

# Revisiting the Invisible Achievement Gap

## Education Coordinating Council Meeting

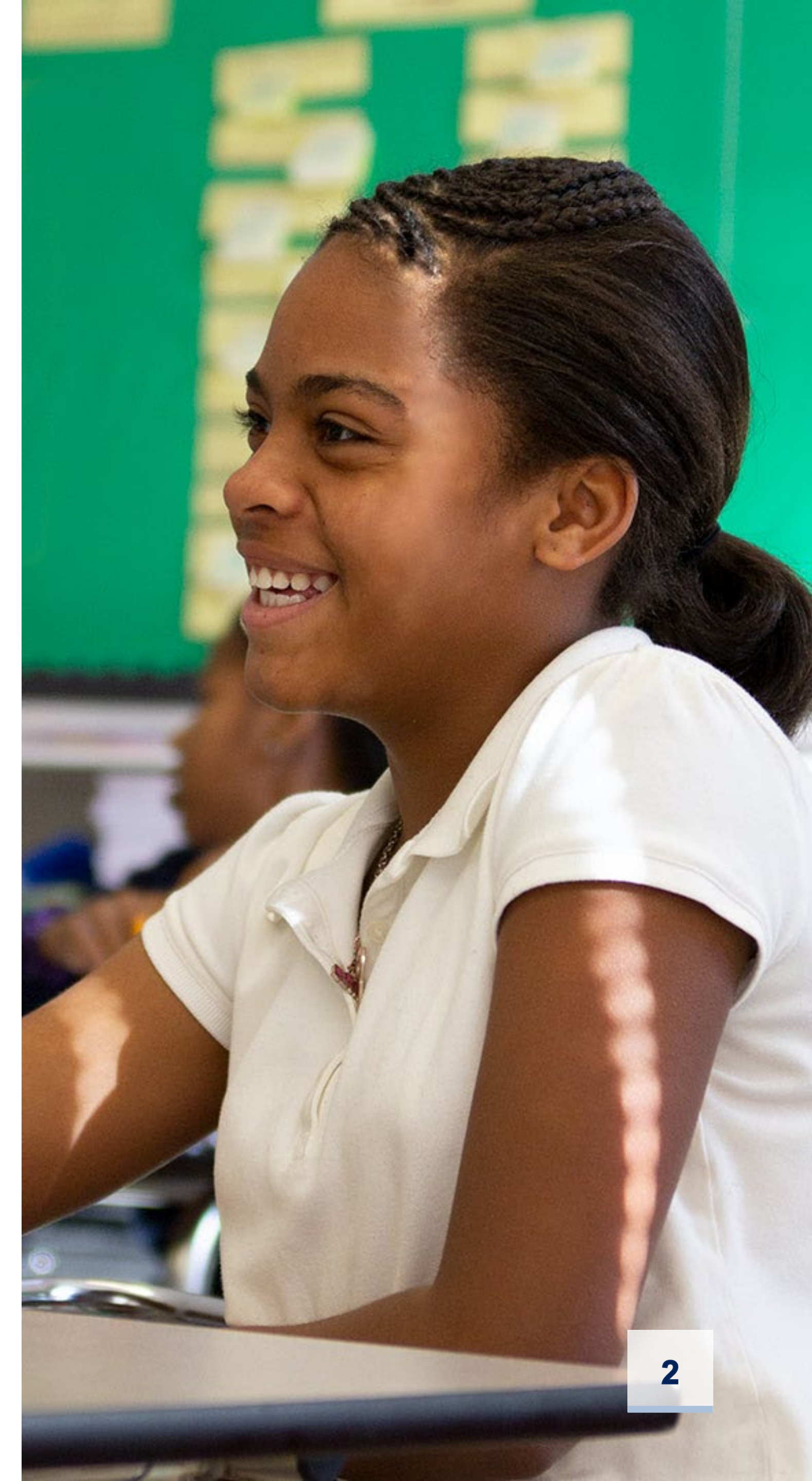
August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025


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## Goals

- **Examine trends over the last decade in educational experiences and outcomes of California's K-12 students in foster care**
- **Learn about school districts' Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) actions that target students in foster care**
- **Share insights from a range of stakeholders, child welfare and education professionals as well as former students in foster care, about these data and how we can better support the success of students in foster care**



