

# Documenting the Haven Academy model

Report produced for the New York Foundling

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October 2022

# Forward

When the doors of Mott Haven Academy Charter School first opened in 2008, we hoped to serve our students well, but also to answer a big, fundamental question: If we built a school specifically designed to address the trauma that students had faced in the child welfare system and in a neighborhood with concentrated poverty, what kind of outcomes would we see? In launching Haven Academy, the New York Foundling took on a mission no one had tried before.

The initial years were challenging; we were growing each year while still trying to refine our model. We realized we needed to invest even more heavily in social workers than we first thought. We discovered the achievement gap entering kindergarten was even wider than we expected. We also saw early, powerful successes as families came to trust Haven Academy and its staff, as teachers saw academic breakthroughs, and as our mental health interventions and social-emotional support started to pay off.

Now in our fourteenth school year, we are confident that we have built something special. We are proud of the results our students have achieved - particularly our students who have been involved in the child welfare system, students who have faced housing instability, students with IEPs, and our English Language Learners. Both their academic results and other important outcomes, like their social-emotional health, attendance, and behavior, encourage us that the Haven Academy model is working. There is always more work for us to do — we will not be truly satisfied until we see strong academic and social-emotional outcomes for every single student — but we know we are well on our way.

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on our community, as it did throughout the nation, with disproportionate impact on low-income communities of color. The pandemic reinforced that Haven was built to weather crisis and trauma. We had already invested in relationships that allowed us to meet families' comprehensive needs, including food insecurity and access to medical care. We had the staffing to provide robust support to our students and we were able to pivot as the pandemic evolved. As families navigate a multifaceted recovery, we know that we will be able to continue to adapt and deliver what they need. With the supportive foundation our students have, we are cautiously optimistic that we will see them continue to flourish even despite the added trauma of the past few years.

When we first set out on this mission, we did so with a sense of obligation that if we learned from this experience, we would share it broadly. We know there is a great need to support vulnerable student populations like the one we serve at Haven Academy. There are thousands of children in New York City who have been involved with the child welfare system, not to mention the many tens of thousands nationally. We see homelessness continue to rise, particularly for families. Academic outcomes for these students are heartbreaking. Over the years, schools from across the city and country have reached out to learn from us because they are interested in what we have built — and because they don't see other examples like Haven Academy.

We continue to believe it is our responsibility to document what we have learned, codify the practices that make Haven Academy unique, and share those broadly. Together, we can change the educational narrative for children involved in the child welfare system.

Melanie Hartzog

President and CEO, The New York Foundling; Board Trustee, Mott Haven Academy Charter School

Jessica Nauiokas

Executive Director and Founder, Mott Haven Academy Charter School

Trish Mulvaney  
Board Chairperson, Mott Haven Academy Charter School

# Executive Summary

Educational outcomes for children involved in the child welfare system have been historically dismal. The disparities begin before kindergarten and they persist; just a quarter of foster care youth in New York City graduate high school on time. Mott Haven Academy Charter School was founded in 2008 as the first school focused on meeting the specific needs of children involved in the child welfare system. The school intentionally recruited students in foster care and whose families receive prevention services. The remaining spots at the school were held for students living in the high-poverty community of Mott Haven.

Over the past 14 years, Haven Academy has expanded and now serves nearly 500 students from Pre-K through 8th grade. This report examines in detail who Haven serves, what makes the model so unique, and what results Haven students have achieved. The purpose of this report is to take an outside-in look at the Haven model and begin to identify what lessons could apply to other schools and organizations.

This report details four primary attributes that make Haven unique:

- A strong school culture with shared common language and a deeply trauma-informed approach;
- Robust in-classroom and out-of-classroom staffing; some of the strategic staffing choices that Haven has made include placing two teachers in every classroom and maintaining a very low student-to-social worker ratio;
- Leadership and staff continuity and experience; Haven has very low staff and leadership turnover, deeply experienced teachers, and staff with a high degree of buy-in to the model, and;
- An anchor partner, The New York Foundling, which has provided strategic support and critical resources over the years

The results that Haven students achieve reflect the impact of this model. Haven students outperform comparison groups on state math and ELA tests, particularly in younger grades. This is true for both general community students and students involved in the child welfare system. In other key metrics, like attendance, chronic absenteeism, special education referrals, and suspensions, Haven students involved in the child welfare system fare better than their peers in other schools. There are still some remaining open questions about how Haven students perform particularly once they get to high school and beyond.

This report does not yet contemplate how Haven's model might apply in other contexts and how best to replicate it. However, it lays the foundation to consider those critical questions and next steps.

# Introduction

Educational outcomes for children in the child welfare system are bleak.

In New York City, children in foster care are more than three times as likely to repeat a grade and more than twice as likely to be referred for special education services. The average student in foster care misses the equivalent of a month-and-a-half of school each year. One in five students in care changes schools when they go into care and again with subsequent placements, meaning they must adjust to significant change at school and at home all at once.<sup>1</sup> A first-of-its-kind longitudinal study of NYC high school students found that only a quarter of NYC youth who experienced foster care in high school graduated on time in 2019. This is an improvement from a decade prior, when just 15.8% of kids who experienced foster care graduated on time, but a far cry from the city's overall graduation rate of 77%.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows that the effects of child welfare involvement are visible in even the earliest grades. Children who experience maltreatment at a young age display a greater rate of language and cognitive delays and show deficiencies in social-emotional domains. Abuse and neglect before the age of two is an important predictor of aggression in elementary school aged-children. And, children who have experienced abuse and neglect are less motivated in school, typically performing worse in math and English in elementary school.<sup>3</sup> Even limited exposure to the child welfare system has a lasting impact. A 2018 study from Michigan found that children who experienced a maltreatment investigation from Child Protective Services before third grade scored lower on standardized math and reading tests, were more likely to be identified as needing special education, and were more likely to be held back at least one grade.<sup>4</sup>

The New York Foundling (abbreviated throughout this report as “the Foundling”) is one of New York City’s oldest child welfare agencies, helping children and their families navigate “through and beyond” foster care. In 2008, recognizing the unique educational needs of children who had been involved with foster care, the Foundling helped to launch Mott Haven Academy Charter School. Haven Academy was founded with the idea of serving as an “educational home” for children in the child welfare system. The theory was that Haven could provide students with a school experience that equally prioritized academics and social-emotional support, which would in turn lead to both better academic outcomes and potentially greater stability in their home life, too.

Haven was founded specifically with child welfare families in mind, but the wraparound model was designed to meet the needs of students in the surrounding community, Mott Haven, who have also faced their share of trauma. Based on the Citizens’ Committee for Children’s Keeping Track of New York City’s Children database, Mott Haven is the second-highest risk neighborhood for children in New York City. 72.4% of children in Mott Haven are living in concentrated poverty; in communities with concentrated poverty, the impact of individual poverty is amplified, with fewer opportunities for upward mobility. A third of households in Mott Haven are severely rent-burdened, and more than 15% of children in the area live in temporary housing. Over half of children live in a household where a parent faced employment instability in the last year, nearly double the rate for the city.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Advocates for Children of New York, *Building a Network of Support: The Case for a DOE Office for Students in Foster Care*. May 2021.

[https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/foster\\_care\\_office\\_report\\_52021.pdf](https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/foster_care_office_report_52021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). *Education Outcomes of NYC Youth in Foster Care*. NYC Office of the Mayor, May 2022,

[https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/Education\\_Outcomes\\_May19\\_2022.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/Education_Outcomes_May19_2022.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Wulczyn, F., Smithgall, C., & Chen, L. “Child Well-Being: The Intersection of Schools and Child Welfare.” *Review of Research in Education*, 2009: 33(1), 35-62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40588117>

<sup>4</sup> Ryan, J. P., Jacob, B. A., Gross, M., Perron, B. E., Moore, A., & Ferguson, S, “Early Exposure to Child Maltreatment and Academic Outcomes.” *Child Maltreatment*, 2018: 23(4), 365–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559518786815>.

<sup>5</sup> Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track Online: The Status of New York City Children*. <https://data.cccnewyork.org>

Haven Academy is located within the boundaries of Community School District 7, which serves some of the highest need students in the city. Along with two other Bronx districts, Districts 9 and 12, it has one of the highest rates of poverty and homelessness.<sup>6</sup> Academic performance has long lagged in District 7. In both ELA and math proficiency, District 7 ranks 29th of the city’s 32 school districts.<sup>7</sup> Haven was founded, in large part, to provide an alternative educational experience for children in the local community.

