welfare Liaisons (CWELs) and Colorado County Caseworkers (CCCs)

In line with the goal of training CWELs and CCCs in the identification and educational rights of children in foster care, the Educational Rights for Students in Foster Care training was created. To date there are 8 modules that were created by CDE in collaboration with CDHS and are hosted on the Welfare Training Center page of the Colorado Department of Human Services. These modules address topics such as the educational rights of students in out-of-home placement, the roles and responsibilities of CWELs and CCCs, and information about best interest determinations. CDE worked with the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect at the University of Colorado Medical Campus, who partner with CDHS on welfare training, to create an account creation process for CWELs and to ensure that there was a formal way to run reports regarding module completion hosted on the learning management system platform. Per House Bill 22-1374, participation in these trainings is mandatory for new CWELs and CCCs and must be taken once every two years after the initial training. In line with this, the foster care education program state coordinator for CDE closely tracks the completion of these legislatively mandated modules and sends regular reminders (through email and via phone calls) to new CWELs and those CWELs who have not yet completed the training. To date (as of January 16, 2025), 116 CWELs (out of 184 CWELs in school districts across the state) have completed all eight

Educational Rights for Students in Foster Care modules and an additional 12 have partially completed the training. CDE is considering ways to ensure all CWELs complete the mandatory modules.

Additional Resources for Colorado Child Welfare Liaisons (CWELs) and Colorado County Caseworkers (CCCs)

In addition to a statewide back-to-school training (discussed below) and the legislatively mandated training modules, CDE hosts a voluntary statewide spring training for all CWELs containing information on new legislation, the educational rights of students in out-of-home placement, and other relevant topics (e.g., working with highly mobile students). All CWELs also receive a recorded copy of each meeting, the slide decks used in presentations, and any additional materials that were disseminated during the meeting. Moreover, CWELs are invited to all trainings in which CDE's FCEP partners with other programs and offices in the department. Some of the trainings included the following topics: Colorado Youth for a Change best practices when working with highly mobile students, early childhood education resources when working with highly mobile youth, and fostering educational success.

Increased Identification of Students in Out-of-Home-Placement

In service of a more complete identification of students in out-of-home placement, CDE created an updated Data Service Agreement (DSA) between CDE and CDHS designed to make monthly data sharing between the agencies as accurate as possible. Data sharing has continued to improve in the past year through a series of regular meetings between the agencies to address discrepancies in identification. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, CDE and CDHS met multiple times to discuss the data sharing process, a small number of discrepancies between datasets, and ways to ensure a seamless and accurate transfer of data.

Increased Ability and Timeliness in Local Level CWEL Access to Data Pipeline Data

Once students in out-of-home placement have been identified by CDE, it is critical that CWELs can access and act on that data. To facilitate this process, CDE's Foster Care Education Program (FCEP) staff are working with the CDE data services team to provide in-depth trainings to CWELs and local education agency data managers so that they can identify students in out-of-home placement in their districts as identified through the data sharing agreement with CDHS.

To align with this goal, FCEP staff, in partnership with the CDE's Data Services Team, offered a back-to-school training on Thursday, September 19, 2024 for CWELs. During the training CDE's Data Services Team members went over the process for collaborating with local education agency data managers on accessing foster care data. This training is offered annually.

Although a tracking system was not yet in place for the 2023-2024 school year, FCEP staff continued making progress in this area. For the 2024-2025 school year (the current year, which will be reported in next year's report) CWELs are registering for webinars and including their districts. In addition, CDE and CDHS created a pre/post-test for the mandatory Educational Rights for students in Foster Care training modules, allowing the state coordinator to track the level of knowledge coming into the training and ensure that each CWEL is digesting and able to report back the information obtained.

Further, CDE's FCEP staff and Data Services Team created a [short byte video](#) about how to access foster care data. Although limitations with the platform preclude the foster care coordinator from tracking participants accessing the video, FCEP staff have plans to create office hours to support individuals with their questions around accessing and using data to identify students in foster care.

Finally, FCEP staff is continuously working with Data Services staff to establish timely access for existing and newly hired CWELs to access data via the data respondent in their district, and to train local education data managers and CWELs in the proper management and use of such data. To this end, new CWELs are sent the

short byte video just described as well as the presentation from the fall Back-to-School training about accessing data. In the email, CWELs are also encouraged to reach out to CDE's foster care coordinator with questions. In turn, the foster care coordinator works closely with both CDE's data services and district data respondents to ensure that queries are answered in a timely and thorough manner.

Tracking Outcomes Related to Student Success and Educational Attainment (2019-2020 through 2023-2024)

Per the Foster Care Success Act, at a minimum, this report must contain the following data for each of the preceding three school years for students in out-of-home placement and enrolled in a public school:

- The number of students in out-of-home placement and number of students in the general state student population;
- The total number and proportion of students in out-of-home placement compared to the general student population who were enrolled in one school, two schools, three schools, or more than three schools during each school year;
- The rates of attendance and habitual truancy, as defined in section 22-33-102 (3.5), C.R.S., for students in out-of-home placement compared to the general student population;
- The dropout rates of students in out-of-home placement compared to the general state student population by individual grade level for grades seven through 12;
- The number and percentage of students in out-of-home placement who re-enrolled in school after dropping out compared to the general state student population;
- The number and percentage of students in out-of-home placement who graduated or completed high school in four years compared to the general state student population; and
- The number and percentage of students in out-of-home placement who took more than four years to graduate or complete high school compared to the general state student population.
- The number and percentage of core content area classes that students in grades six through 12 in out-of-home placement complete during each school year;
- The percentage of students in out-of-home placement who advance to the next grade level after each school year;
- The percentage of students in out-of-home placement who graduated or completed high school in more than four years;
- The percentage of students in out-of-home placement who engage in postsecondary and workforce readiness pathways as described in section 22-11-204(4). C.R.S. 22-7-1009 allows local school boards, BOCES and CSI to choose to add an endorsement to a high school diploma to indicate that a student has achieved postsecondary and workforce readiness or that the student has demonstrated exemplary postsecondary and workforce readiness. To date, no diploma granting body in Colorado has opted to include such an endorsement on its diplomas and so CDE does not have any data to report in this category. Given this, we instead report on the number of graduating students in out-of-home placement who entered postsecondary education.