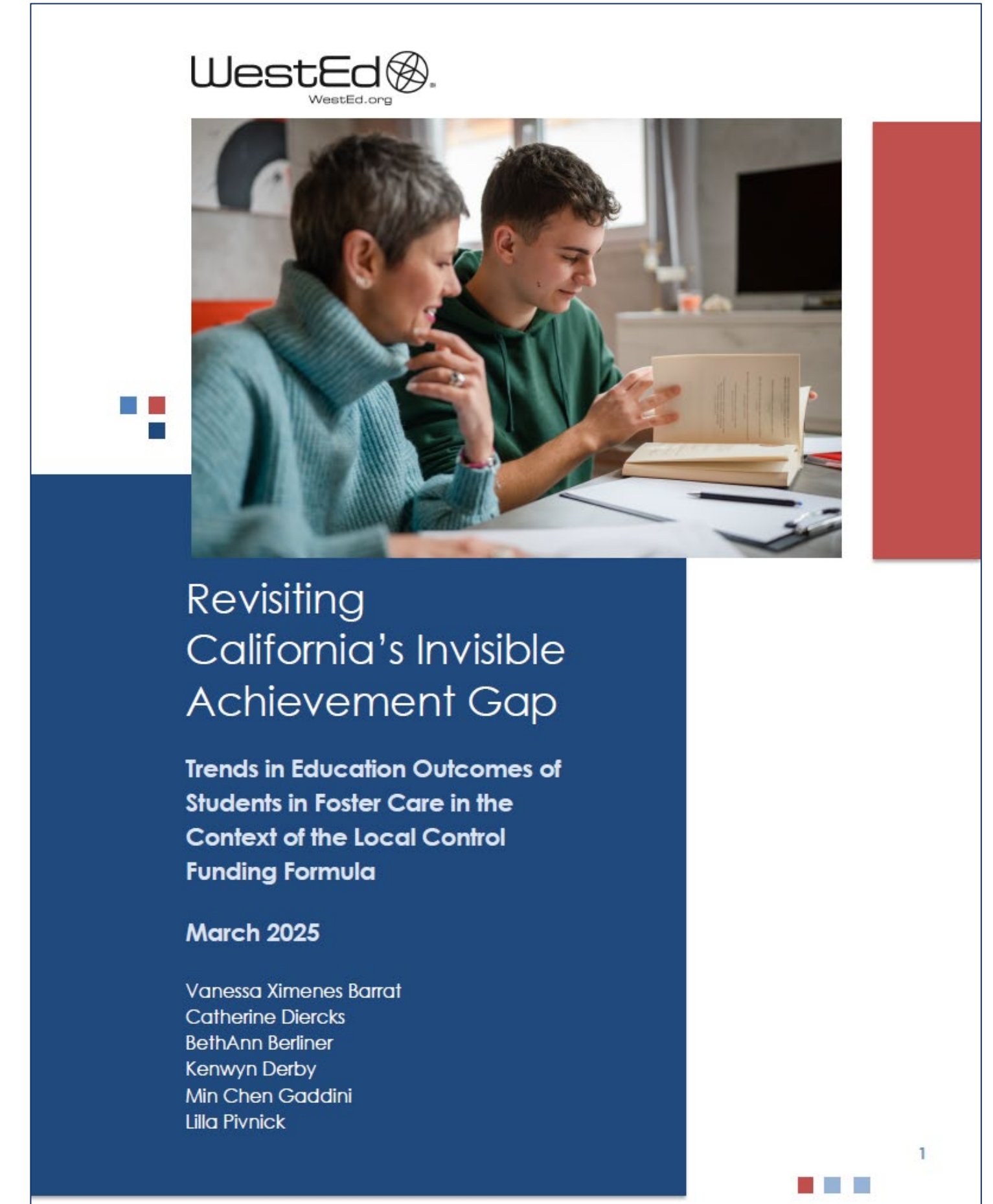
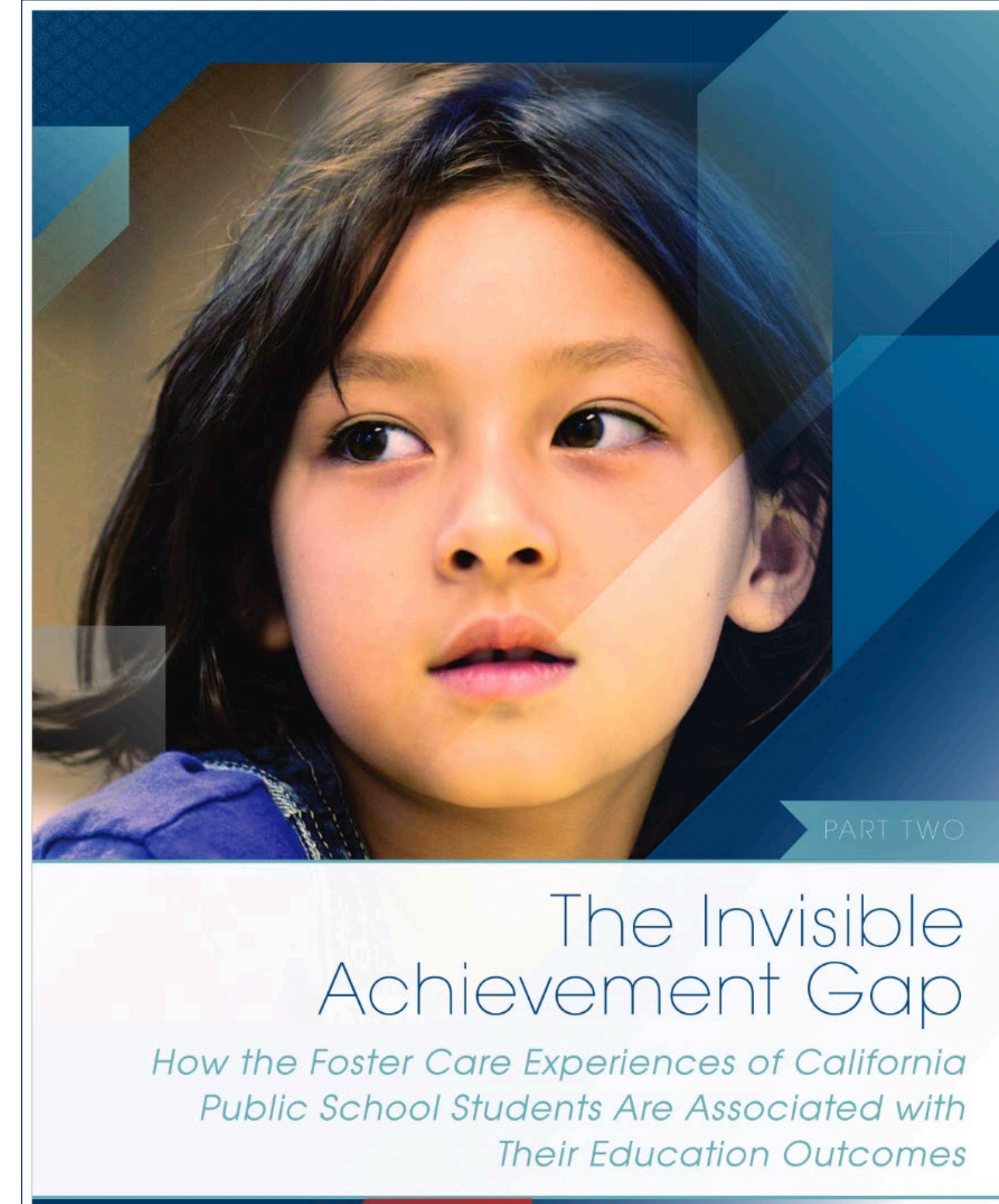


What helps get a student in foster care to succeed in school is having a supportive adult. That's one of the biggest challenges – just not having that same parental unit checking up on you, making sure that you're getting through your classes. So, you have to create those adult supports in your own way. And it's a lot of informal stuff. Maybe you have a great teacher or great coach, but they're not following you throughout your educational journey.

– Former foster youth



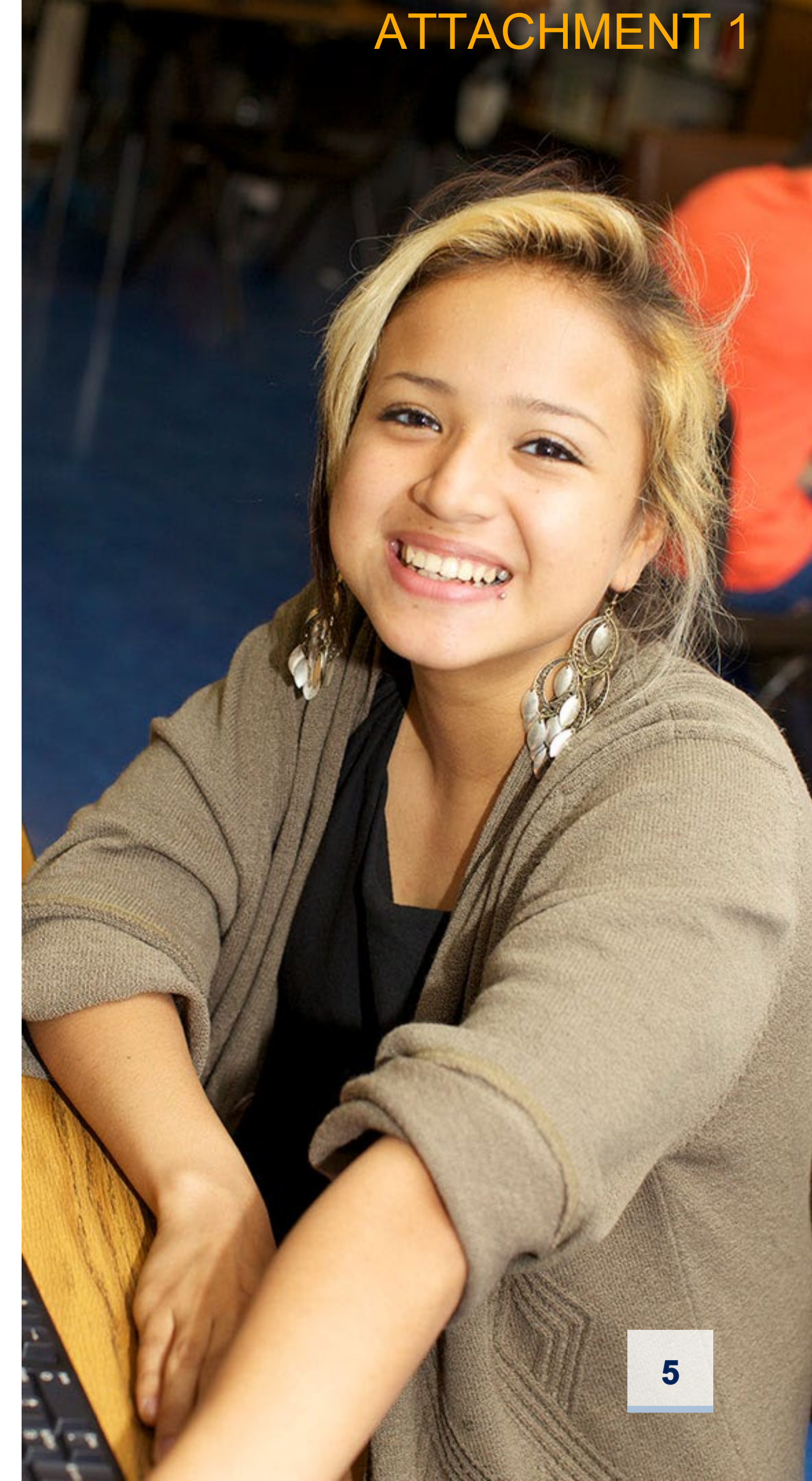
# This work follows on The Invisible Achievement Gap – Parts 1 and 2