In the 14 years since it was founded, Haven has grown from a nascent idea to a fully enrolled Pre-K through 8 school with nearly 500 students. Haven has graduated nine cohorts from elementary school, three cohorts from middle school, and has alumni in high school and college. Under the continued leadership of its founding principal, Jessica Nauiakas, Haven has refined its approach to both instruction and social-emotional support. At the time it opened, Haven was the first public school to focus explicitly on child welfare families and it remains a leader. The school attracts attention from local and national press wanting to profile its work, neighboring schools looking to partner, and schools and organizations from across the country that are interested in emulating pieces of the model.

There is a richness and nuance to “the Haven story” beyond what has been captured in public discourse. This report aims to answer three critical questions:

- How is Haven’s student population unique?
- What makes the Haven model special?
- What are the results for Haven students?

The answers to these questions build our understanding of Haven Academy and what it has accomplished, allow us to distill the specific factors that enable that success, and begin to quantify the ways in which these results are unique for children in the child welfare system. Ultimately, this will help us identify the lessons that Haven can bring to the education and child welfare communities.

## Methodology

This report was written based on interviews with current and former Haven staff, Board members, and external experts; review of internal Haven documents and training materials, including materials developed by LeveragED Foundation; review of published articles and materials about Haven; analysis of proprietary Haven data; review and analysis of public data sets released by New York City, New York State, and local nonprofit organizations; and a robust research survey. There are some limitations to the data, both for Haven and for comparison groups, which is noted throughout. The report includes a set of questions that should be answered in the future with additional data collection or research.

## How is Haven’s student population unique?

By design, Haven Academy serves a highly vulnerable student population. Haven’s lottery prioritizes an even split between children in foster care, children receiving prevention services, and residents of the community of Mott Haven (abbreviated often as “general community”). Haven’s enrollment has grown steadily since 2008 as the school has built out its elementary and middle school grades and added Pre-K. Each cohort includes about 50 students (36 in Pre-K. Total enrollment was 481 students in 2021-22, but is closer to 500 students in a typical year. Most Haven students start in Pre-

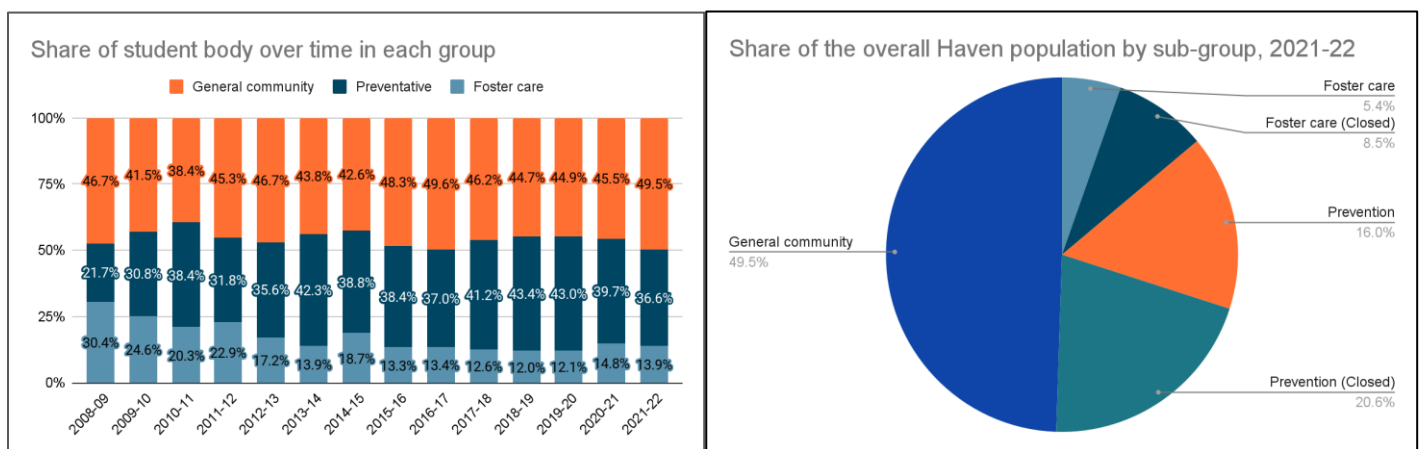
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<sup>6</sup> NYC Department of Education, *2020-2021 Diversity Report*. Published March 4, 2022. <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Education/2020-2021-Diversity-Report/8vk5-fzts>

<sup>7</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Test Results*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/test-results>

K or Kindergarten, though there are new additions to each cohort annually as space permits. Unlike many other charter schools, Haven does backfill its enrollment; if a spot becomes vacant at the start of a new school year, or even mid-year, Haven will turn to its waitlist. The waitlist is organized by sub-group so that if a child welfare involved student leaves Haven, they are replaced by another child welfare involved student.

Though Haven does heavy targeting and recruitment, its student population has never perfectly matched the desired split of drawing one third of students from the three groups. The share of students involved in the child welfare system (foster care and prevention combined) has hovered just above 50% most years. Over time, the share of students in foster care has decreased, from 30.4% in 2008-09 to 13.9% in 2021-22. Haven counts children with open and closed foster care cases to be “foster care” students given they carry the trauma of their experience whether or not their case is active; the same logic is applied for prevention cases. Among Haven’s child welfare students, a majority of “foster care” kids have closed cases; the same is true for prevention students. In reality, in 2021-22, just 5.4% of the student body – 26 students – had active foster care cases.



The smaller-than-expected foster care numbers have a couple of potential explanations. First, Haven’s decrease in foster care students reflects a broader citywide trend as the foster care population continues to shrink. Over the past decade, the citywide foster care population decreased steadily from 14,561 children in 2011 to 7,639 children in 2021 – a 48% drop.<sup>8</sup> This is a fraction of the foster care census in earlier decades; in the 1990s, there were as many as 50,000 kids in care.<sup>9</sup> Citywide, 2,636 children from 0-18 entered foster care in 2021; 112 of those placements were in Mott Haven.<sup>10</sup> Comparatively, in 2008, the year that Haven opened, 7,093 children were placed in foster care, including 227 in Mott Haven.<sup>11</sup> Children enter foster care at a higher rate in Mott Haven than citywide and while the share of children in care in the neighborhood has decreased over the past decade, the decline has not been as significant as the citywide trend.

Children are also staying in foster care for shorter periods of time. The average length of stay in foster care has decreased in recent years; from 2017 to 2019, the number of kids remaining in care for more than two years dropped by 22%.<sup>12</sup> It is entirely plausible that a child who enters Haven’s lottery in April as a foster care child could be moved to

<sup>8</sup> Administration for Children’s Services, *FY 2021 Foster Care Strategic Blueprint*. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/FCStrategicBlueprintFY2021.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Elsen-Rooney, Michael. “NYC has fewer than 8000 kids in foster care, an all time low.” *New York Daily News*, Feb. 13, 2020. <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/ny-foster-care-numbers-drop-20200213-ptzmaeuxajf7fe3hwortdn7zzu-story.html>

<sup>10</sup> Administration for Children’s Services, *Foster Care Placements by Borough/CD of Origin, CY 2021*. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/PlacementsCY2021.pdf>

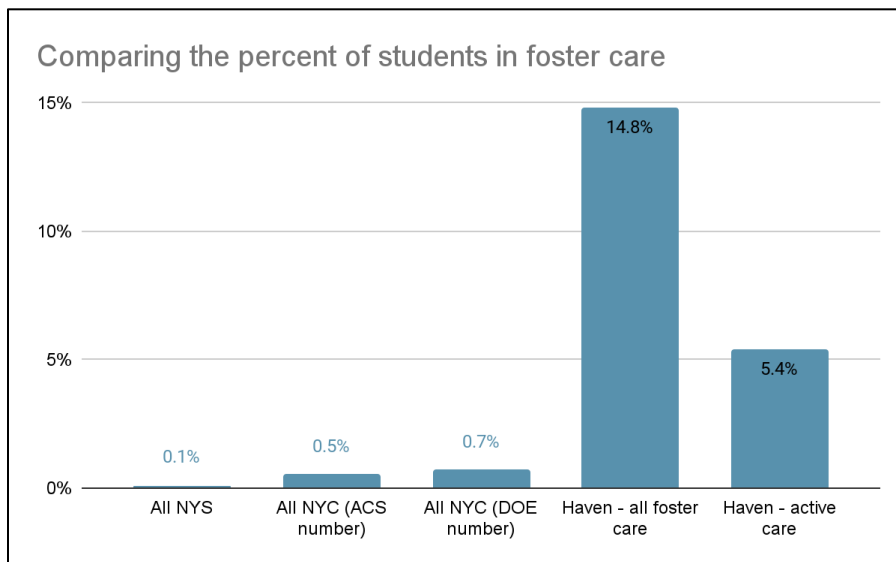
<sup>11</sup> Administration for Children’s Services, *Child Welfare Indicators Annual Report 2008*. [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/City\\_Council\\_Report\\_2008\\_Annual.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/City_Council_Report_2008_Annual.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Administration for Children’s Services, *FY 2021 Foster Care Strategic Blueprint*.

