

Research Brief

Long-term education outcomes of Washington students who have experienced foster care, homelessness, or institutional education, 2024

The legislature recognized that students in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or receiving institutional education can experience significant disruptions in their education and need a more collaborative effort within our education system and across other systems to ensure they have the support they need to be successful. Previous reports have described how Washington's education system continues to produce inequitable outcomes for students who have experienced [foster care](#) or [homelessness](#). This brief examines those inequities over time as well as for students who have experienced institutional education.

Research question

What are the long-term education outcomes of Washington students who have experienced foster care, homelessness, or institutional education in comparison with their peers across cohort years?

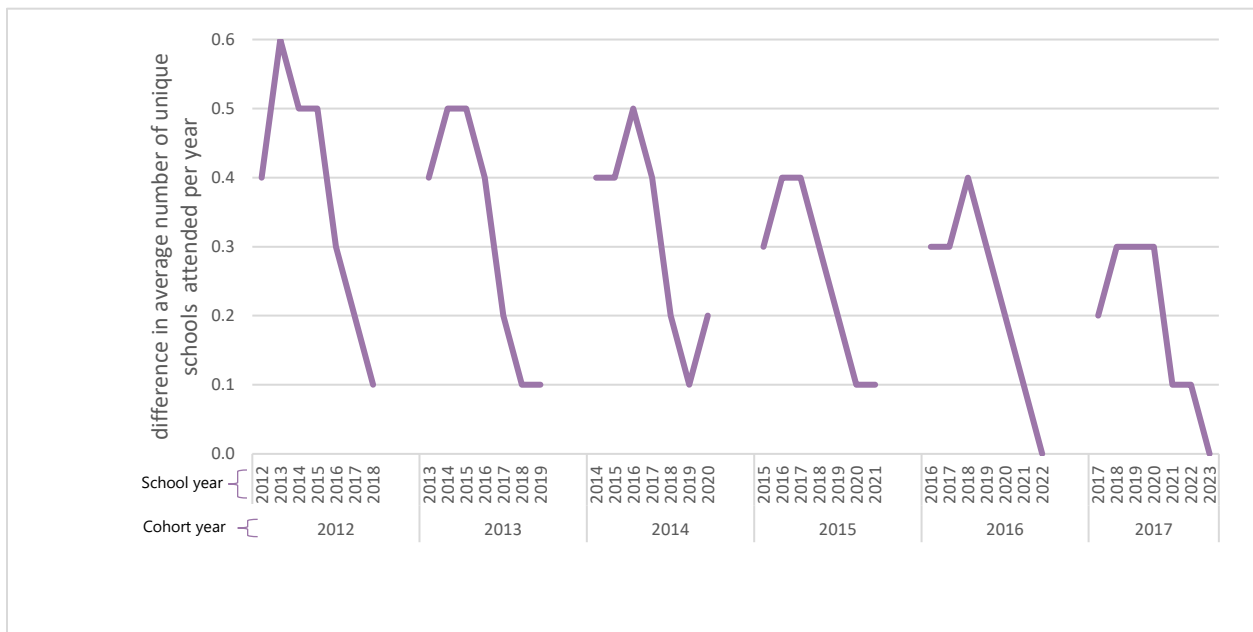
Key findings

1. Students who experienced **foster care**: Gaps in mobility (see definition below) and on-time high school graduation have decreased over time. Completion rates of associate's degrees are similar to their peers, but challenges remain in accessing bachelor's degrees.
2. Students who experienced **homelessness**: Gaps in on-time high school graduation have decreased over time. Associate's degree attainment and engagement in education or workforce are similar to those of their peers, but challenges remain in accessing bachelor's degrees.
3. Students who have experienced **institutional education**: Gaps remain steady across cohort years on most measures. The method for identifying students who experience institutional education is still under development, so the students being included in this group and associated outcomes may change in the future as the definition is refined.

K-12 School Mobility

Student mobility refers to the number of unique schools attended in a school year. Greater mobility can be disruptive to students' academic progress. Over time, average mobility for 8th graders who experienced **foster care** peaks early in their high school years around the time of when many would be in the 9th and 10th grades, while mobility for their peers holds steady across school years. Differences with their peers become slightly smaller in more recent cohort years. Figure 1 shows the difference in the average number of unique schools attended per school year by cohort between 8th graders who experience foster care and those who do not. For 8th graders who have experienced **homelessness**, gaps are small and steady across cohorts, with year-to-year differences within cohorts ranging from 0.1 to 0.3 additional schools. For 8th graders who experienced **institutional education**, gaps remain wide across cohorts, with year-to-year differences within cohorts ranging from 0.1 to 0.9 additional schools. This wider gap is expected, as enrollment at an institutional education facility increases a student's number of school enrollments.