## Study Sources and Methods

- **Publicly available CDE education data for K-12 students in foster care**
  - Quantitative analysis of data from School Years 2014–15 through 2023–24
- **Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) data**
  - Document review of the content of the 2022–23 LCAPs for California’s 10 school districts with the highest enrollments of students in foster care
- **Interview and focus group data**
  - With policy leaders, practitioners, and former students in foster care to contextualize the findings







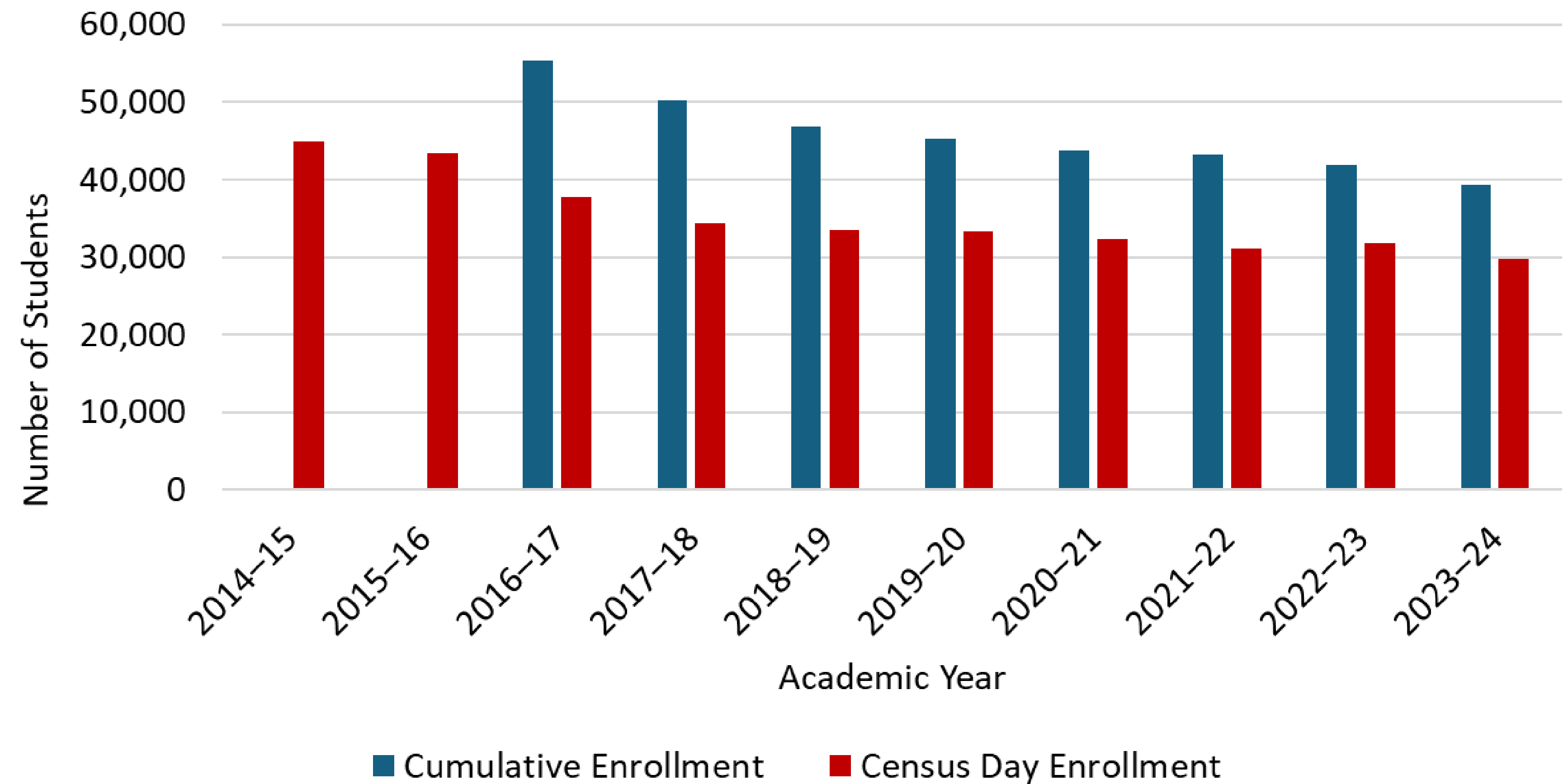
# Number of K-12 students in foster care and school experiences



## The number of students in foster care steadily decreased in the last decade

### Interviewees mentioned:

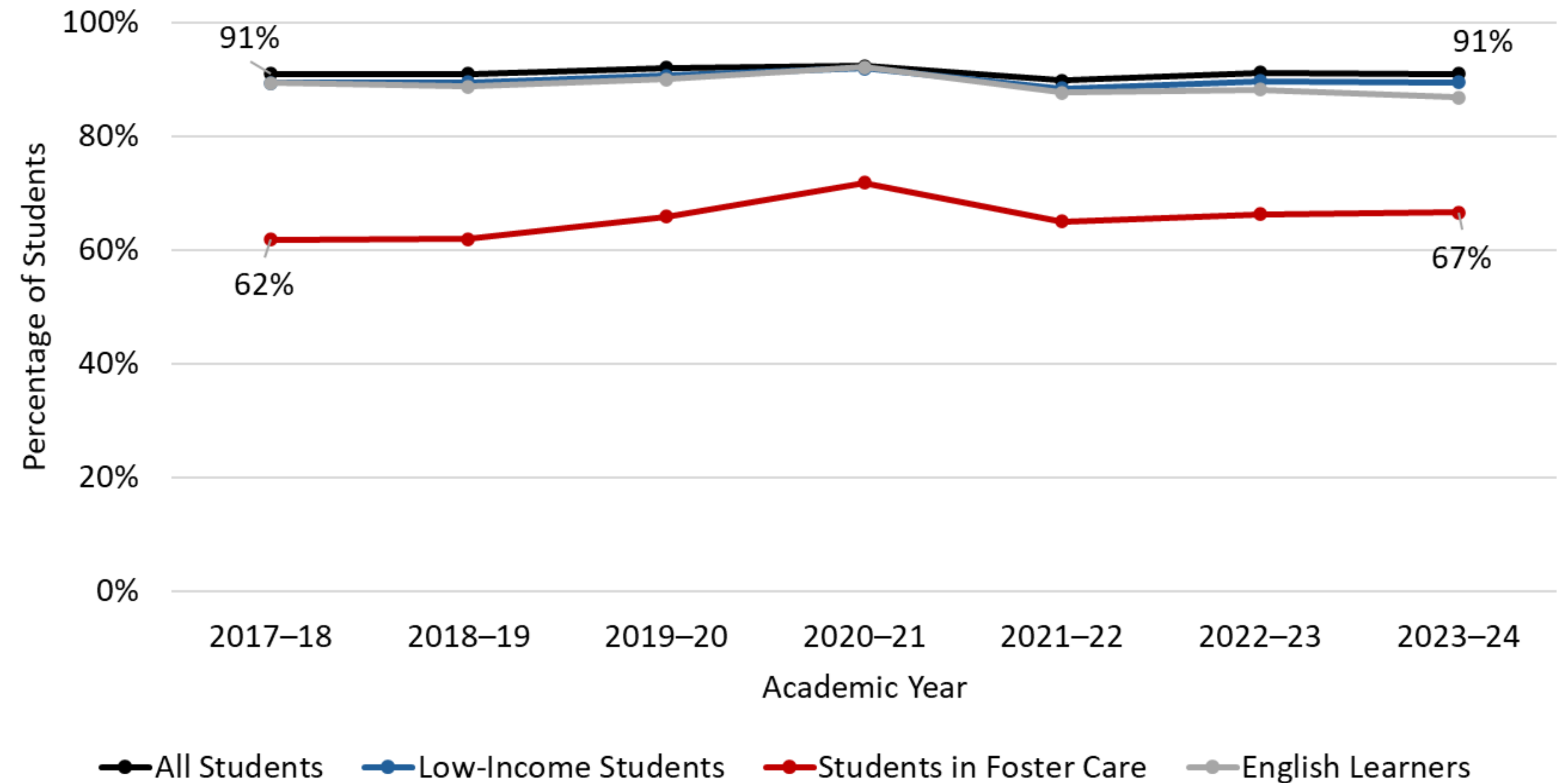
- An increase in acuity
- Challenges for districts with few foster youth to provide targeted services