permanency by the time their school year begins in September. Keeping the percentages the same over time would therefore require a disruptive level of enrollment churn. Haven also enrolls a large number of siblings; it is possible, therefore, that when the oldest child in a family started at Haven, the children were all in care, but they have moved to permanency by the time a younger sibling starts. 39% of incoming Pre-K students who accepted a spot through the lottery for Pre-K for 2021-22 had an older sibling already enrolled at Haven.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, children enter foster care all the time – not necessarily at a moment when school enrollment makes sense. Increasing the number of children in active care at Haven can be a bit of a Catch-22: it would require recruiting students to Haven after they have entered care, which would trigger an educational disruption – exactly what Haven aims to avoid. Haven staff do regular outreach to foster care agencies and individual caseworkers to build relationships that will hopefully lead to school referrals. However, educational continuity is considered the best practice and is the preferred policy in NYC. It’s also one of the few metrics that the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) reports publicly for children in foster care in the public school system, and so case workers may face pressure to keep children in their preexisting school, even if Haven might be a better fit.

Still, Haven serves a disproportionately vulnerable population. New York State reported on foster care enrollment in public schools statewide for the first time in 2018-19, identifying 2,851 children statewide out of 2.59M total students in grades K-12, or about 0.1%.<sup>14</sup> Evidence suggests this to be a severe undercount. Based on ACS data, approximately 0.53% students in NYC were in foster care in 2020-21.<sup>15</sup> This is point-in-time data, so is also likely a slight undercount. In an April 2022 City Council hearing, the NYC Department of Education (DOE) identified that just over 7,000 children in city schools – about 0.7% of total enrolled students – were in care at some point in the 2020-21 school year.<sup>16</sup> Counting all Haven “foster care” students, the share of Haven students was more than 20 times greater than the city average. Even when considering only the share of Haven students in active care - 5.4% - this is still nearly 10 times the city average.



<sup>13</sup> This equates to 17 of the 44 children who accepted an offer to Pre-K at Haven through the lottery. 2 of the 17 siblings were in foster care and 6 were in prevention services.

<sup>14</sup> New York State Education Department, *NY State Public School Enrollment (2018-19)*. <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php>

<sup>15</sup> Administration for Children’s Services, *Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care, School Year 2020-2021*.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/LL142SY20202021.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> “Oversight - Foster Care Students in the DOE System.” NYC City Council Committee on Education remote hearing, April 20, 2022.

<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/DepartmentDetail.aspx?ID=6903&GUID=5D939F6A-A26A-456C-BF68-2FE3903139C8#>



The city does not publish school-level data on foster care students, making it challenging to know how much of an outlier Haven actually is, though evidence suggests there are no other elementary or middle schools with the same focus. There is only one DOE school that gives an admission priority for child welfare involved students; Brooklyn Arts and Science Elementary School in Crown Heights gives priority to English Language Learners and/or applicants who are in the child welfare system for 20% of seats.<sup>17</sup> Though no DOE high schools have an admissions priority for child welfare involved students, many of the city's transfer high schools serve disproportionately large numbers of foster care students. Transfer schools, which primarily serve students who are over-age, under-credited and at risk of not graduating, have more robust social services than typical high schools, which can be a big benefit to foster care students. Lastly, because children in foster care are more likely than their peers to be referred for special education services, there is a concentration of child welfare involved students in the city's more restrictive District 75 programs, though they are not explicitly or intentionally designed to serve this population. Children in foster care who attend District 75 programs are less likely to graduate than their foster care peers in other DOE schools.<sup>18</sup>

Among charter schools, there are a few others that emphasize support for students involved in the child welfare system. Broome Street Academy, a charter high school in Lower Manhattan, has a very explicit focus on children in foster care. Broome Street Academy operates in partnership with The Door, a large youth development organization, in a similar model to Haven and New York Foundling's partnership. Since Haven opened, at least two other schools have opened that try to prioritize students involved in the child welfare system – Children's Aid College Prep Charter School and Cardinal McCloskey Community Charter School. Both schools also grew out of large nonprofit organizations that are deeply connected to child welfare and other social services in New York City. Children involved in the child welfare system are not the sole focus of either school though and the numbers are relatively small.

There is limited public data on children whose families receive prevention services. For foster care students, ACS and DOE do a robust data match so that schools have information on which students are in care. There is no similar process for prevention services; students are not flagged in any DOE system and it is likely their school may have no information about the services they are receiving. No city or state agency reports on educational outcome measures for students receiving prevention services.

The nature and duration of prevention services vary, as do the factors that lead families to be referred for prevention services. Among NYC's 59 community districts, Mott Haven ranks fourth in the city for the proportion of children under 18 receiving prevention services.<sup>19</sup> The number of children in prevention services citywide was relatively consistent from 2013-2019, about 45,000 per year. There was a major dip from 2019 to 2020, attributable in part to service shifts during the onset of the pandemic.<sup>20</sup> In July 2020, ACS launched a redesigned prevention services program following a major reprocurement.<sup>21</sup> In 2021, 34,105 children citywide were served by prevention services, including 1,031 in Mott Haven.<sup>22</sup>

Haven has consistently had enrollment that is at least one-third students in prevention services. Like its foster care designation, Haven considers any child who has ever been served by prevention services as a "prevention" student, even

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<sup>17</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Diversity in Admissions*. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enrollment-help/meeting-student-needs/diversity-in-admissions/>

<sup>18</sup> Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). *Education Outcomes of NYC Youth in Foster Care*.

<sup>19</sup> Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track Online: The Status of New York City Children*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> Administration for Children's Services, "For The First Time In Over A Decade, Administration For Children's Services Launches Redesigned Prevention Services System To Better Support Children & Families In Every Neighborhood Across New York City." July 2, 2020. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/PressReleases/2020/ACSPreventionServices.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Administration for Children's Services, *Children\* Served by Child Welfare Prevention Services by Home Borough/CD, CY 2021*. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2021/PreventionServicesCY2021.pdf>

if the case is closed. In 2021-22, 16% of Haven students were in active receipt of prevention services and 20.6% of Haven students had a closed prevention case. The average family in NYC receives prevention services for 9.5 months, so it is likely a Haven student's status could change from one school year to the next.<sup>23</sup> Given the concentration of children receiving prevention services in Mott Haven, Haven could consider increasing its targeted number of prevention families given the challenges in filling all of the seats designated for children in foster care.

Haven was also designed to meet the needs of a very high poverty community. Over 95% of Haven students qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch, among the highest of any school in the city. This is a higher rate of poverty than the District 7 average (90.7%), which is already among the city's highest. It is meaningfully higher than the city average of 73% and the city's charter school average, which is 79.9%.<sup>24</sup>

Many Haven students live in temporary housing. The official federal definition of temporary housing is expansive and includes students who are living in homeless and domestic violence shelters, those who are doubled-up (i.e., living with another family in a space not meant for multiple families), and students living in a hotel, motel, or situation that is otherwise transitional in nature. In 2020-21, 7.9% of students in grades K-8 citywide lived in temporary housing. District 7 had among the highest rates in the city with 18.2% of students in grades K-8 living in temporary housing.<sup>25</sup> The share of Haven students living in temporary housing in 2020-21 was more than double the citywide rate and just above the District 7 rate at 20.6%. Housing instability has also increased for Haven students over the years. From 2013-14 to 2018-19, the number of housing transitions experienced by students increased by more than 3X. Over the same time period, enrollment increased by 1.7X. This trend is consistent with a growth in housing instability for families in the broader Mott Haven community over the past decade; District 7 saw a 66.9% increase in student homelessness from 2010-11 to 2016-17.<sup>26</sup>

Haven's other special populations are similar in size to the city average. The percentage of students at Haven who are English Language Learners (14%) exceeds the citywide rate of 13%, but is smaller than the District 7 average of 19%.<sup>27</sup> The difference between Haven and District 7 is largely because students involved in the child welfare system are overrepresented at Haven and are less likely to be ELLs; in 2018-19, 18% of Haven general community students were ELLs, versus 9% of child welfare involved students. Over the past few years, Haven has seen a small uptick in the number of students who are ELLs and newcomers to the country; in 2021-22, there were four, up from zero a few years prior.