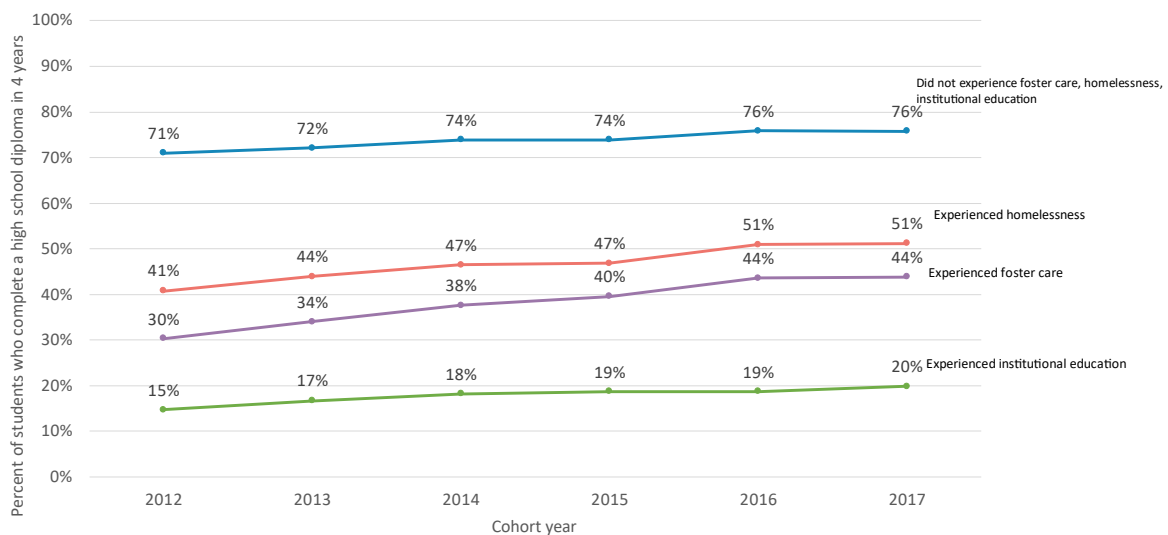
Figure 1. Mobility gaps decrease in more recent cohort years for 8th graders who experienced foster care.



High School Graduation

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who complete a high school diploma on time. Gaps are wide and persistent across cohorts for students who experienced institutional education, who have high school graduation rates that are 56 to 58 percentage points lower than their peers who did not experience institutional education. Students who experienced homelessness and foster care also have lower high school graduation rates than their peers, but these gaps have declined over time.

Figure 2. On-time high school graduation gaps are decreasing in more recent cohort years for students who experience foster care or homelessness and gap remain steady for students who experience institutional education.



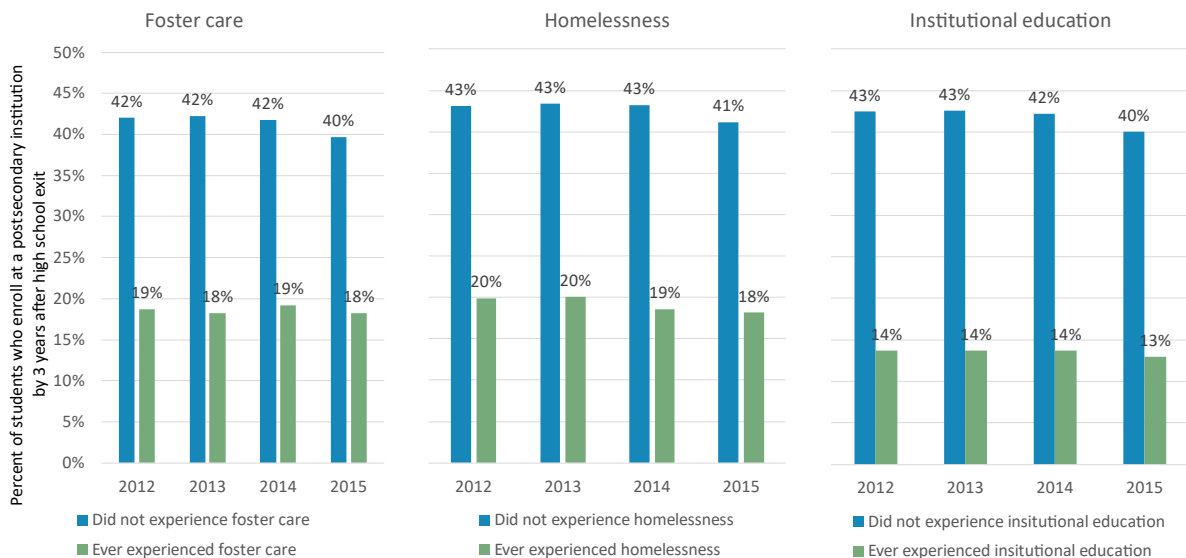
Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship enrollment for all student groups is similar to their peers (all less than 1%), but there is a peer gap in apprenticeship completion. Completion rates for students who experienced foster care cannot be reported due to small numbers. Of students who enrolled in an apprenticeship, 16% of those who experienced homelessness and 11% of those who experienced institutional education completed the apprenticeship, in comparison with a 20% completion rate of their peers who did not experience either homelessness or institutional education.