## School stability increased but remained lower than for other students

While most students attended only one school each year, only **about 2/3 of students** in foster care experienced **school stability**.

- Transportation as a persistent challenge
- Lack of information in BIDs to inform decisions about school placement

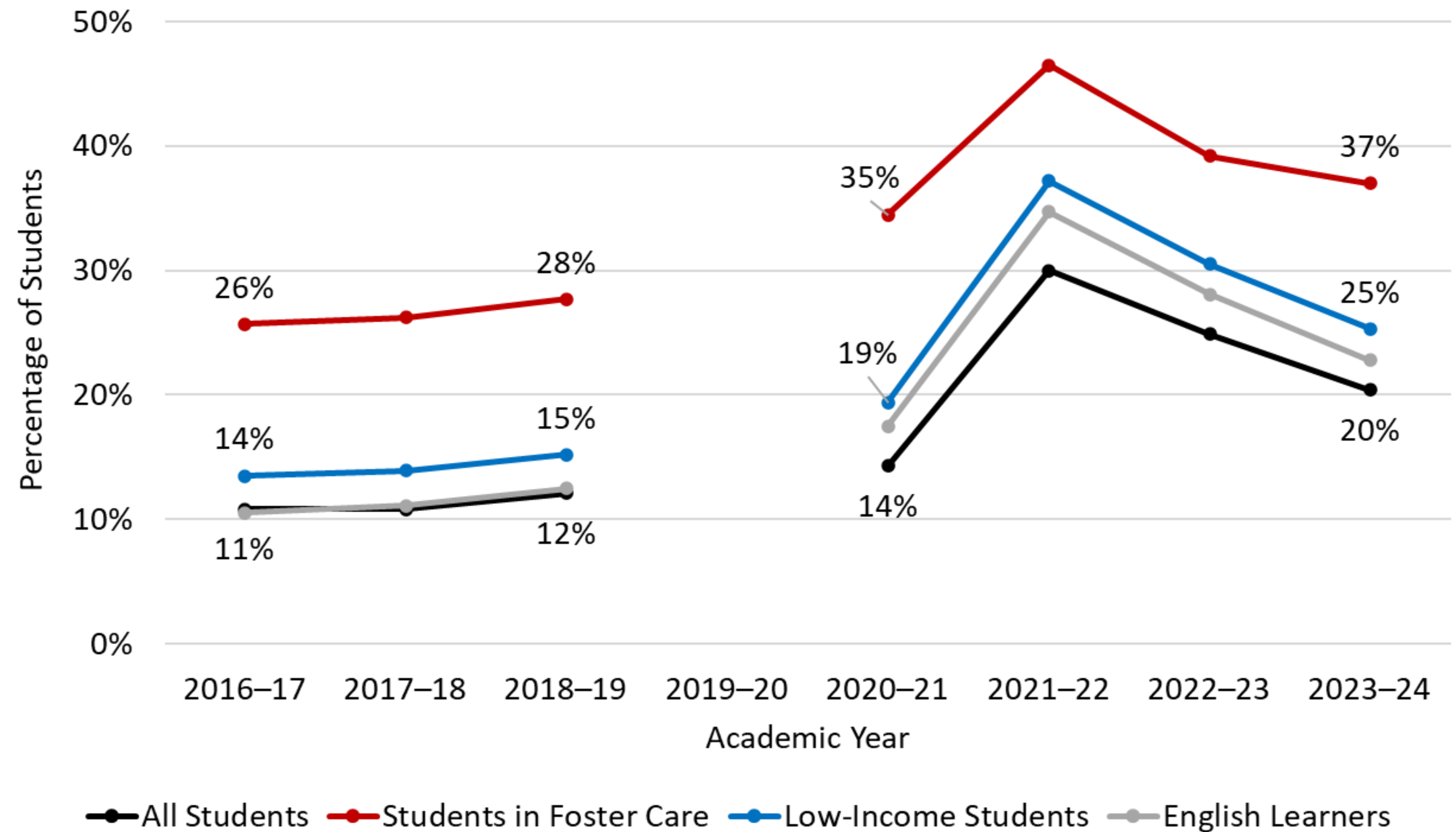




# The percentage of students in foster care who were chronically absent increased substantially since the pandemic

Chronic absence substantially worsened after the pandemic for all students, but students in foster care remained much **more likely to be chronically absent** than other high-need student groups.

- Instability in students' living situations and frequent school changes
- Delays in unenrollment in a student's school of origin, lack of reliable transportation, and lengthy school commutes
- Mandatory court dates and medical appointments scheduled during school hours