Each of these points are addressed below in the context of the baseline data reported in CDE's 2021-2022 Foster Care Success Act Annual Evaluation Report.

Students Identified

Over the course of the past five years, an average of 1,714 students in out-of-home placement have been identified each year as eligible for educational services in Colorado at the time enrollment is counted in October. This number increases throughout the year as more students are identified. The rate of identification has varied from year to year, with 2023-2024 having the most students in out-of-home placement identified in the past five years. *See **Table 1** for the numbers of students in the state student population and the number identified as being in out-of-home placement.*

AN AVERAGE OF
1,714
STUDENTS
IDENTIFIED EACH

Table 1: State Student Population and Students Identified as Being in Out-of-Home Placement as of October Count

	State Student Population	Identified as Out-of-Home Placement
2019-2020	913,223	2,057
2020-2021	883,199	944
2021-2022	886,517	709
2022-2023	883,264	2,384
2023-2024	881,464	2,478

Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. Student counts here will be lower than counts in later tables due to the timing of this collection.

Course Completion

In the 2023-2024 school year, 6th – 12th grade foster students collectively took a total of 12,306 Language, Math, Science, and Social Studies courses (or 5.0 core courses per foster student on average). Of these courses, students passed or completed 8,492 courses (or 3.4 core courses per foster student on average), a 69.0% completion rate. This is 3.6 percentage points higher than last year's completion rate of 65.4 percent and 3.4 percentage points higher than the 2021-22 school year (65.6 percent), which was the first year CDE began tracking this data.

Successful Grade-Level Transitions

The authorizing legislation requires the annual reporting of increases in successful grade-level transitions for students in out-of-home placement and the state student population. Data shows that, for the first time in four years, students in out-of-home placement successfully advanced to the next grade-level at a rate 1.2 percentage points higher than the state rate. The four-year average of students in out-of-home placement (97.2 percent) is still 1.7 percentage points lower than the four-year average for the state (98.9 percent). *See **Chart 1** for the percentage of students in Colorado and in out-of-home placement who advanced to the next grade level in the past four years.*

Chart 1: Percentage of Students in Colorado and in Out-of-Home Placement Advancing to the Next Grade Level
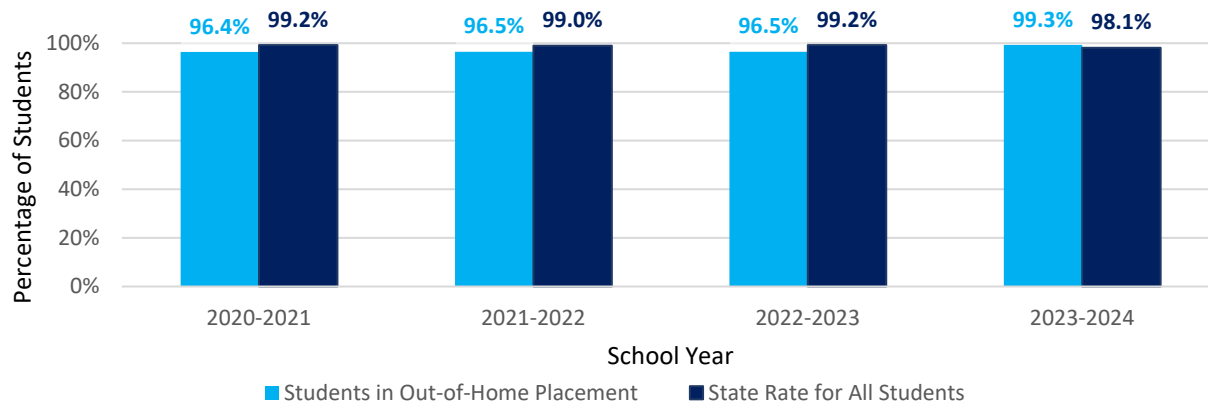
Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

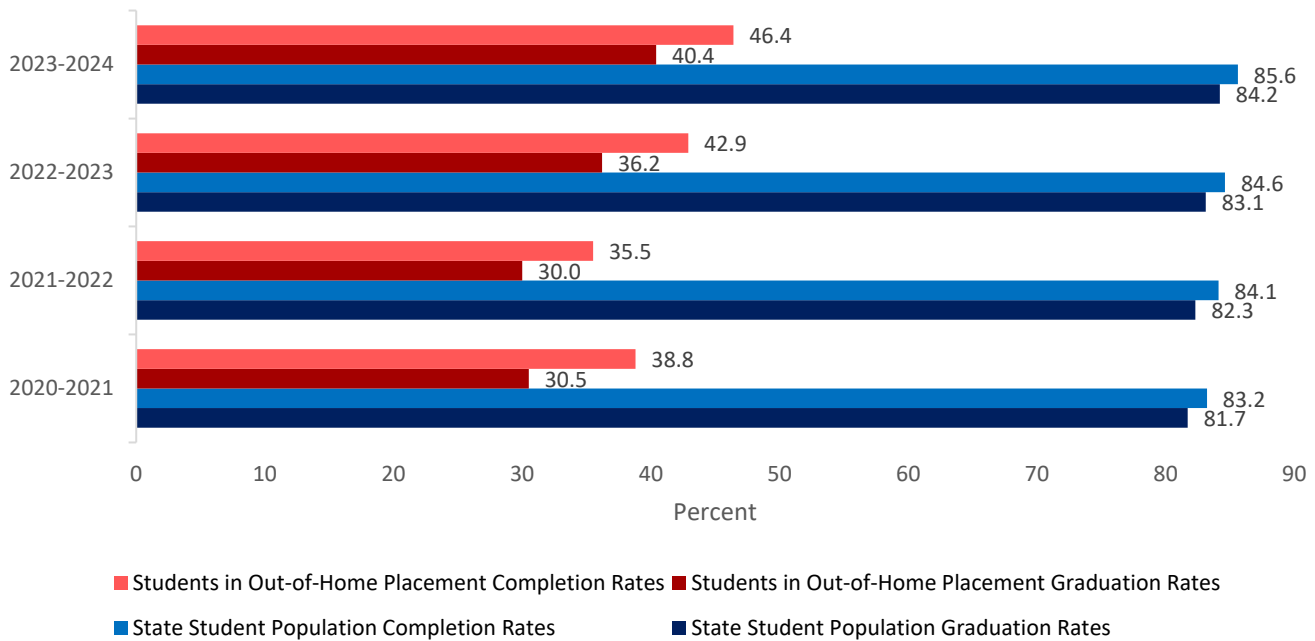## Four-Year and Extended Graduation and Completion Rates