The share of Haven students with a disability – 21.4% – is on par with the citywide average (20.7%) and is lower than the District 7 average (24.4%). Child welfare students at Haven are more likely to have an IEP than general community students. However, the percentage of child welfare students at Haven with an IEP (24.2%) is far lower than the city and state averages, which hover around 50% for children in foster care.<sup>28</sup> This is explained in more detail later in this report as part of the section on results for Haven students.

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<sup>23</sup> Administration for Children's Services, *ACS Quarterly Report on Prevention Services Utilization, January-March 2022*.  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2022/PreventiveServicesUtilizationQ1.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Demographic Snapshot 2016-17 to 2020-21*. [Demographic Snapshot 2016-17 to 2020-21 - Public \(Open external link\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> NYC Department of Education, *2020-2021 Diversity Report*.

<sup>26</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, *On The Map: The Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City 2018*. August 2018.  
<https://www.icphusa.org/reports/on-the-map-the-atlas-of-student-homelessness-in-new-york-city-2018-section-1/>

<sup>27</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Demographic Snapshot 2016-17 to 2020-21*.

<sup>28</sup> "Oversight - Foster Care Students in the DOE System." NYC City Council Committee on Education remote hearing, April 20, 2022.

# What makes the Haven model special?

Haven’s model has been built over time and is informed by research, best practice, the experience of its teachers, leaders, and Board members and advisors, as well as focused and intentional experimentation. Haven has clear values and a vision that guide everything from its operations to its instructional philosophy and social-emotional supports.

The primary attributes that make Haven so unique are its:

- Strong school culture
- Robust in-classroom and out-of-classroom staffing
- Leadership and staff continuity and experience
- Anchor partner, the Foundling

Each of these factors is explored in more detail below. This is not to say that these four elements alone comprise the totality of the Haven approach but these are the features that are most distinct and which distinguish Haven from other schools.

## Strong school culture

Haven’s culture is the most challenging of its attributes to quantify. However, there is distinct observable evidence of the culture and its strength. It is immediately felt when talking to any staff member and while walking through the halls. It has been repeatedly observed by visitors, journalists, and close advisors over the years. As several longtime leaders noted, “nothing at Haven happens by accident.”

As defined by the Harvard Business Review, organizational culture is characterized by four attributes: culture is shared through behaviors, values, assumptions, and normal; culture is pervasive, permeating the entire organization; culture is enduring over time, and; culture is implicit, often subliminal in nature.<sup>29</sup> Haven’s culture demonstrates all of these attributes: it is shared through values, common language, expected norms, and behaviors, which are made explicit throughout the organization; it is embodied by every staff member in the organization and it has strengthened over time, in large part because of staff and leadership continuity; and it is implicitly understood by every member of the Haven community, as demonstrated in survey results.

Haven’s values are included in staff and family onboarding and are consistently underscored in training. The school values are posted on the walls throughout the building and each space has its own posted expectations, whether it is a classroom, the hallway, or the bathrooms. As measured by the DOE’s annual survey of teachers, an overwhelming majority of Haven teachers (91%) believe that leadership has set a clear vision for the school.<sup>30</sup> This consistent language helps translate the vision and values into actionable behaviors. Teachers reinforce their classroom directions by pointing to the values. When students act out, discussion of their behavior is connected back to the values.

Five Guiding Principles of Haven Academy	
H - Honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ We tell the truth.</li><li>○ We trust our teammates mean no harm.</li></ul>

<sup>29</sup> Groysberg, Boris, Jeremiah Lee, Jesse Price and J. Yo-Jud Cheng, “The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture.” Harvard Business Review, Jan.-Feb.2018. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-leaders-guide-to-corporate-culture>

<sup>30</sup> NYC Department of Education, *School Survey Results, Survey Archives*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/school-quality/nyc-school-survey/survey-archives>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We take responsibility for our work, our actions and our words.</li> </ul>
<b>A</b> - Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We solve problems and seek creative solutions.</li> <li>○ We find pride and joy in our work</li> <li>○ We are focused in our actions and know that wasting time limits our learning.</li> </ul>
<b>V</b> - Value community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We respect ourselves and others.</li> <li>○ We anticipate and respond to the needs of our teammates.</li> <li>○ We are responsible for our environment and lead change when needed.</li> </ul>
<b>E</b> - Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We show gratitude to others.</li> <li>○ We are kind and patient.</li> <li>○ We care about the feelings of our teammates.</li> </ul>
<b>N</b> - Never give up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We work hard every day, in everything we set out to do.</li> <li>○ We have courage to try new things &amp; give ourselves time to learn to do them well.</li> <li>○ We persevere through challenges.</li> </ul>

Haven’s culture is deeply responsive to the trauma its student population has faced. Many public schools are ignorant or indifferent to the specific experiences of children in the child welfare system. This is not out of malice – for most schools, this is a topic that staff are not trained on and have little exposure to. Advocates in New York City have found that many schools may unintentionally violate the rights of parents and students in foster care because they lack the specific knowledge about how to navigate the system. Designated liaisons in most schools receive no more than a few minutes of information on foster care each year as part of annual compliance training. They have limited understanding of what families may be experiencing.<sup>31</sup> For Haven staff, this is a huge focus from day one. One of the first modules in their onboarding focuses on attachment theory and the impacts of trauma on young children. Haven staff are explicitly taught about the child welfare system; they have exposure to staff from child welfare agencies and learn about the processes and procedures of the child welfare system. From this training and exposure, Haven staff enter this classroom with a different mindset and approach than teachers in most schools. This makes them more responsive to children in the child welfare system, certainly, but also benefits children who have faced any kind of trauma.

Evidence of the trauma-based approach comes through in big and small ways. Haven staff do a comprehensive social history intake with new students and look for information that will help them support students, covering everything from significant issues like which adults can engage with the child to the more minute but also important details. For example, a child who started at Haven had had a very traumatic removal that involved the police and was triggered by any sort of siren or alarm; staff knew to provide extra support to this child during fire drills. In many schools, if a student makes a statement of self-harm, the automatic response is a 911 call. Haven staff have the tools and capacity to first do an assessment, understand the risk, and then determine the next step, which could include a 911 call if absolutely necessary. This can help avoid retraumatizing a child unnecessarily. Haven’s self-harm protocols are one of the tools that staff have worked to codify and share with other schools.

When new teachers start at Haven, they participate in a two-week Summer Institute and all materials for their onboarding are posted in a virtual portal. Both the institute and the portal emphasize the Haven values and focus deeply on school culture and social-emotional responsiveness. On the portal, Haven has defined its approach as a “tight/loose continuum,” a construct that is built around the students that it serves. “A core principle of the Haven model is building systems that are both tight— structured and predictable— and loose— responsive and based on student choice. ... For a

<sup>31</sup> Advocates for Children of New York, *Building a Network of Support: The Case for a DOE Office for Students in Foster Care*.

child who has been exposed to trauma, or who has experienced the trauma of displacement in the child welfare system, the combination of stability in a nurturing environment with a child's own sense of control leads to a feeling of safety in the Haven environment."<sup>32</sup> Haven's willingness to accommodate the individual needs of its students is a big part of what makes the school unique. Where most schools would try to adapt kids to meet the school culture and philosophy, Haven works to honor who kids are and adapt the environment to what they need.

The "tight/loose" approach is fundamentally different from many other charter schools, many of which were founded with a focus on structure and order above all else. Haven does not remove students whose behavior poses a challenge. Instead, large portions of the student body have individualized behavior plans with specific strategies in place to help them succeed. This can include strategies like giving a student space to be in a "cozy corner" rather than at their desk, providing counseling above and beyond what is required, and allowing the student to take breaks during the day.