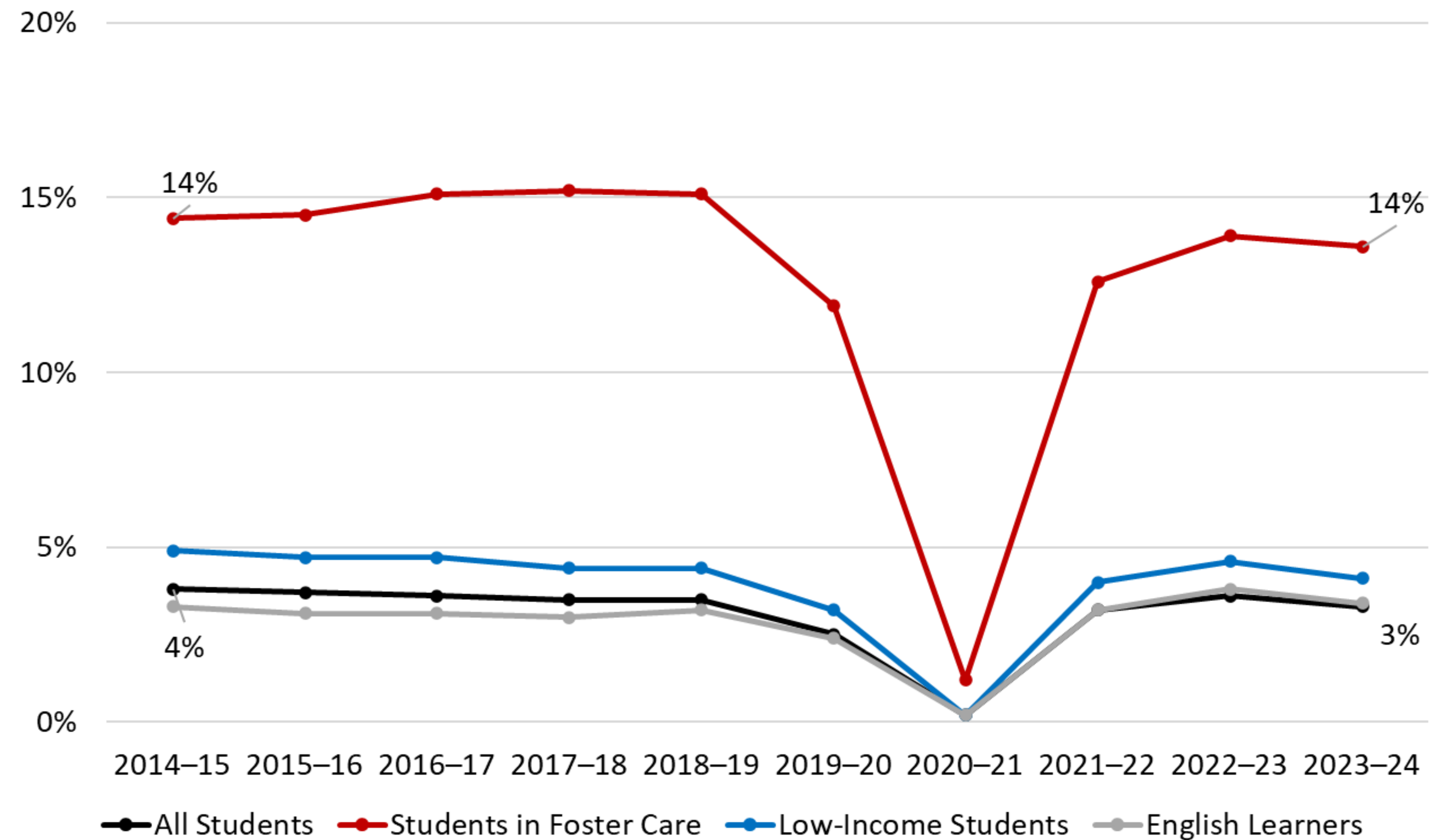




## The percentage of students in foster care who were suspended remained stable over the last decade and reverted rapidly to pre-pandemic levels

Students in foster care were **over three times more likely** than all students and other high-need student groups to be **suspended**.

- Need for more trauma-informed approaches in education
- California Senate Bill 274, which took effect on July 1, 2024, prohibits suspensions based on lower-level behavioral offenses of “willful defiance”







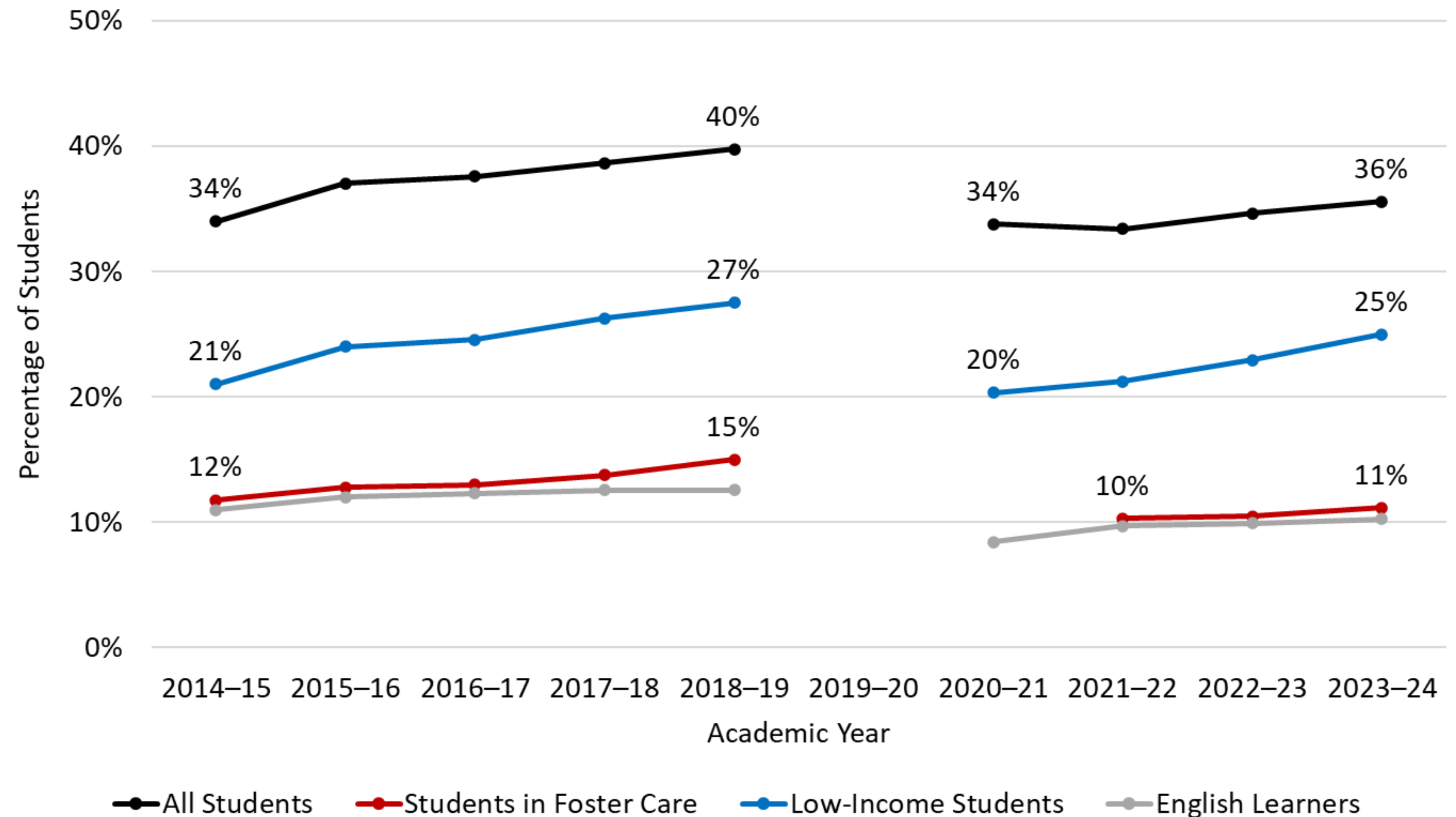
# Trends in education outcomes of K-12 students in foster care



## The percentage of students in foster care who met grade-level standards in math increased slightly before the pandemic but decreased again post-pandemic

Students in foster care **performed well below** low-income students in math, and small pre-pandemic progress disappeared post-pandemic as students reverted to a rate of meeting **grade-level standards** below 10 years ago.