Graduation and completion rates for students in out-of-home placement have historically been much lower than these rates for the state student population in Colorado. Four-year graduation rates for students in out-of-home placement are rising, reaching 40.4 percent in the 2023-2024 school year, a 4.2 percentage point increase over the previous year and a 10.4 percentage point increase over the last two years. Four-year completion rates also rose in comparison to previous years, and, in line with historical data, show that many students in out-of-home placement take advantage of alternatives to graduation to complete their education. *See **Table 2** for the number of graduates and completers in the state student population and students in out-of-home placement and **Chart 2** for the four-year graduation and completion rates of the state student population and students in out-of-home placement over the past four years.*

Table 2: Four-Year Graduates and Completers Among the State Student Population and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

	State Student Population Graduates	State Student Population Completers	Students in OoHP Graduates	Students in OoHP Completers
2019-2020	55,220	56,251	273	352
2020-2021	55,842	56,862	224	285
2021-2022	56,284	57,456	180	213
2022-2023	56,812	57,840	173	205
2023-2024	58,318	59,336	195	224

Note: OoHP = Out-of-home-placement. Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Chart 2: Graduation Rates for Students in Colorado and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

- Students in Out-of-Home Placement Completion Rates
- Students in Out-of-Home Placement Graduation Rates
- State Student Population Completion Rates
- State Student Population Graduation Rates

Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Moreover, when given more time, many students in out-of-home placement continue their educations, graduating or completing in 5, 6, or 7 years. These extended graduation rates show that a higher percentage of students in out-of-home placement utilize the extra years needed to complete their educations than the percentage of the state's overall student population utilizing the extra time. *See Table 3 for extended-year graduation and completion rates for the state student population and students in out-of-home placement. See Chart 3 and Table 4 for the number and percentage of students in the state student population and students in out-of-home placement graduating or completing their educations in more than four years.*

Table 3: Extended-Year Graduation and Completion Rates for the State Student Population and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

| Class	4-Year	Rate	5-Year	Rate	6-Year	Rate	7-Year	Rate
of	Graduation	Completion	Graduation	Completion	Graduation	Completion	Graduation	Completion
			All	Students				
2020	81.9	83.4	86.0	88.0	87.1	89.3	87.6	89.9
2021	81.7	83.2	85.7	87.7	86.7	88.9	**87.1**	**89.6**
2022	82.3	84.1	86.1	88.3	**87.1**	**89.5**	*Available*	*2024-25*
2023	83.1	84.6	**86.8**	**88.8**	*Available*	*2024-25*	*Available*	*2025-26*
2024	**84.2**	**85.6**	*Available*	*2024-25*	*Available*	*2025-26*	*Available*	*2026-27*
			OoHP	Students				
2020	30.5	39.4	36.7	46.7	39.4	49.9	40.8	51.6
2021	30.5	38.8	36.5	45.6	39.1	50.0	**39.4**	**50.7**
2022	30.0	35.5	35.9	43.0	**38.9**	**46.8**	*Available*	*2024-25*
2023	36.2	42.9	**42.8**	**50.6**	*Available*	*2024-25*	*Available*	*2025-26*
2024	**40.4**	**46.4**	*Available*	*2024-25*	*Available*	*2025-26*	*Available*	*2026-27*

Note: OoHP = Out-of-Home Placement. Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. Bolded values are from the 2023-2024 school year.

Table 4: Graduates and Completers Taking More Than Four Years Among the State Student Population and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

Anticipated Year of Graduation	Graduates / Completers Included in Count	State Student Population Graduates	State Student Population Completers	Students in OoHP Graduates	Students in OoHP Completers
2020-2021	5-, 6-, and 7-year	3,469	4,106	65	87
2021-2022	5- and 6-year	3,069	3,517	57	72
2022-2023	5-year	2,446	2,737	35	41

Note: OoHP = Out-of-Home Placement. Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. Counts include all students from each AYG cohort who took more than four years to graduate. For those students expected to graduate in 2022-2023, this only includes students who graduated in five years. For students in the 2021-2022 cohort, this also includes students who graduated in 6 years and for students in the 2020-2021 cohort, this also includes students who graduated in 7 years.