Haven has developed a unique and strong approach to social-emotional support over time, built upon elements of different frameworks. Since day one, many elements of a responsive classroom have been in place. Teachers prioritize routines, like morning meetings, which have become an ingrained part of the school culture. Many Haven staff and leaders pinpoint the introduction of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system (also known as PBIS) in 2013-14 to be pivotal to the evolution of Haven's culture. Other practices, like restorative circles, have been added into the model over time. To help students label and regulate their emotions, Haven implemented the RULER curriculum several years ago. Lastly, long before it was a trendy thing to do, Haven used assessments to measure students' social-emotional growth. Taken on their own, none of these protocols or practices are unique; what is special is the way that Haven has knitted together elements of these different practices and trained teachers to implement this philosophy. Because it does not just come out of a neat box, the success of this evolved model speaks to the longevity of Haven staff and to the hiring process for new staff, which specifically screens for emotional intelligence and empathy. The homegrown approach can make it harder to pinpoint what exactly about Haven's model works and could make replication more challenging, though there are some core tenets that others could look to. In more recent years, Haven has worked with LeveragED to document and codify its approach.

Haven's instructional approach is less ingrained in the school culture and is not as highly customized. The school has changed curriculum many times over the years, motivated by new trends in education (i.e., an increasing emphasis on phonics) and by the needs of Haven students. In more recent years, Haven has gravitated toward more culturally-responsive curriculum and materials, looking for ways to ensure that its students are represented in texts. Haven has resisted placing a strong emphasis on state tests, which differentiates the culture from many other charter schools.

Haven has placed more emphasis on equity in recent years. This came into focus for Haven ahead of some of the national and local trends for similarly-minded schools, but was not necessarily ingrained in the culture from the start. To date, this has meant shifts in curriculum and materials, updated hiring practices, mandated staff training and optional professional learning communities, and more explicit discussion about race with students, staff, and families. This will be something to continue monitoring and assessing in future years.

## Robust in-classroom and out-of-classroom staffing

The most quantifiable difference between Haven and other schools is the level of staffing that Haven maintains. Most notable are Haven's commitment to placing two teachers in every classroom and its unusually low student-to-social worker ratio. Additionally, Haven has made a series of strategic choices about staffing based on years of experience and

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<sup>32</sup> Haven Academy Portal, <https://sites.google.com/havenacademy.org/mha-onboarding/home-page>

a willingness to try new structures.

Haven has two teachers in every classroom, both for general education and integrated co-teaching settings. This is an expensive model that would be hard for many schools to replicate; it quite literally doubles the cost of instructional staff for general education classrooms. For Haven, this strategic choice supports more personalized instruction for students and allows for more differentiated expertise among teachers. Haven teachers employ a variety of instructional methods depending on the needs of their class, allowing for constant small grouping and differentiation in response to data. Some Haven teachers trade off teaching; others take a more intentional co-teaching approach. The latter allows Haven students to learn in much smaller cohorts.

Though research on class size is somewhat mixed, one of the few authoritative studies found a measurable difference in outcomes and engagement when elementary school students were in unusually small classes (13-17 students) versus the typical class of 22-25 students.<sup>33</sup> A study conducted in New York City, found that students benefited from smaller class sizes, but benefits were reduced because creating smaller classes often required hiring new, inexperienced teachers.<sup>34</sup> Haven may be better positioned to reap the benefits of smaller learning cohorts because the majority of its teachers have deep experience.

Given the number of students with behavioral challenges at Haven, this staffing model also ensures more time on task for students. It is impossible to quantify the number of instructional minutes that are preserved for students because of co-teaching, but it is immediately apparent in a classroom visit. Picture a second grade classroom: students are transitioning between learning activities when one student places his head down and starts to violently kick his feet against the table. In a typical classroom in another school, the teacher would need to take time away from the rest of the class to check in on this student and assess what kind of intervention might be needed; this would cause the whole class to divert their attention, and depending on the nature of the outburst, could lead to a prolonged distraction from instruction. There might be another staff member who could come in to support, but not necessarily; most schools do not have the out-of-classroom support that Haven does. If this incident happened in a second-grade classroom at Haven, however, much of this disruption could be avoided; one teacher could continue to lead the full class in instruction while the other checked in with the student having the outburst. If the teacher was unable to calm the child down and diffuse the incident, she could easily summon support from an out-of-classroom staff member through a quick message on her phone.

Haven has been able to adapt its classroom staffing on an as-needed basis. A few years ago, one cohort was split into three sections, rather than the typical two, because of an unusually high volume of behavioral issues. Prior to COVID-19, grades 3, 4 and 5 were all departmentalized, meaning that students moved between teachers and classrooms for English and math, similar to how they would in middle school. Since the pandemic, the school has shifted away from a departmentalization model in third grade to create more support for the younger students. The large number of instructional staff make shifts like this possible.

Complementing the classroom staff, Haven's robust out-of-classroom staffing allows for wide ranging social-emotional support for students and teachers. In District 7 elementary schools, the average student-to-social worker ratio is 371 to 1; including all social worker and guidance counselor staff, the ratio is 186 to 1. In middle school, that drops to 149 to 1,

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<sup>33</sup> Barnum, Matt. "Does class size really matter? A Chalkbeat look at the research." Chalkbeat, June 10, 2022.

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/6/10/23162544/class-size-research>

<sup>34</sup> Zimmerman, Matt. "NYC class size limits could boost learning — but in practice, they often don't. A new study explains why." Chalkbeat, July 26, 2017. <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2017/7/26/21100717/nyc-class-size-limits-could-boost-learning-but-in-practice-they-often-don-t-a-new-study-explains-why>

or 64 to 1 including guidance counselors.<sup>35</sup> In 2021-22, Haven had four full-time social workers, two social work supervisors, a middle school guidance counselor, eight social work interns, and five behavior specialists (or restorative justice specialists, as they are known in middle school). That is a staff of 20 people focused on social-emotional support for a student body of 481, or a ratio of one staff member to every 24 students.

<b>Social emotional team staffing model, 2021-22</b>					
<b>Role</b>	<b>Pre-K and K</b>	<b>Grades 1-2</b>	<b>Grades 3-5</b>	<b>Grades 6-8</b>	<b>Total</b>
Full-time social workers	1	1	1	1	<b>4</b>
Social work supervisors	1		1		<b>2</b>
Social work interns	4		2	2	<b>8</b>
Guidance counselors	-	-	-	1 (for 8th grade)	<b>1</b>
Behavior and data specialists (also known as restorative justice specialists)	2		1	2	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>					<b>20</b>

Haven’s social-emotional team is able to provide push-in classroom lessons for all students, individual and group counseling, and crisis intervention. Social workers serve as a link between Haven and the child welfare system for children in care. These are all typical services for school social workers, though Haven is able to provide more breadth and depth given the staffing numbers. In its early years, Haven assigned distinct responsibilities to each of its social workers (i.e., one social worker handled all crisis counseling) and all social workers were assigned to support the full school. However, as the school grew, Haven made an important pivot and assigned social workers, social work interns, and behavioral specialists to specific grade bands. This has allowed staff to form deeper relationships with students, families, and teachers, rather than just focus on kids actively in crisis. Haven is also unique in keeping clinical social work supervisors on staff; this ensures that social work staff have on-site professional development, coaching, and support, which is meaningful given the level of trauma they encounter on a day-to-day basis.

In most New York City schools, social workers are only able to provide mandated counseling – counseling for students whose IEPs require it – and occasional crisis consulting. Students might otherwise sit on a waiting list for counseling services or potentially receive an outside referral. At Haven, as many as 178 students received counseling in 2018-19, less than a quarter of whom were mandated to receive counseling. The remainder were recommended by a Haven staff member, family member, or even the student themselves for additional support. About 130 of the students who received counseling were involved in the child welfare system; this accounts for just over half of all students involved in the child welfare system. In some cases, Haven social workers support the entire family, meeting regularly with a parent or guardian in addition to a student.

For children involved in the child welfare system, Haven social workers are closely connected to agency and ACS caseworkers. Haven staff have more in-depth knowledge of how the child welfare system works than a typical school

<sup>35</sup> NYC Department of Education, *DOE Guidance Counselor Reporting*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/government-reports/guidance-counselor-reporting>

social worker, and so they are better equipped to be good advocates for what children need. Their relatively small caseloads mean they are able to follow up frequently, participate in placement preservation conversations and other consequential meetings, and build deep relationships that ultimately benefit the students in care. Haven has also put documentation requirements in place that align well to what caseworkers need. Haven has had anecdotal success in pushing for more supportive placement options for its students.