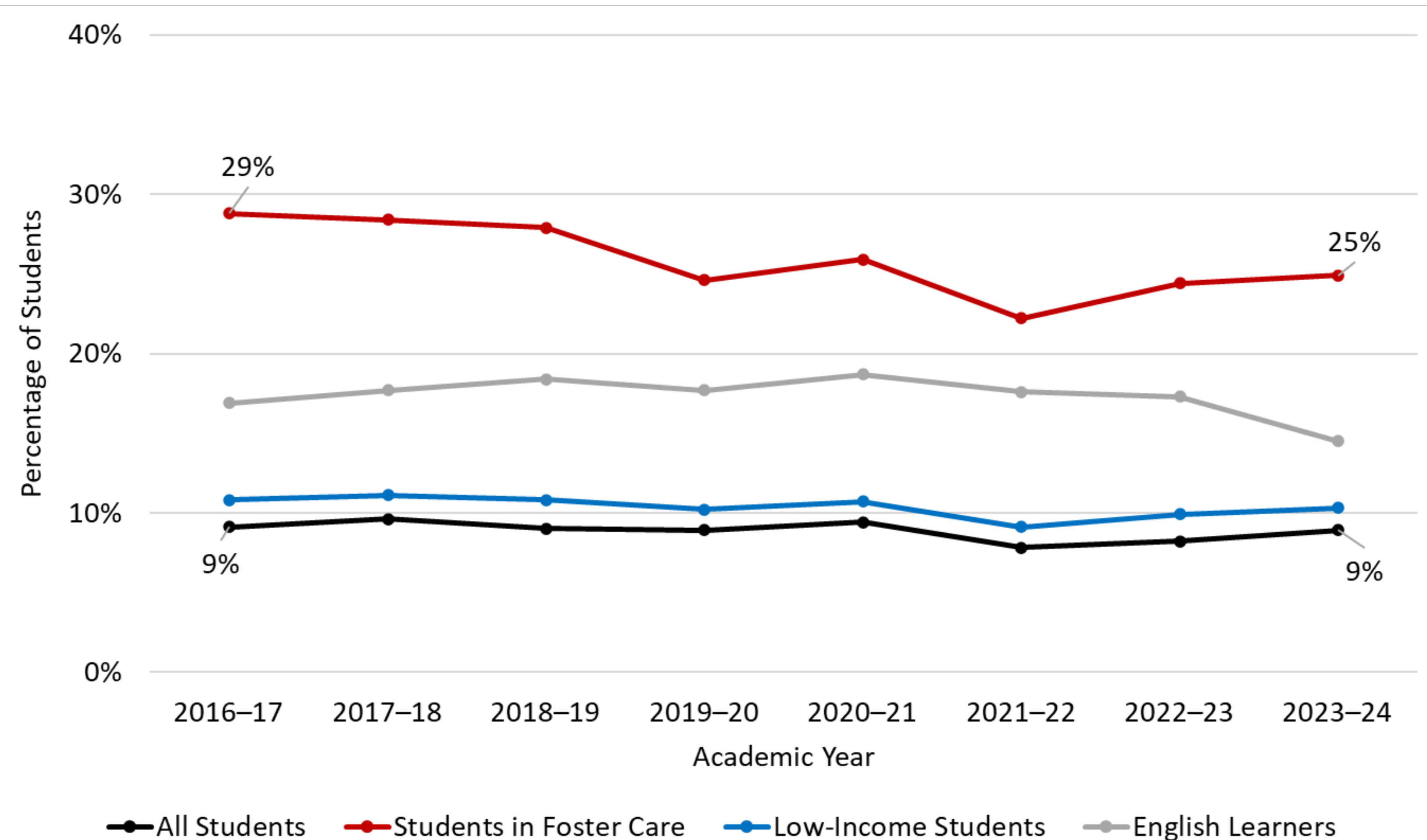
- Reflection of school instability and interruptions to students' academic instruction time
- Interviewees noted the potential benefit of one-on-one tutoring in the midst of repeated home and school transitions





## The percentage of students in foster care who dropped out of high school decreased over the last eight years but remained higher than for other students

Even though dropout rates decreased over time, high school students in foster care had the **highest dropout rates** compared to other student groups, with one in four students in foster care dropping out each year.

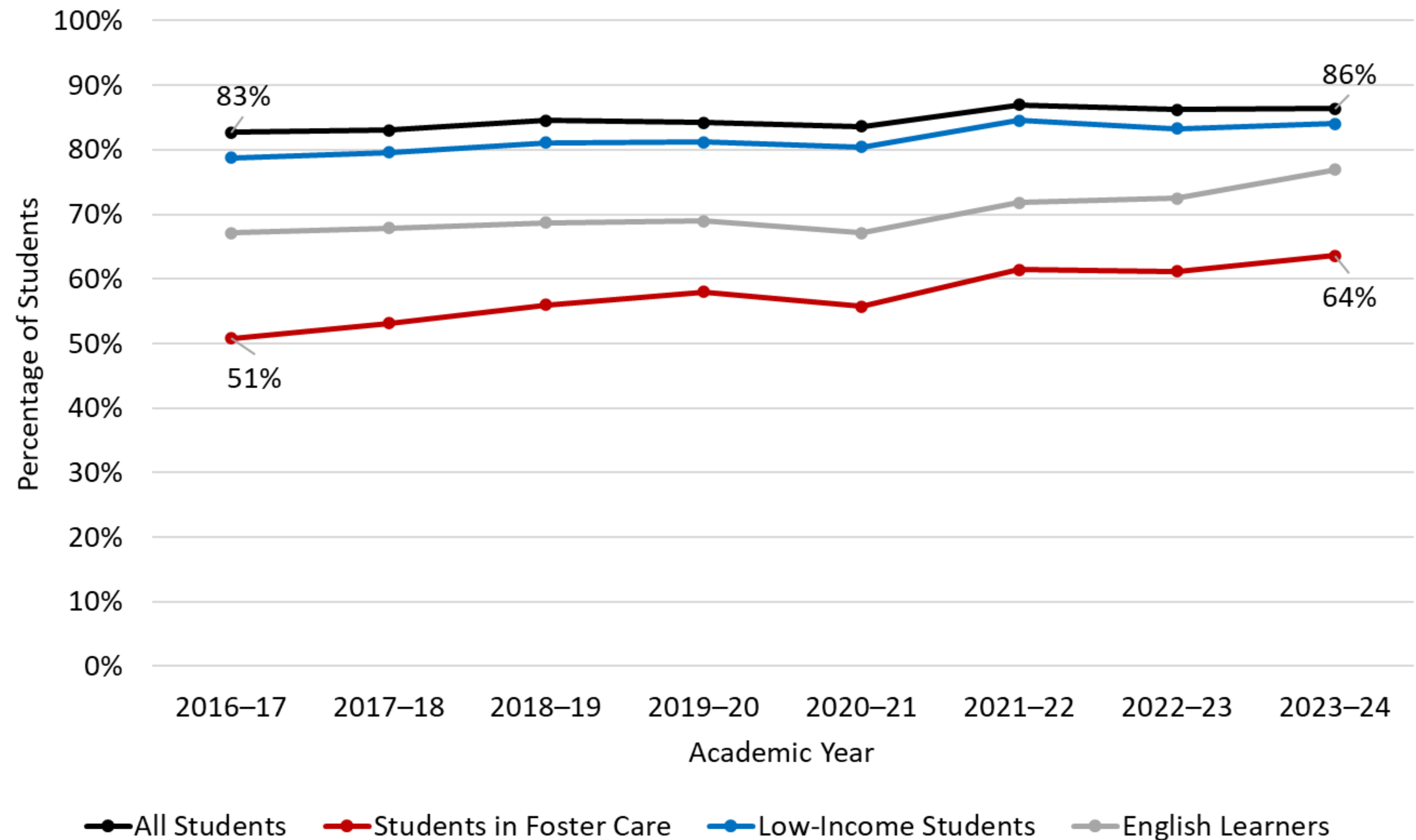




## The percentage of students in foster care who earned a regular high school diploma increased by 10 percentage points over the last eight years

While still lower than for other high-need students, recent increases in graduation rates are **narrowing the graduation gap**.