Chart 3: Percentage of Students in the General Population and in Out-of-Home Placement Graduating and Completing in More Than Four Years
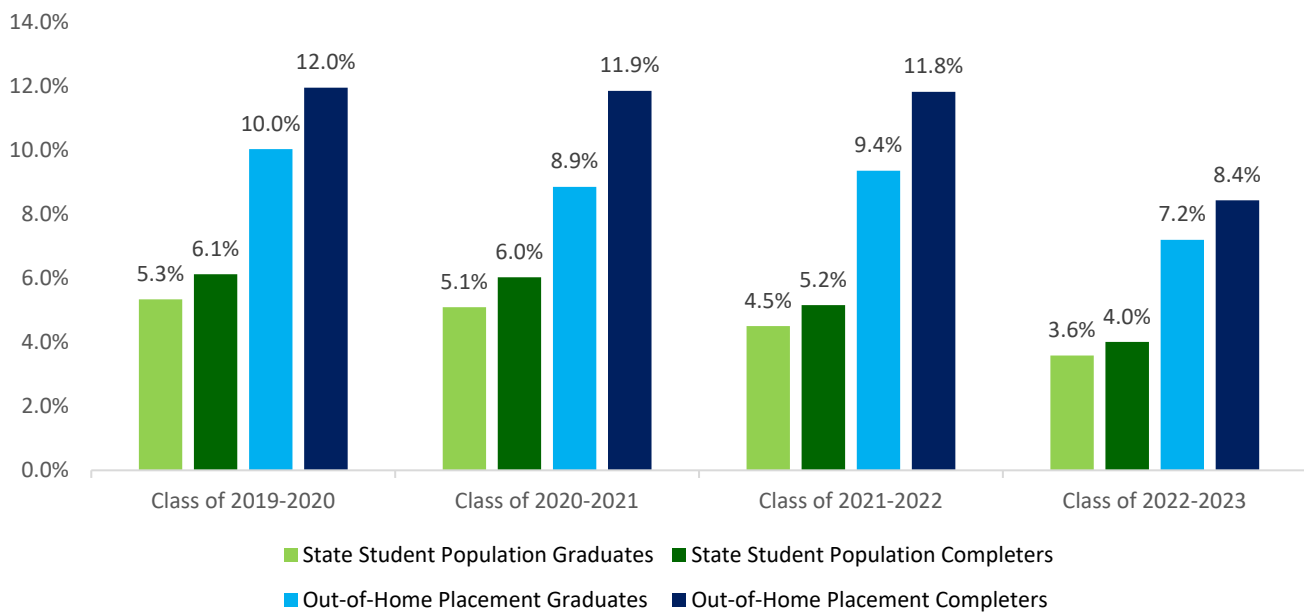
Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. Graduates and completers from the classes of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 include students who graduated or completed in 5, 6, and 7 years. Graduates and completers from the class of 2021-2022 include students who graduated or completed in 5 and 6 years. Graduates and completers from the class of 2022-2023

include students who graduated or completed in 5 years. The classes of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 do not yet have 6- and 7- years rates available as they are not yet 6- or 7-years out from their expected graduation years.

Student Mobility

Students in out-of-home placement are more likely to change schools throughout the year, putting them at increased risk for disengagement. Across the last four years in Colorado, students in out-of-home placement have had much higher mobility rates than the state student population. The number of students in out-of-home placement staying in one school decreased in the 2023-2024 (unlike the state student population), and the number of these students attending 3 or more schools increased, much like in the state student population. *Chart 4* shows the percentages (and *Table 5* shows the numbers) of students attending single and multiple schools in Colorado and in out-of-home placement over the last four years.

Chart 4: Percentages of Students Attending Single and Multiple Schools: State Rates and Rates for Students in Out-of-Home-Placement
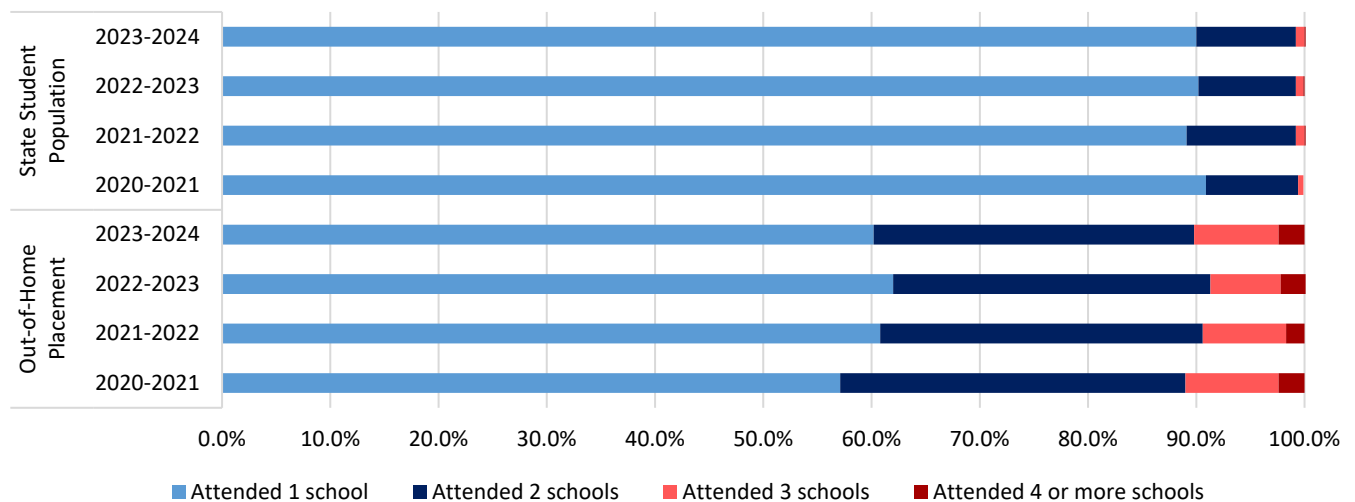
Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Table 5: Number of Students in the State Student Population and in Out-of-Home Placement Attending Single and Multiple Schools