Throughout the years, Haven has employed a robust leadership team and other out-of-classroom coaches, including a director of programs for each grade band, separate assistant principals and principals for elementary and middle school, and professional development coaches. This enables more comprehensive on-the-job training for teachers. It is not uncommon to see adults in the back of classrooms, offering real-time coaching. All Haven staff, regardless of their role, are expected to support instruction and social-emotional development. This manifests in many different ways. For example, during small group phonics instruction in the younger grades, other staff members in addition to the two classroom teachers – anyone from a member of the technology team to an assistant principal – might take a small group. To take another example, if a child has a special relationship with the PE teacher, the PE teacher may be called in when that child is in crisis rather than just send them to the designated person. During arrival and dismissal every day, there are an “overwhelming” number of adults present, as one staff member put it, meaning there are more people to engage with families and collect anecdotal information that may support how Haven works with students.

Haven has made nuanced staffing decisions over the years that further support its specific student population. For example, in grades Pre-K through 2, teachers stay with their class during lunch and recess. In typical schools, this would be a prep period for teachers. However, Haven determined that students were less likely to have behavioral incidents at lunch and recess with their teachers present; reducing incidents during these periods has a positive carry-over effect for the rest of the day. To ensure teachers have sufficient prep, students in Pre-K through 2 have an additional special period each day. Though this means they have less instructional time than other Haven students, they still have as much instructional time as their peers in other schools given Haven’s longer school day. Many of Haven’s creative staffing choices would not be replicable in a traditional public school given contractual requirements.

Haven’s robust staffing model does lead to some pain points. Particularly for out-of-classroom staff, several people cited a lack of role clarity. This was exacerbated during the onset of the pandemic when everyone jumped in to help however they could. This can create some tensions though, and staff would benefit from more defined job descriptions. The lines can be especially blurry among members of the social-emotional team. Additionally, for classroom teachers, the availability of such robust, dedicated social-emotional support can become a crutch; teachers are quick to seek support for student incidents, even if they might have the skills to address the incident themselves. Anecdotally, staff shared that this tendency becomes greater throughout the school year as teachers become further and further removed from the training they received over the summer. More than one staff member suggested this pattern could be disrupted by holding more frequent teacher training on behavior throughout the year.

To make its staffing model possible, Haven has opted to dedicate a large part of its budget toward staff. Haven spends slightly more of its budget on salaries than other schools. In recent years, about 60% of Haven’s budget has gone to staff salaries. By comparison, Broome Street Academy, the other charter school in the city focused on students in the child welfare system, spent about 55% of its budget on staff salaries.<sup>36</sup> Nearby district schools in the South Bronx spent about

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<sup>36</sup> Broome Street Academy, *Compliance Reports*. <https://broomestreetacademy.org/compliance/>

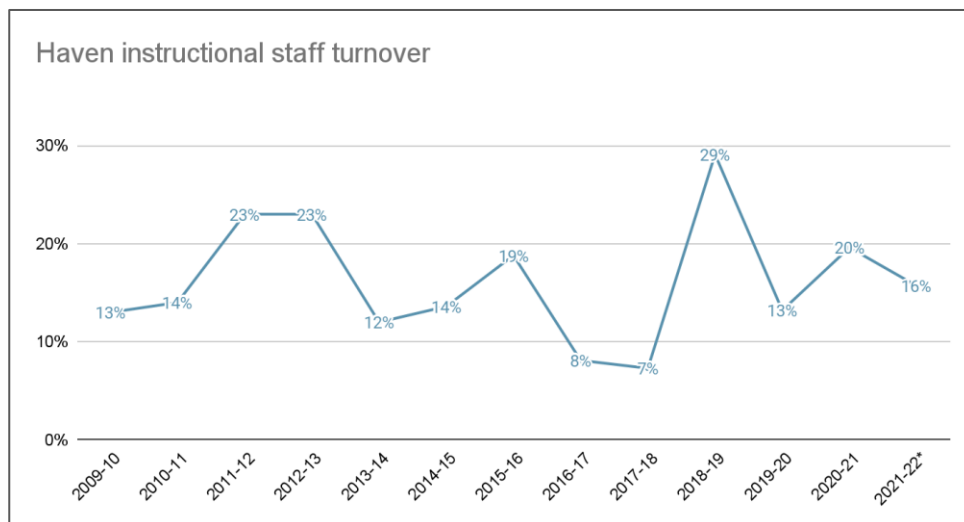


51% of their budget on staff salaries.<sup>37</sup> District schools do have to spend much more on the city’s pension and benefits system though, so a greater portion of their budget is actually locked up in staff cost – even if they have fewer people. Haven’s spend on administration is much lower than other schools.

## Leadership and staff continuity and experience

Haven has remarkable continuity among its staff and leaders. This reinforces the strong school culture and supports deep relationship building with families. From 2011 to 2022, Haven saw an average of 16% of its instructional staff turn over annually. Annual teacher turnover ranged from 7-29%.<sup>38</sup> The 29% turnover rate in 2019 was an outlier and coincided with a major leadership change in the middle school; no more than 23% of staff had turned over in any other year. In Haven’s earlier years, the staff was much smaller, so a single staff departure represents several percentage points.

Historically, charter schools in NYC have had higher rates of teacher turnover than district schools.<sup>39</sup> According to a 2012 report from the New York City Charter Center, average teacher turnover at NYC charters ranged from 26-33% compared to 13-16% at traditional public schools.<sup>40</sup> Haven’s turnover rate is on the low end for charter schools; in most years, it is more on par with a traditional city public school.



Of the 103 staff members who left Haven between 2018 and present, including instructional staff, non-instructional staff, and leadership, just 20 staff members (19%) were asked to leave. The other 81% left for a variety of reasons; the most common were that staff found a new job, resigned for personal reasons, returned to school, or relocated. Of the 83 staff members who left of their own choosing, Haven would have liked to retain 49 of them.

Haven’s staff have generally high satisfaction with the school. In 2021, 97% of Haven teachers responded to the DOE

<sup>37</sup> In 2017-18, the two closest district elementary schools (07X043, 07X049) spent 51.3% and 51.4% of their budgets on salaries, respectively. Source: NYC Department of Education, *School Based Expenditure Reports*.

[https://www.nycenet.edu/offices/d\\_chanc\\_oper/budget/dbor/sber/FY2018/FY2018\\_Default.aspx](https://www.nycenet.edu/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/sber/FY2018/FY2018_Default.aspx)

<sup>38</sup> Data for 2021-22 is through March; data for all other school years reflects the full year.

<sup>39</sup> Zelon, Helen. “Why Charter Schools Have High Teacher Turnover.” City Limits, August 20, 2014. <https://citylimits.org/2014/08/20/why-charter-schools-have-high-teacher-turnover>

<sup>40</sup> NYC Charter School Center, *The State of the NYC Charter School Sector 2012*. 2012. <http://c4258751.r51.cf2.rackcdn.com/state-of-the-sector-2012.pdf>

school survey that they “look forward to each working day at this school,” as compared to 90% of all NYC teachers.<sup>41</sup> Haven leadership has prided itself on creating a “people-centered organization.” In conversations, Haven staff identified several factors that likely contributed to high satisfaction and low turnover among their colleagues:

- **Confidence in leadership:** Haven staff think highly of leadership and have confidence that leadership trusts them to do their work well. Survey responses from teachers demonstrate that more teachers at Haven feel this way than at the average NYC school. Staff also feel more comfortable sharing worries or concerns with leadership than staff at other schools, trust that the leadership will do what they say, and believe that leadership prioritizes the needs of children ahead of personal interests.
- **On-the-job training:** Haven staff have access to robust on-the-job training and support with a steady presence of coaches and mentors, thanks to Haven’s robust out-of-classroom and leadership staffing. Professional development for staff is prioritized within the schedule; students start their day 90 minutes later on Friday mornings and teachers use that window for training and planning together.
- **Behavioral supports:** Haven staff have more support and are less overburdened than their peers in other high-poverty schools. 100% of Haven teachers responded to the DOE school survey that all or most teachers have access to school-based supports to assist in behavioral and emotional escalations, compared to 87% of all NYC teachers.<sup>42</sup>
- **Buy-in to the model:** Haven’s unique culture is a huge asset. Survey results indicate that an overwhelming majority of Haven teachers believe in the model and believe it to be effective. 97% of teachers responded that all or nearly all adults in the school teach students how to advocate for themselves and recognize disruptive behavior as “social-emotional learning opportunities.”<sup>43</sup> Haven’s hiring process prioritizes candidates who display empathy and have the right mindset to serve Haven students. This likely predisposes new staff to have a higher degree of buy-in.
- **Growth opportunity:** Many members of Haven’s leadership team started as classroom teachers. Staff cited the opportunities they have had over time to take on new responsibilities or shift their role to try new challenges.
- **Compensation:** Compensation for Haven teachers is slightly better than the UFT contract rates for NYC public school teachers. (On the other hand, public school teachers have access to a city pension.)
- **Certification flexibility:** Like other charter schools, Haven is able to hire up to 30% of its teachers without certification. This gives Haven more flexibility to hire teachers from out of state or from other charter schools who might otherwise not be able to teach in NYC. Public schools have far less flexibility with regard to certification. In 2021-22, 13 of Haven’s 44 instructional staff teaching core subjects (English, Math, Social Studies, and Science) were uncertified.
- **Schedule flexibility:** Staff at Haven are granted far more flexibility than teachers in other schools with regard to vacation time, ability to work remotely (job responsibilities permitting), and shifts in hours where needed. This is made possible by Haven’s overall staffing levels – there are more adults available to cover – and because Haven teachers are not unionized. Some flagged that this flexibility could sometimes be too adult-oriented though, benefiting Haven staff at the expense of what students might need.

Haven’s staff members are also extremely experienced; most teachers who come to Haven already have at least some teaching experience elsewhere. According to the NYC Charter Center, 38% of charter school teachers in NYC have been teaching for 6 years or longer.<sup>44</sup> In 2019-20, 73% of Haven’s teachers had been teaching for 6 years or longer. Of Haven’s

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<sup>41</sup> NYC Department of Education, *School Survey Results, Survey Archives*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> NYC Charter School Center, *NYC Charter School Teacher Snapshot*. May 2020. <https://nyccharterschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NYC-CS-Teachers-2021-22.pdf>

49 instructional staff members in 2019-20, only 2 were in their first year of teaching altogether. The staff collectively had an average of 8 years of teaching experience.

Haven has had remarkable consistency in its leadership. The founder and head of school, Jessica Nauiokas, has been in place since the school's founding in 2008. Jessica has been a tremendous driver of the school's model and culture and continues to be a critical part of all aspects of Haven's operations. Initially, Jessica served as the principal of the school. As the school grew, she hired assistant principals for each grade band and later, a principal for each of the lower and upper grades. Many members of the leadership team grew up within Haven, serving as teachers and in other administrative roles before taking on leadership positions. In 2021-22, 3 members of Haven's 7 person leadership team had been with the school for 14 years. Even with some leadership departures over the years, Haven has maintained strong institutional knowledge; the 2021-22 leadership team had an average of 7.4 years of experience at Haven.

Turnover among Haven's leadership team members has been remarkably low. From 2009 to 2021, there were no leadership changes in 10 out of 13 school years. The only major outlier was 2018-19; 3 of 5 leadership team members left, largely as part of a shift in the middle school leadership structure. This continuity is unusual among NYC charter schools, where principal turnover is double that of city public schools. As many as a quarter to a third of charter school principals leave each year.<sup>45</sup>

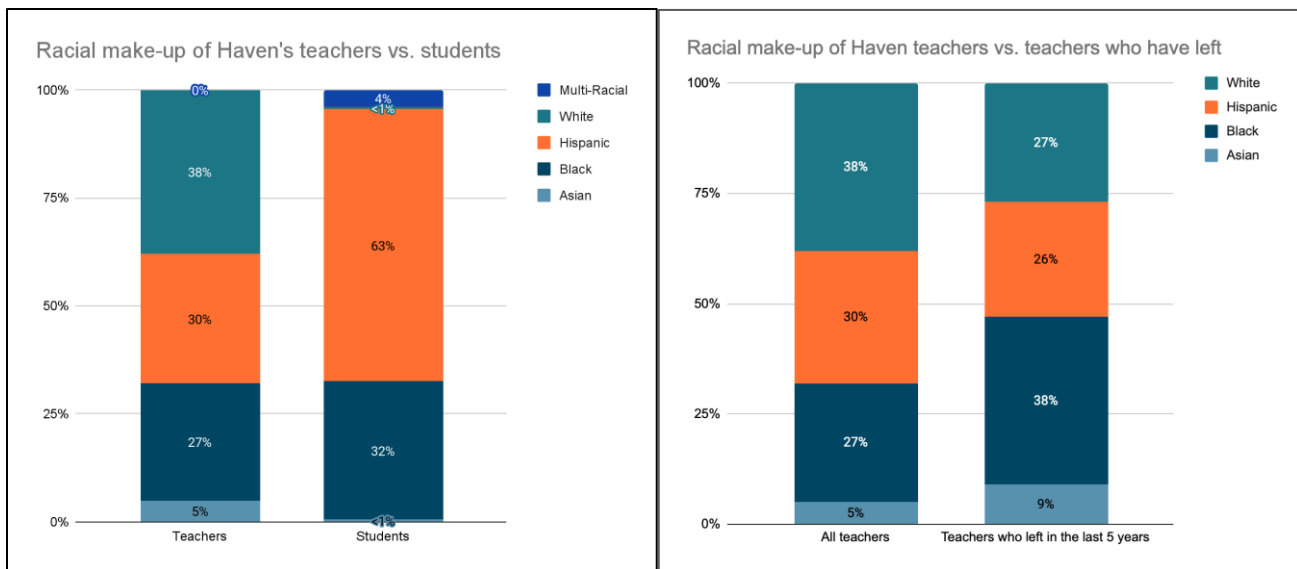
One staffing challenge that Haven does have, like many other urban schools, is that the staff look very different from the students they serve. Especially in the earlier years, white women made up a majority of Haven staff, though Haven has made significant progress since then. In 2021-22, 62% of instructional staff were people of color, versus 99% of the student body. Haven's workforce is more diverse than the city average (43% people of color) and the Bronx average (56% people of color).<sup>46</sup>

However, over the past five years, Black and Asian teachers were disproportionately likely to leave Haven; Black teachers make up 27% of the workforce, but made up 38% of departures. Black and Hispanic staff members were more likely to be asked to leave than white staff members; 19% of Black staff who left and 31% of Hispanic staff who left were asked to leave by Haven, versus 6% of white staff who left. Further research is required to understand what might be driving these disparities and whether it is rooted in bias, disparities in performance, or other factors.

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<sup>45</sup> Zimmerman, Alex. "New York City charters burn through principals faster than district schools, report finds." Chalkbeat, Nov. 19, 2018. <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2018/11/19/21106218/new-york-city-charters-burn-through-principals-faster-than-district-schools-report-finds>

<sup>46</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Report on School-Based Staff Demographics*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/government-reports/report-on-school-based-staff-demographics>



In more recent years, Haven has begun intentional conversations to address the need for greater staff diversity and has put new practices in place. Much of this work has been done in partnership with NYU’s MetroCenter. Haven has also applied to participate in other efforts to specifically address Black staff turnover rates.

## Anchor partner, the Foundling

Haven grew out of the New York Foundling and the Foundling has been a critical partner since the start. The benefits of this partnership are clear in a few ways: the role of Foundling staff and Board members on Haven’s board, who have provided valuable strategic direction; monetary resources, both from Foundling directly and as a result of Foundling’s fundraising power; the physical building where Haven operates, which the Foundling built from the ground up; and the influence of the Foundling’s approach to child welfare.

Many charter schools are founded in partnership with other organizations, but few relationships have the longevity and success of Haven and Foundling, according to James Merriman, the longtime leader of the NYC Charter Center.<sup>47</sup> In some examples, the partner becomes too involved in day-to-day school operations without any expertise on how to run a school. In other examples, the school’s growth outpaces the partner and the partner becomes subsumed by the school, such as with DREAM Charter and Harlem RBI. And yet in other examples, the partner and school ultimately face irreconcilable differences in approach and philosophy, which can be challenging when their operations are intertwined. For example, Boys and Girls Harbor, the nonprofit that helped to found Harbor Science and Arts Charter School, ultimately pushed the school out of its space, explaining that the two institutions had moved in different directions.<sup>48</sup> Haven and Foundling have avoided these pitfalls, largely a credit to the people involved – the founding principal, Jessica Nauiokas and Foundling’s CEO at the time, Bill Baccaglino, as well as Haven’s founding Board president, Trish Mulvaney, critical Haven Board members like Meghan Mackay, and others.