- Local graduation requirement exceptions (AB 216)
- Extension of foster care to age 21

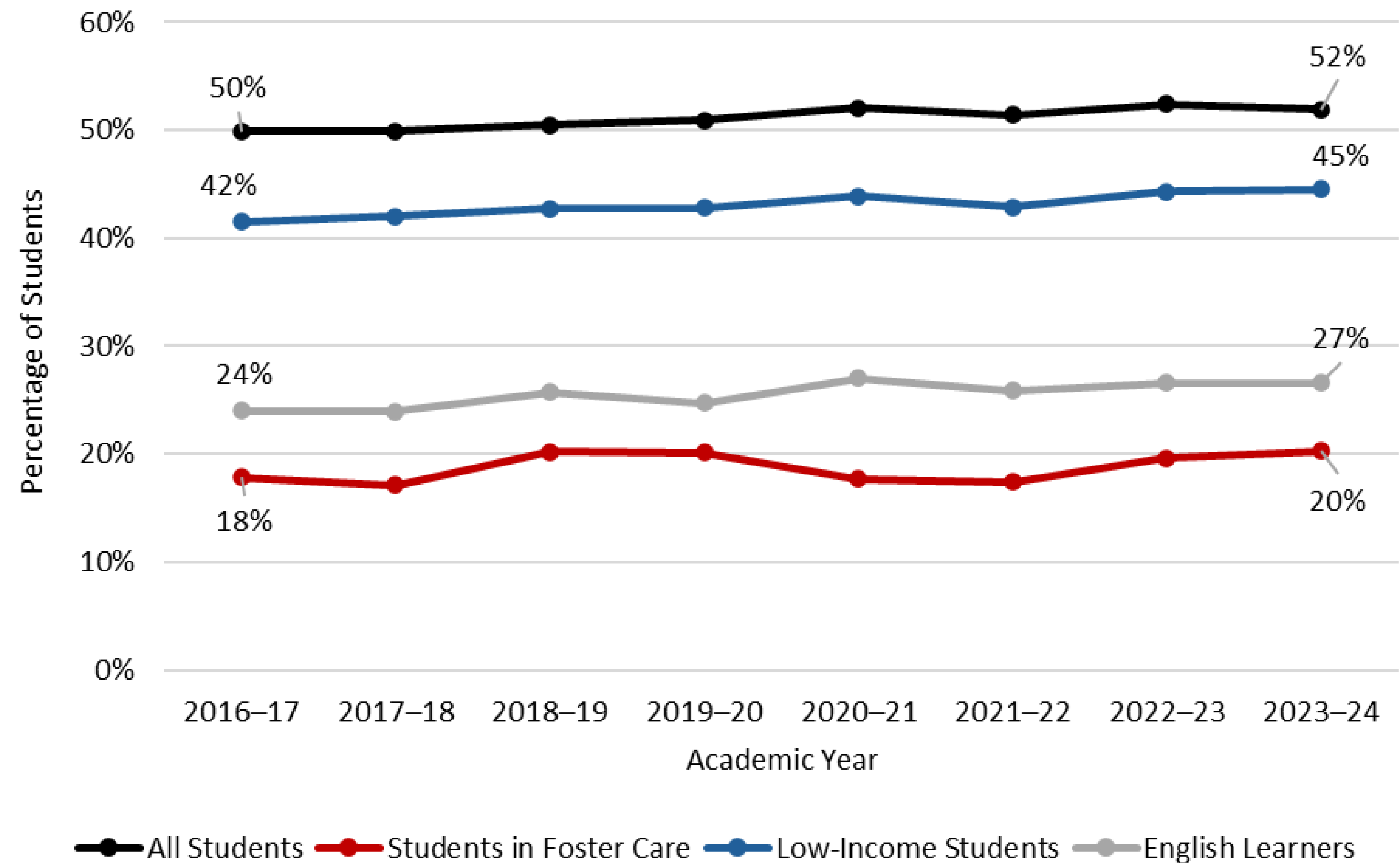




# The percentage of graduating students in foster care meeting UC/CSU requirements has not changed over the last seven years

Fewer than one in five graduating students in foster care successfully completed **California's a-g college preparatory course requirements** for admission to the state's four-year public universities, effectively **limiting their postsecondary opportunities.**

➤ Related to the possibility to graduate under the less rigorous state minimum standard?

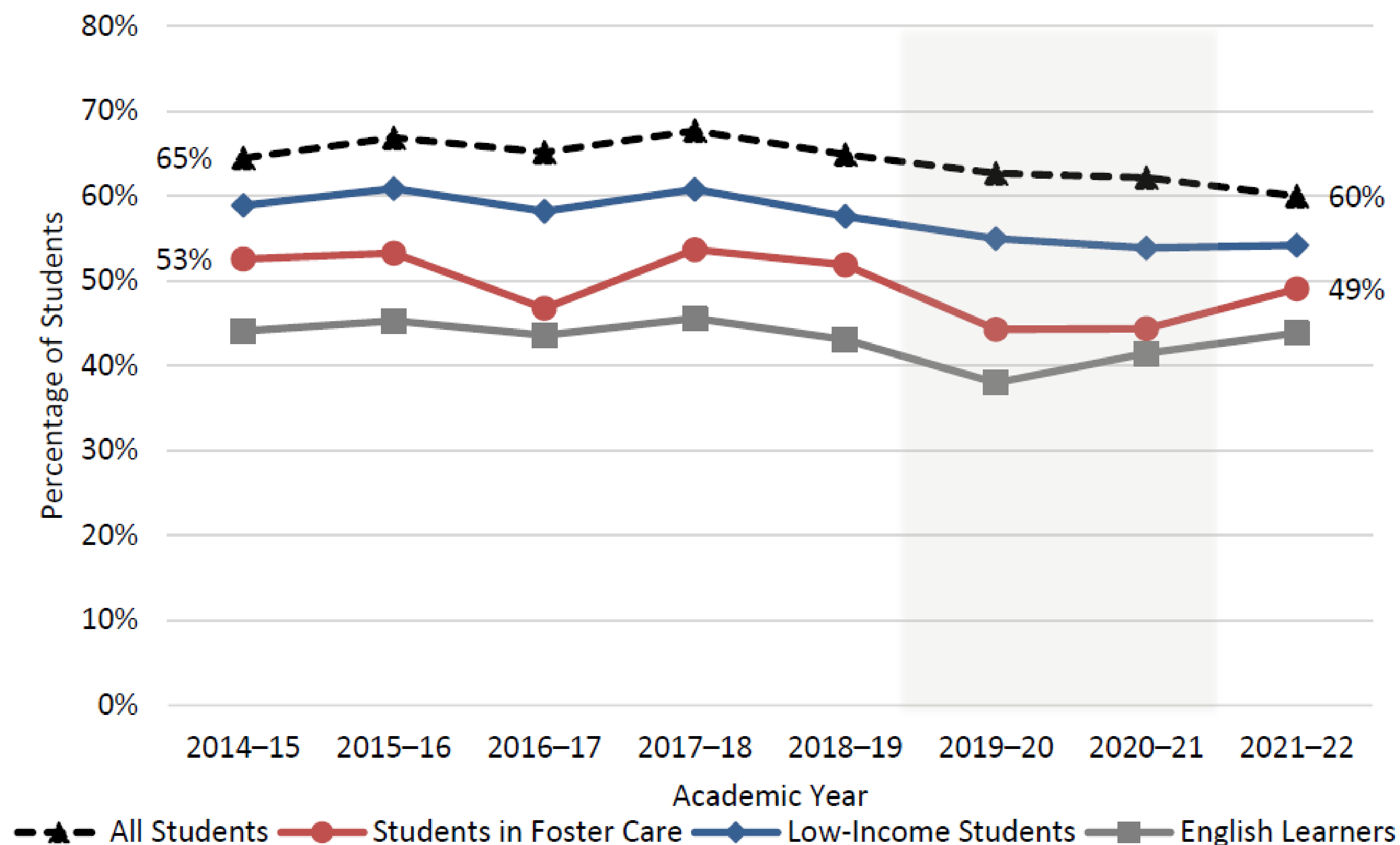




## The percentage of students in foster care enrolling in college within one year of high school completion decreased over the last decade

Among high school completers, the percentage of students in foster care who **enrolled in college** within one year of high school completion **declined during the pandemic but shows signs of recovery**.