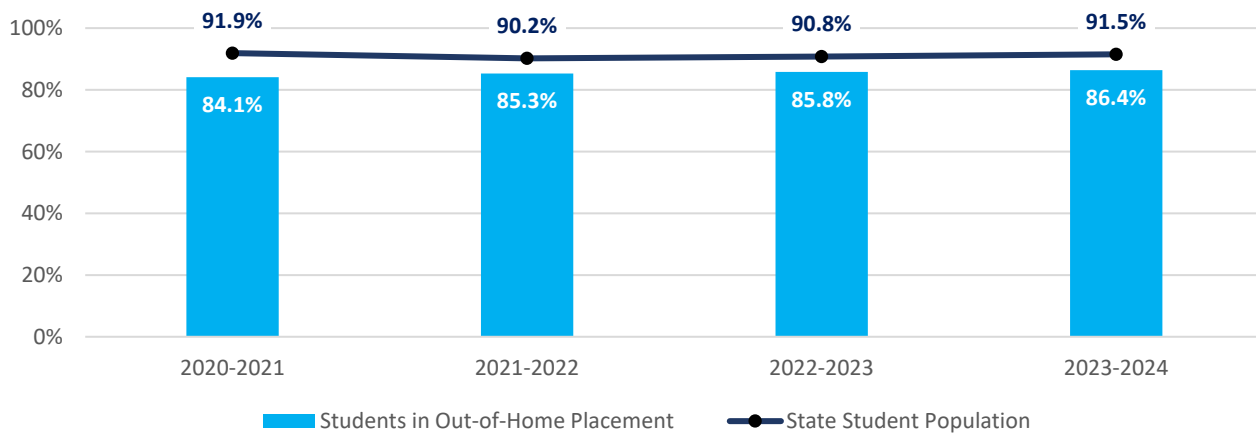| School Year	Total students	Attend 1 school	Attend 2 schools	Attend 3 schools	Attend 4+ schools
All	**Students**				
2023-2024	939,299	845,247	85,957	7,338	757
2022-2023	935,703	844,025	84,301	6,746	631
2021-2022	944,160	840,959	95,109	7,463	629
2020-2021	947,205	861,402	80,448	4,980	375
OoHP	**Students**				
2023-2024	3,723	2,240	1,101	291	91
2022-2023	3,807	2,359	1,115	247	86
2021-2022	3,738	2,273	1,114	289	62
2020-2021	2,965	1,694	947	254	70

Note: OoHP = Out-of-Home Placement. Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. Student counts here are higher than student counts in Table 1 because it

includes all students enrolled in a Colorado school in 2023-2024, including those who left before October 1 (the date of the enrollment count) or entered a Colorado school at any point in the year.
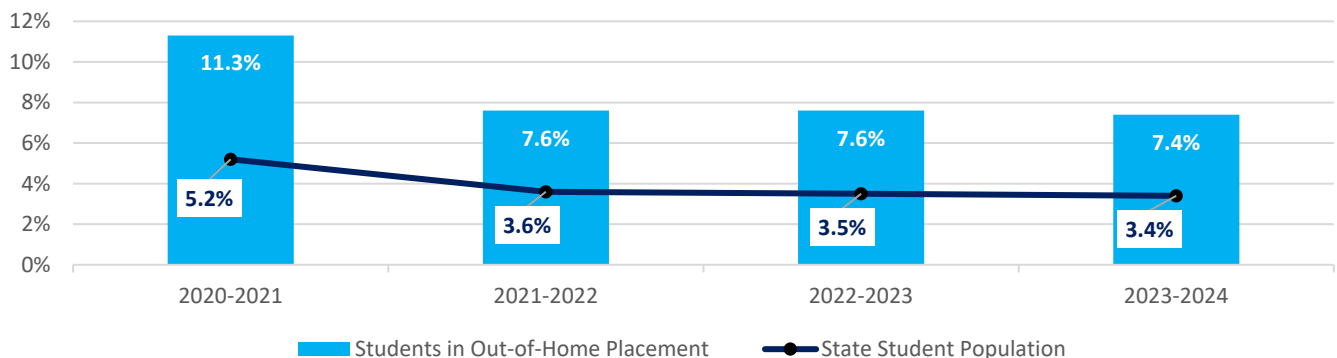
Attendance

In Colorado, students in out-of-home placement have lower attendance and higher truancy rates than their peers in the state student population. In the 2023-2024 school year, both the state and students in out-of-home placement improved in both metrics. In the case of truancy, students in out-of-home placement improved at a slightly higher rate than the state. ***Charts 5 and 6*** *show the attendance and truancy rates for students in the state student population and students in out-of-home placement over the last four years.*

Chart 5: Average Attendance Rates for Students in Colorado and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
State Student Population	91.9%	90.2%	90.8%	91.5%
Students in Out-of-Home Placement	84.1%	85.3%	85.8%	86.4%

Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. The attendance rate of a student is the proportion of possible school days that they attended. For the state, this rate is the number of school days attended over all possible school days for all students.

Chart 6: Truancy Rates for Students in Colorado and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

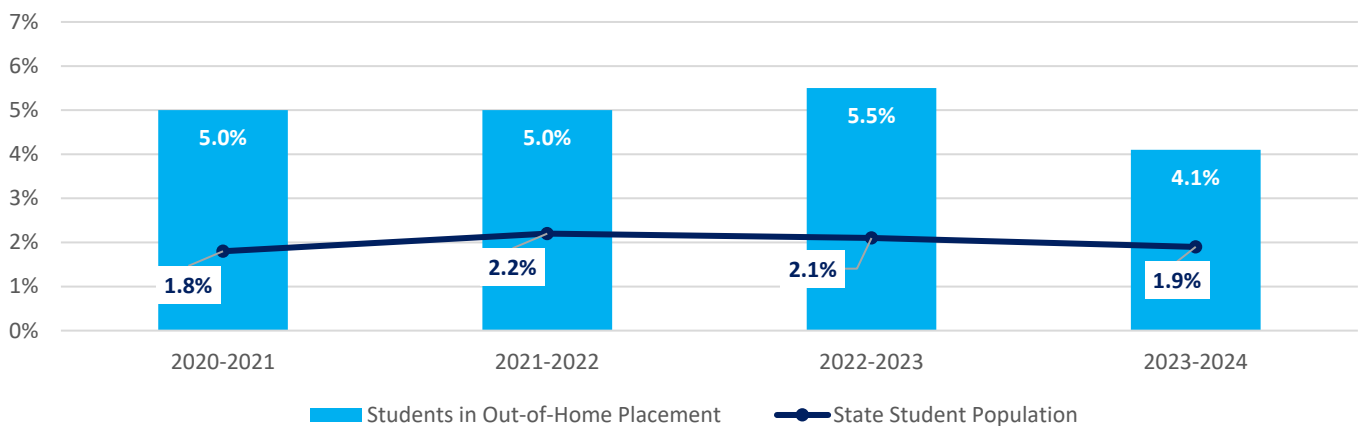|	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Students in Out-of-Home Placement	11.3%	7.6%	7.6%	7.4%
State Student Population	5.2%	3.6%	3.5%	3.4%

Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting. The truancy rate of a student is the proportion of possible school days for which they had an unexcused absence. For the state, this rate is the number of unexcused absences over all possible school days for all students.
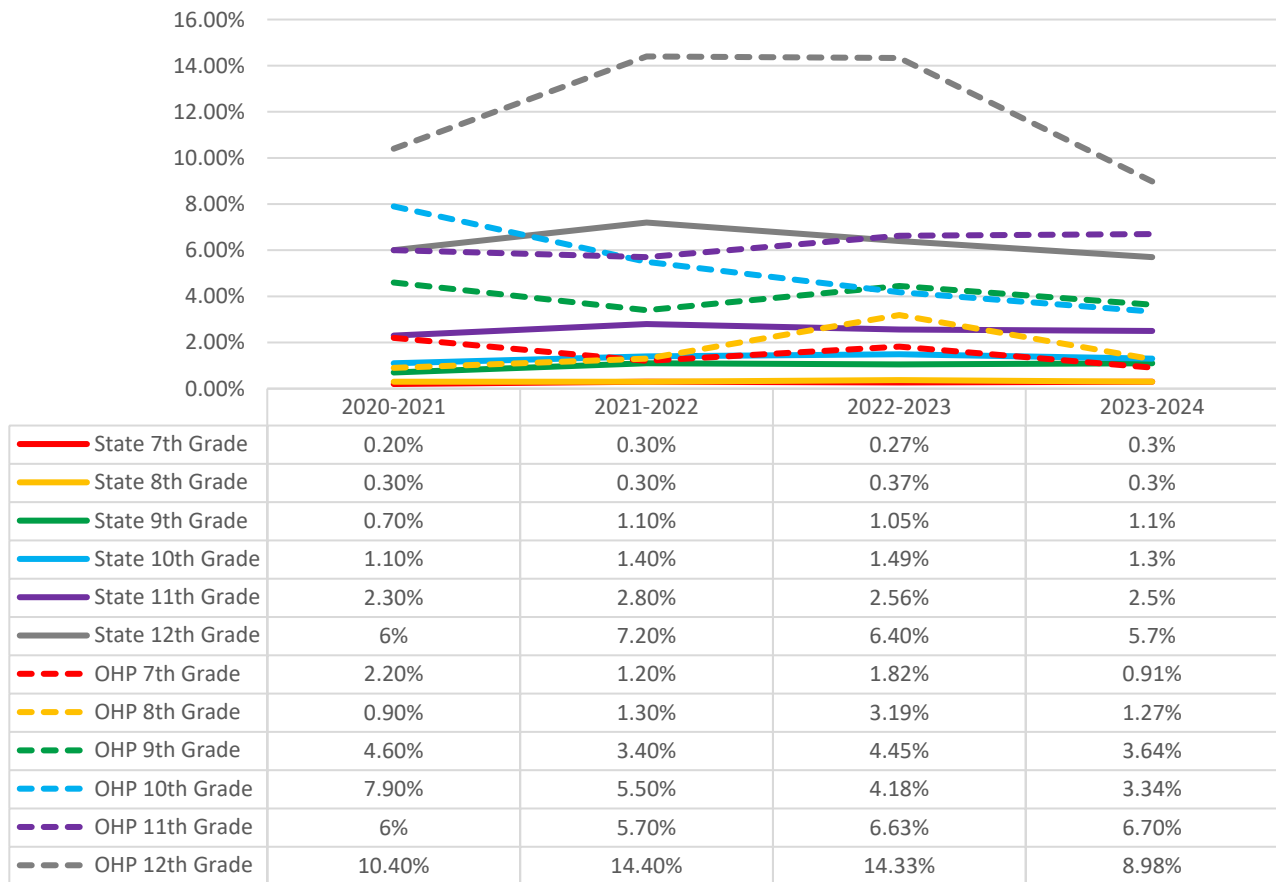
Dropout Prevention

In Colorado, students in out-of-home placement show higher dropout rates than their peers in the state's overall student population. In the 2023-2024 school year, students in out-of-home placement saw a marked improvement in their dropout rate, lowering it by 1.4 percentage points, whereas the state rate only decreased by 0.2 percentage points. *Chart 7* *shows the dropout rates for students in the state student population and students in out-of-home placement over the last four years.* *Chart 8* *shows the dropout rates for students in the state student population and in out-of-home placement broken down by grade over the last four years. Please note that these rates are computed over small numbers of students and as such are expected to naturally vary by several percentage points year-to-year. The total numbers of 7 – 12th grade students in out-of-home placement were 2,305 in 2023-2024, 2,321 students in 2022-23, and 2,280 in 2021-22.*

Chart 7: Dropout Rates for Students in Colorado and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Chart 8: Dropout Rates by Grade for the General Student Population and Students in Out-of-Home Placement