Postsecondary

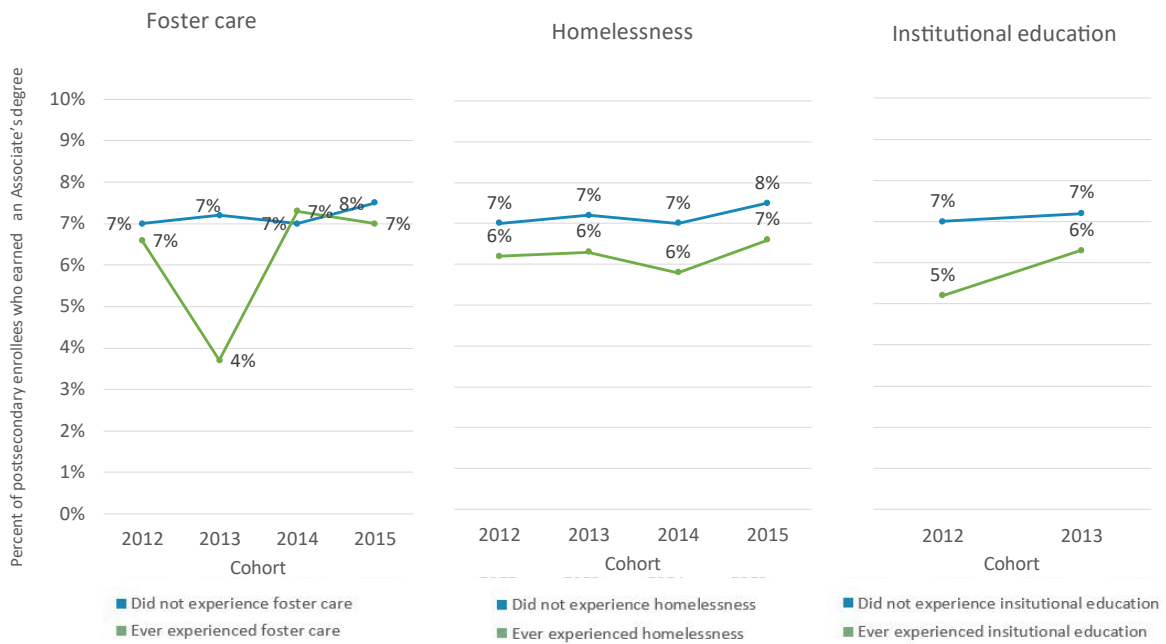
Postsecondary enrollment and completion gaps with peers are steady across cohort years for all student groups. Figure 3 shows the percentage of students who enroll at a postsecondary institution within three years after exiting high school.

Figure 3. Postsecondary enrollment rates three years after high school are lower for students who experience foster care, homelessness, and institutional education, with gaps steady across cohort years.