- Economic challenges can lead to prioritization of work over continuing education
- Lack of awareness of the financial and housing support at college
- Latest data available is from **2021/2022** and does not provide insight into the impact of recent policy changes







# District programs and services for students in foster care

**Analysis of Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs)**



10 California districts with the most students in foster care

School District	2022–23
Los Angeles Unified	3,734
Fresno Unified	780
Lancaster Elementary	525
Long Beach Unified	508
Antelope Valley Union High	491
Palmdale Elementary	480
San Bernardino City Unified	477
Moreno Valley Unified	355
Kern High	348
Hesperia Unified	341
Total number enrolled	8,039
Percentage of California students in foster care	25%





# Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

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- Under LCFF, districts are entitled to an annual **base grant** for each student and **supplemental grants** for each **unduplicated** high-need student.
- **Concentration grants** of 65 percent of the base grant for each **unduplicated** high-need student above a 55 percent threshold.
  - Under LCFF, students in foster care are also considered to be low-income students and are counted only once (unduplicated). They do not generate additional funds as a distinct high-need student group.

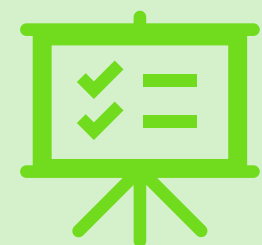




# Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs)



Districts can opt to spend LCFF funds on any combination of the high-need student groups. These efforts are required to be described in each district's LCAP.



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

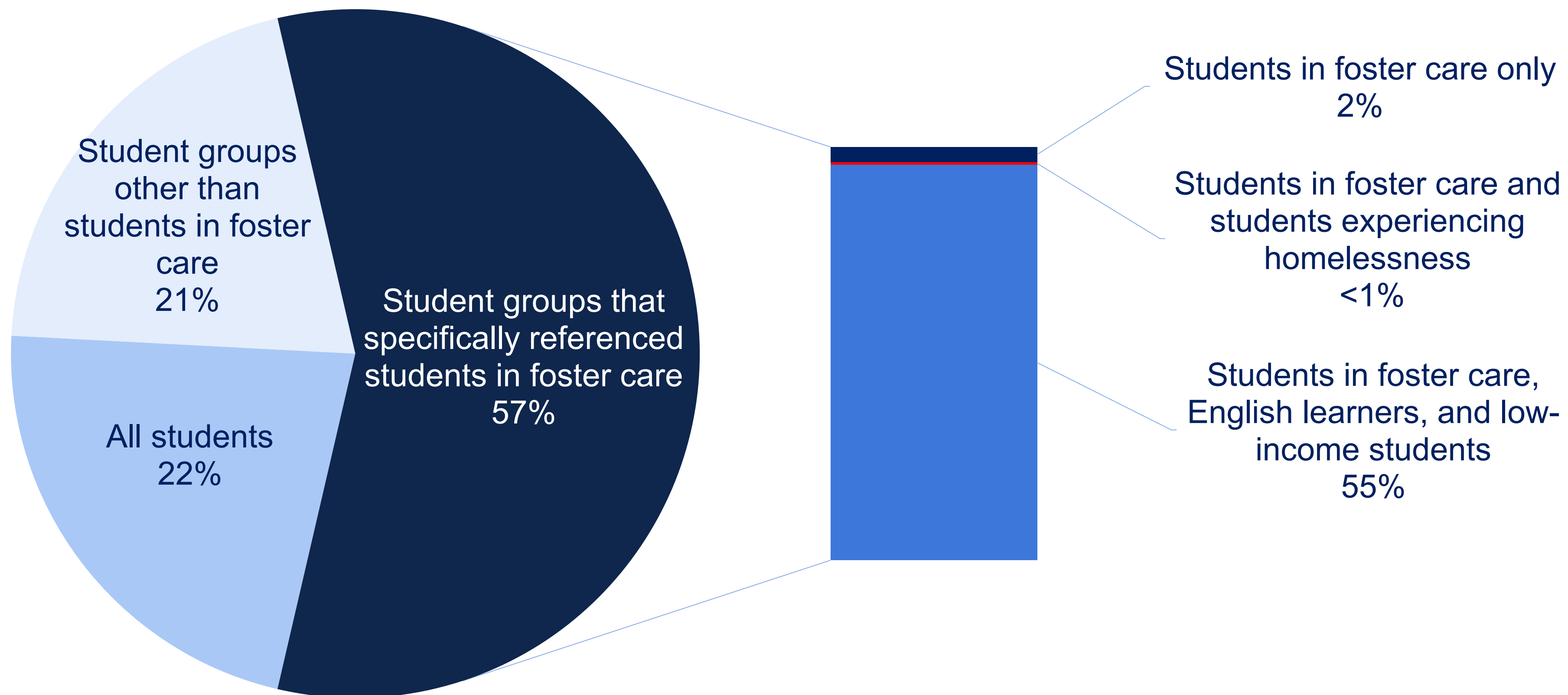
> **Actions** are the planned programs or services districts intend to carry out to meet their goals.

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



# When referenced in LCAP actions, foster care students were almost always combined with other high-need student groups

## LCAP Actions by Targeted Student Groups





# LCAP actions – Interviewees Input

- Significant efforts to support students in foster care are **not always reflected** in LCAPs
- Interventions **designed for all students** may not fully address their specific need
- Difficulties of access to services related to higher rates of **chronic absence and school mobility**
- Districts with actions and funding dedicated **uniquely** to students in foster care may be better equipped to facilitate student access to districtwide and school-level programs and services
- Among the ten school districts with the most students in foster care, eight provided **at least one action exclusively for students in foster care (or foster care and homeless)**



# Summary – Trends in outcomes

## Over the last decade, data show that...

- While students in foster care were often those with the lowest education outcomes compared to other high need students, areas of progress over the last decade, despite a national health emergency included:
  - Slight increase in **stability**
  - Decrease in **dropout rates**
  - Increase in **graduation rates**
- **Academic achievement** had shown progress before the pandemic followed by a sharp decrease after the pandemic
- Finally, some areas showed no progress or have worsened in the last years including **chronic absence, suspension rates, percentage meeting UC/CSU requirements, and enrollment in college** within one year of high school completion



# Summary – LCAP analysis

## 2022-23 LCAP analysis showed that...

- Among the ten school districts with the most students in foster care, **over half mentioned students in foster care**
- Of the actions that mentioned students in foster care, **nearly all were intended for the three high-need student groups combined** and actions were rarely solely for students in foster care
- Among the ten school districts with the most students in foster care, eight provided **at least one action exclusively for students in foster care (or foster care and homeless)**





## Reflection:

How might the promise of LCFF be more fully realized for students in foster care?

What other important questions should we consider to improve education outcomes for students in foster care?





# Thank you!

**For more information or to collaborate, please reach out:**

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If we can get the school support of having better eyes, better outlook, better reporting and intervening before [problems become more serious], I think that alone would save money, make a better system, make better outcomes, and create the mindset of you can go to college ... but we can't change the mindset if we're not changing the actions first.

**– Former foster youth**