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
State 7th Grade	0.20%	0.30%	0.27%	0.3%
State 8th Grade	0.30%	0.30%	0.37%	0.3%
State 9th Grade	0.70%	1.10%	1.05%	1.1%
State 10th Grade	1.10%	1.40%	1.49%	1.3%
State 11th Grade	2.30%	2.80%	2.56%	2.5%
State 12th Grade	6%	7.20%	6.40%	5.7%
OHP 7th Grade	2.20%	1.20%	1.82%	0.91%
OHP 8th Grade	0.90%	1.30%	3.19%	1.27%
OHP 9th Grade	4.60%	3.40%	4.45%	3.64%
OHP 10th Grade	7.90%	5.50%	4.18%	3.34%
OHP 11th Grade	6%	5.70%	6.63%	6.70%
OHP 12th Grade	10.40%	14.40%	14.33%	8.98%

Note: State = state student population; OHP = students in out-of-home placement. Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Engagement and Re-enrollment

Two essential keys to ensuring positive educational outcomes for all of Colorado's students in out-of-home placement are engaging students in the educational process and re-enrolling students who have left.

One way to engage students and keep them on track for graduation is through offering postsecondary workforce readiness pathways (e.g., personalized pathways through high school and on to college or a career, including exploration of non-traditional ways students can enter into postsecondary education, such as certificate programs, apprenticeships and other work-based learning experiences, 2- and 4-year degrees, military, and career training). Please note that there is no statewide data collection of student participation in postsecondary workforce readiness pathways. C.R.S. 22-7-1009 allows local school boards, BOCES and CSI to choose to add an endorsement to a high school diploma to indicate that a student has achieved postsecondary and workforce readiness or that the student has demonstrated exemplary postsecondary and workforce readiness. To date, no diploma granting body in Colorado has reported to CDE that it is offering such an endorsement and CDE does not systemically collect this data currently.

CDE does track the number of students who go on to postsecondary education. Historically, the number of students in out-of-home placement going on to postsecondary is low. Of those students in out-of-home placement who graduated or completed their education in 2022-2023, 26.1 percent successfully matriculated (i.e., went into 2- or 4-year higher education institutions or postsecondary programs, enlisted in the military, or entered career and technical education programs). This is comparable to the previous three years (25.2 percent in 2021-2022, 30.4 percent in 2020-2021 and 24.1 percent in 2019-2020) and lower than the three-year statewide average of 52.1 percent (for those students anticipated to graduate in 2021, 2022 and 2023). The number and percentage of students in out-of-home placement going on to postsecondary is not currently available for the 2023-2024 school year. The department will continue to provide resources for districts to encourage students in out-of-home placement to engage in postsecondary workforce readiness pathways to promote the attainment of higher education among this group of students, including by promoting the Colorado Department of Higher Education FosterEd program, which helps pay for attendance at a public institution of higher education in Colorado for students in foster care.

Part of re-engaging students in school is re-enrolling them after they're dropped out. Each year, just under a quarter of all the students statewide who dropped out the previous year re-enroll, with an average over the last four years of 22.6 percent of students statewide who have dropped out of school in one year re-enrolling in the following year. The percentage of foster students who re-enroll after dropping out is about 10 percentage points higher (with an average of 32.6 percent over the last four years). In the 2023-2024 school year, the statewide percentage of students who re-engaged after dropping out increased by 1.5 percentage points, but the percentage of students in out-of-home placement who did the same decreased by 6.4 percent. *See **Table 6** for the number (and **Chart 9** for the percentage) of students in the state student population and students in out-of-home placement who re-engaged after dropping out over the last four years.*

Table 6: Students Who Re-Enrolled After Dropping Out

	State Student Population	Students in Out-of-Home Placement
2020-2021	1,824	31
2021-2022	1,826	30
2022-2023	2,385	38
2023-2024	2,336	37

Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Chart 9: Percentage of Students in the General Population
and Students in Out-of-Home Placement who Re-engaged
After Dropping Out the Year Prior
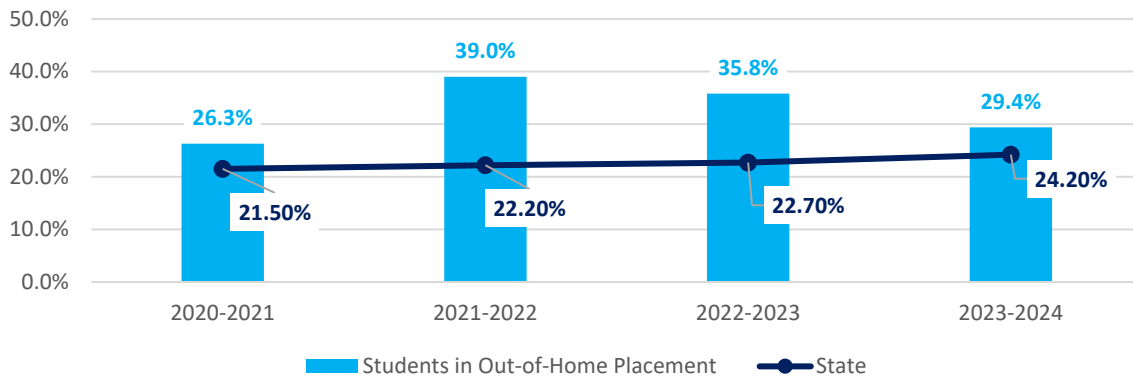
Note: Data obtained in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and from school and district reporting.

Please note that the number of students in out-of-home-placement who drop out is relatively small, making large jumps in percentages from year to year more common.

Local Service Delivery to Support Educational Attainment

CDE is committed to increasing knowledge in schools about best practices for supporting the educational attainment of students in out-of-home placement.