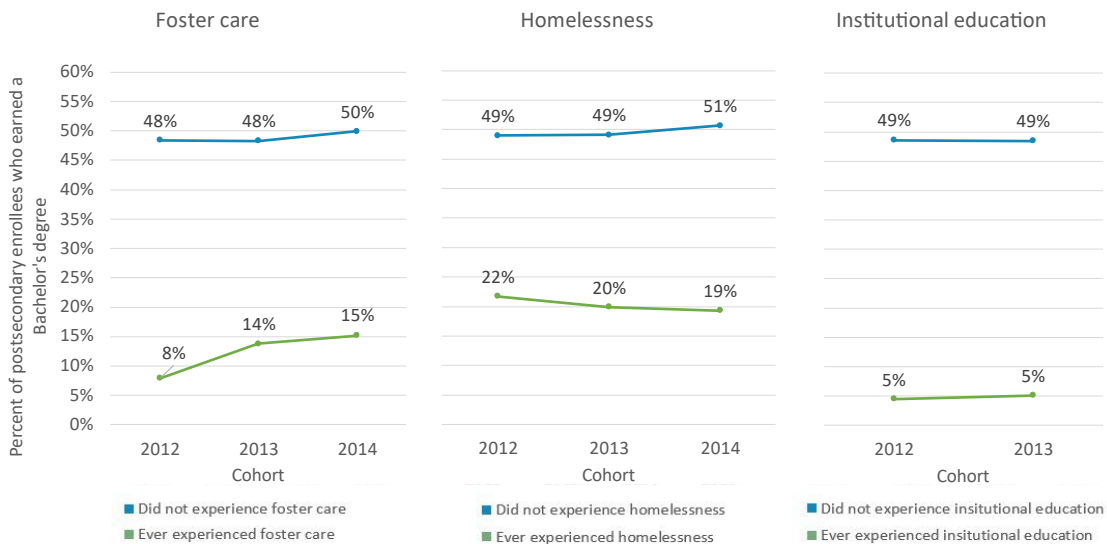
Students who experienced foster care or homelessness who enroll at a postsecondary education institution complete their associate's degrees at similar rates as their peers, with a slight peer gap for students who experienced institutional education. Gaps remain wide across student groups when it comes to completing bachelor's degrees. Figure 4 shows the percentage of postsecondary enrollees who earned a bachelor's or associate's degree as their highest credential earned during the study period.

Figure 4. Students who enroll at a postsecondary education institution complete associate's degrees at a similar proportion to their peers.



Note: Highest credential earned if multiple degrees

Figure 5. Bachelor's degree completion gaps remain wide across student groups.



Note: Highest credential earned if multiple degrees

Engagement

Students were considered engaged if they enrolled at a postsecondary institution, participated in a registered apprenticeship, or were employed in Washington. Table 1 shows the percentage point difference with peers engaged in postsecondary, employment, or apprenticeship. Students who experienced foster care or institutional education have lower engagement rates than their peers, while students who experienced homelessness have similar engagement rates relative to their peers.

Table 1: Across cohort years, students who have experienced homelessness are engaged at similar rates to their peers, while students who experienced foster care or institutional education have small percentage point differences with their peers in engagement.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Foster care	-7	-6	-4	-6	-5	-5
Homelessness	0	0	-1	-1	-1	-2
Institutional education	-5	-5	-4	-4	-5	-8

Analytical approach

Cohort design. The cohorts are first-time 8th graders during the 2012 through 2017 school years and are followed from their cohort year until the 2023 school year for academic outcomes, quarter one of the 2023 calendar year for apprenticeship outcomes, and the 2022 calendar year for workforce outcomes. More recent cohorts have fewer years of follow-up than earlier cohorts, so some measures are limited by this cohort design.

Student group definitions. Students were identified as having experienced foster care if they were in Division of Children and Family Services placement and care authority as identified through Department of Children Youth & Families records, age 3–21 since January 1, 2012. Youth in Tribal Child Welfare or Federal Foster Care are not part of this data source. Students were identified as having experienced homelessness through K-12 records (as defined by McKinney Vento Act) since the 2012 school year. Students were identified as having experienced institutional education if they ever enrolled in education programs at adult jails, long-term juvenile institutions, rehabilitation centers, detention centers, and community facilities from the 2013–14 school year to the 2022–23 school year, according to K-12 enrollment records.

Data sources. The data for this publication came from the ERDC P20W data system. This data system links administrative records from several education state agencies. Data sources for this publication include:

- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI): Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) — For data on enrollment, student characteristics and K-12 program participation. (EDS) Education Data System — For school directory information.
- Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) — For data on GED completion and postsecondary credentials awarded at a Washington public CTC.
- Public Centralized Higher Education Enrollment System (PCHEES) housed at the Office of Financial Management (OFM) — For data on postsecondary enrollment and credentials awarded at Washington public 4-year institutions.
- National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) — For data on postsecondary enrollment and credentials awarded at Washington State private and tribal institutions as well as Out-of-State institutions.
- Employment Security Department Unemployment Insurance wage (ESD) — For workforce data.
- Department of Labor and Industries Registered Apprenticeship (L&I) — For apprenticeship data.
- Department of Children Youth & Families (DCYF) — For foster care data.

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