Orientation Materials and Training
CDE's Foster Care Education Program State Coordinator has continued to use and refine the process for onboarding new CWELs which includes:
- a Change of CWEL request form;
- an updated and comprehensive new CWEL information at a glance guidance document;
- a new CWEL guidance document;
- the most recent Back-to-School memo; and
- CWEL Learning Management Platform account creation instructions

The CDE's FCEP State Coordinator sends a welcome email to all new CWELs that includes the above-mentioned documents and provides an opportunity to connect about any questions.

Annual Back-to-School Training for All CWELs
In addition to the information reported above, the annual back-to-school training for all CWELs includes in-depth information on the following:
- Updates from CDE about the state of Foster Care in Colorado; and
- An overview of educational rights for students in out-of-home placement.

Inter-Department Office Hours
CDE is partnering with CDHS to host open office hours to help local education agencies and counties develop, understand, and implement educational rights for students in out-of-home placement. Office hours will begin in

the coming spring and will be reported on in full in the next legislative report. In addition to being an open forum for questions around supporting the educational attainment of students in out-of-home placement, topics will include:

- Promising Practices for Working with Counties
- Every Student Succeeds Act Transportation
- Using the Cognos Report for Foster Student Identification in your District

CDE will track the implementation of these office hours by creating and posting agendas online, and by tracking which local education agencies are represented at each session.

Additional Informational Materials

CDE also aims to improve the coordination of services between local educational agencies and county agencies, including the types of services provided to students in out-of-home placement. CDE will provide technical assistance to local education agencies regarding this topic via webinars and informational manuals published on the CDE website. These materials are still in development pending guidance from the United States Department of Education and will be reported on in full next year.

In addition, CDE is working with the Foster Care Education Coordinator to continuously improve FCEP. Per House Bill 18-1306 the specific duties of the Department of Education Foster Care Education Coordinator are as follows:

- Provide training and professional development to address needs associated with implementation of state and federal mandates relating to foster care education;
- Collect and disseminate child welfare education information on CDE's website;
- Coordinate with CDHS and other agencies as necessary;
- Provide technical assistance to education providers for removing barriers to graduation;
- Serve as the point of contact to review compliance of local education providers; and
- Acting as a liaison in coordination with CDHS to review complaints related to disputes over transportation agreements between local education agencies, the state charter school institute and county departments.

Dispute Resolution

CDE's FCEP created a dispute log to track trend data around the types of disputes that occur between local education agencies and county human service offices. This is intended to inform areas of needed technical assistance and further training. To date the State Coordinator for Foster Care Education has provided support for thirteen disputes that ranged from the following areas: who is the Administrative Unit, who is responsible for excess education costs when a student in placed in a facility out of state, who is the district of residency, when is it appropriate for a CWEL or designee to attend a best interest determination meeting, who has access to educational records when a student has a disability and an active individual education plan, and questions around court orders for foster care youth who are justice involved.

CONCLUSION

Colorado data trends show that, despite improvement in nearly all areas, students in out-of-home placement continue to experience lower attendance rates, lower graduation rates and completion rates, and higher dropout rates than their peers. Further, students in out-of-home placement are more likely to change schools throughout the year, putting them at increased risk for disengagement. Given this, identification of and provision of support to students in out-of-home placement is crucial. More can be done to ensure awareness of and access to state resources for students in out-of-home placements. CDE and CDHS are working to improve

internal processes and meet improvement goals regarding these students to ensure that they are given every opportunity to succeed.

Endnotes

[1] Clemens, E. V., Klopfenstein, K., Lalonde, T. L., & Tis, M. (2018). The effects of placement and school stability on academic growth trajectories of students in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *87*, 86-94.

[2] Clemens, E. V., Lalonde, T. L., & Sheesley, A. P. (2016). The relationship between school mobility and students in foster care earning a high school credential. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *68*, 193-201.

[3] Free, J. L., Križ, K., & Konecnik, J. (2014). Harvesting hardships: Educators' views on the challenges of migrant students and their consequences on education. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *47*, 187-197.

[4] Gasper, J., DeLuca, S., & Estacion, A. (2012). Switching schools: Revisiting the relationship between school mobility and high school dropout. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(3), 487-519. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4279956/pdf/nihms622720.pdf

[5] Grim, J. T. (2019). *High School Student Mobility, Achievement, and Graduation*. Retrieved from https://media.proquest.com/media/pq/classic/doc/4327436933/fmt/ai/rep/NPDF?_s=y%2BkmV0cMCoHMstyQviUBjjRyaHE%3D

Appendix

Helpful Definitions

Highly mobile students: Means children or youth who at any time during the academic year were homeless, as defined in section 22-1-102.5, C.R.S; were in non-certified kinship care, as defined in section 19-1-103, C.R.S; were students in out-of-home placement, as defined in section 22-32-138(1)(h), C.R.S.; or were migrant children, as defined in section 22-23-103, C.R.S.

Kinship: According to section 19-1-103, C.R.S., there are two types of kinship placement. The definitions are as follows:
- (71.3) "Kin", for purposes of a "kinship foster care home" or for purposes of "noncertified kinship care", may be a relative of the child, a person ascribed by the family as having a family-like relationship with the child, or a person that has a prior significant relationship with the child. These relationships take into account cultural values and continuity of significant relationships with the child.
- (78.7) "Noncertified kinship care" means a child is being cared for by a relative or kin who has a significant relationship with the child in circumstances when there is a safety concern by a county department and where the relative or kin has not met the foster care certification requirements for a kinship foster care home or has chosen not to pursue that certification process.

Student in out-of-home placement: Means a student who at any time during an academic term is in foster care and receiving educational services through a state-licensed day treatment facility, who is otherwise in placement out of the home as that term is defined in section 19-1-103 (85), C.R.S., or who is in placement outside of the home as a result of an adjudication pursuant to article 2 of title 19, C.R.S. It includes a child or youth who transfers enrollment as a result of being returned to his or her home at the conclusion of out-of-home placement.