The idea for Haven came from the Foundling; Baccaglino brought the concept to the NYC Charter Center and was introduced to Nauiokas, who agreed to come on board as the founding school leader. Critically, Foundling paid for Nauiokas’ salary for nearly a year before the school opened, giving her and others significant time to plan. This kind of

<sup>47</sup> Interview with James Merriman, June 10, 2022

<sup>48</sup> Decker, Geoff. “Shifting course, East Harlem nonprofit evicts charter school.” Chalkbeat, Nov. 18, 2011.

<https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2011/11/18/21109742/shifting-course-east-harlem-nonprofit-evicts-charter-school>

planning time for a new charter school is considered best practice, but not always made possible.<sup>49</sup> The early years of Haven's operations involved some trial-and-error – not atypical for a new school with a new school leader, and particularly not unexpected in a school with such a complex student population. Haven's first charter renewals were rockier as a result, but Foundling continued to support the school through these early learning pains. This has also created some financial cushion because Haven's outside funding comes primarily from Foundling, who may have been more flexible over time than other outside funders may have been; in the early years, funding continued to flow even when the evidence of a successful model was not yet clear.

Foundling purchased the land where Haven operates today and developed the building to be fit for Haven's purposes. In the initial concept, Haven would occupy half of the building and Foundling would use the other half for its Bronx-based services. Haven was incubated in the District 7 elementary school across the street for two years before moving into its current building in 2010. Today, Foundling uses just one of the eight floors of the building and the rest is dedicated to Haven. This has allowed Haven to sidestep the intense politics around charter school building space in New York City. However, Haven has had to bear the heavy costs of operating in a private building. Only charter schools that opened after 2014 are eligible to receive public funding to subsidize the cost to operate in a private space. Haven's middle school technically meets this requirement, but the elementary program does not. Haven allocates its building costs in a strategic way across the elementary and middle school to ensure it can draw down on the available public funding.

The relationship between Haven and the Foundling has evolved over time. In the initial Haven model, part of the rationale for co-locating Haven with the Foundling was to allow Haven students to benefit from on-site caseworker and social worker support from the Foundling. Haven leadership quickly determined that Haven students needed dedicated social worker capacity; Foundling caseworkers were often out in the field and not necessarily available in the moments when they were most needed. As Haven expanded to middle school, the Foundling caseworkers moved to another space. However, there are still some Foundling services available on the fourth floor of Haven's building. Kids in care through Foundling may be able to take advantage of this service co-location.

In most academic years, there are just a small handful of students in care through the Foundling who are enrolled at Haven – typically no more than 5 or so. In earlier years, there were individuals at Foundling and Haven who had strong relationships with each other, which helped create an informal pipeline between the two organizations. With some staff turnover in recent years, combined with the impact of the pandemic, the relationship has not been as strong. There is room to grow and strengthen the enrollment pipeline. Both Haven and Foundling staff are making an effort now to bolster this relationship, coordinate on family outreach efforts, and consider other ways to bring Foundling families to Haven. When Foundling had caseworkers located in Haven's building, families might organically come into contact with the school. Now, staff are thinking about how to arrange proactive tours and to systematically target students who are entering Pre-K or Kindergarten.

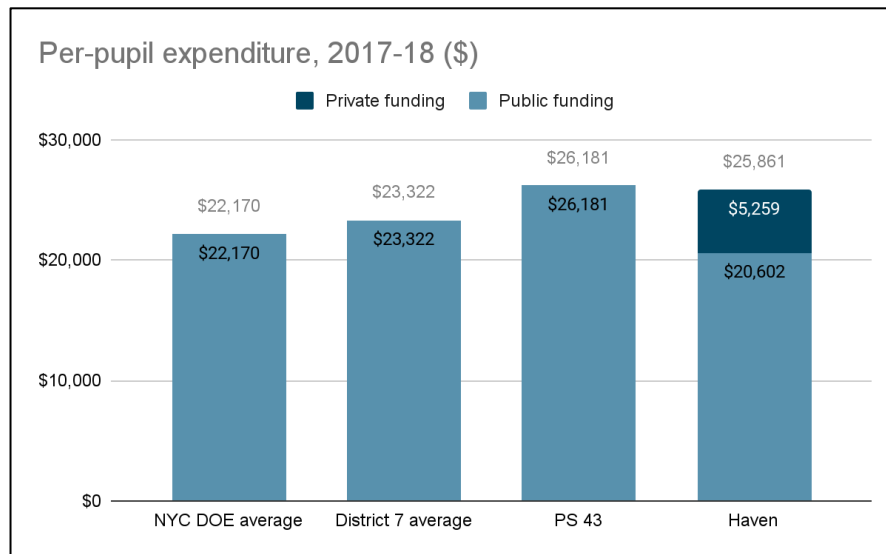
Throughout its history, Haven has benefited financially from the partnership with the Foundling. In an average year, about 80% of Haven's budget comes from public revenue sources; the other 20% comes from private contributions and grants. In 2019-20, about a quarter of the non-governmental revenue in Haven's budget came directly from the Foundling (5% of all funding). Including in-kind building-related contributions, that jumps to about 40% of private funding (8% of all funding). Much of the remaining private funds come from individuals and institutions in the Foundling's network and Haven benefits from the fundraising expertise and capacity at the Foundling. Haven's budget has far more private funding in it than most; a 2017 study of charter schools in NYC found that 98% of per-pupil funding

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<sup>49</sup> Cannata, Marisa, Grant Thomas, and Zaia Thombre. *Starting Strong: Best Practices in Starting a Charter School*. Vanderbilt Peabody School, October 2013. [https://my.vanderbilt.edu/marisacannata/files/2013/10/Starting\\_Strong\\_final.pdf](https://my.vanderbilt.edu/marisacannata/files/2013/10/Starting_Strong_final.pdf)

in charter schools came from public revenue sources.<sup>50</sup>

Charter schools in New York City have agitated for many years that their per-pupil funding is well below that of their public school counterparts. The city’s Independent Budget Office found in 2017 that there was a per-pupil deficit of 5.7% to 24.2% for charter schools as compared to district schools; facilities created the biggest variance among charters.<sup>51</sup> Though Haven has been able to make up much of the gap with private funding, the disparity is evident right outside Haven’s front door. P.S. 43 Jonas Bronck is immediately across the street from Haven and has very similar enrollment. In 2017-18, the most recent year the DOE published school-level budgets, P.S. 43 had a per-pupil spend of \$26,181.<sup>52</sup> By comparison, Haven’s per-student spend was \$25,013 in the same year. However, that includes both public and private resources. Relying only on Haven’s public revenue would have meant a per-student spend of \$19,705, or 21% below that of P.S. 43. So, while Haven does operate an expensive model by many measures, it does so within a total budget consistent with a typical public school.



That being said, Haven enjoys far more budgetary autonomy and flexibility than a traditional public school, which has allowed the school to invest its resources in exactly the way it sees fit.

## What are the results for Haven students?

It is clear that Haven operates a very different kind of school with a specifically targeted population. To measure whether this model has been successful, it is important to look both at Haven’s absolute performance as well as the performance specifically of its child welfare students. In the analyses that follow, wherever possible, Haven’s foster care students are isolated and compared to similar groups. In other analyses, all of Haven’s child welfare students (foster care and prevention services) are grouped together. Not all comparisons are perfectly apples-to-apples and the limitations are noted accordingly.

<sup>50</sup> Maloney, Larry D. and Patrick J. Wolf. *Charter School Funding: Inequity in New York City*. University of Arkansas, August 2017. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED580235.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office, “With State Formula for Charter School Funding Likely to Change, City Costs to Grow More Than Budgeted.” March 2017, <https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/with-state-formula-for-charter-school-funding-likely-to-change-city-costs-to-grow-more-than-budgeted-march-2017.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> NYC Department of Education, *School Based Expenditure Reports*.

It is also important to look at Haven's current performance in the context of its history. Many long-time staff and leaders have acknowledged that they underestimated at first the level of deficit that even a kindergartener would have when they entered Haven. Students came to Haven without basic language skills, without the social-emotional skills that would allow them to learn, and with significant trust issues related to the trauma they had experienced. The percentage of students with active foster care cases was much higher in Haven's first few years than today, which may have created additional challenges.

When Haven had its first cohort of 3rd grade students take state tests in 2010-2011, the results were a bit of an awakening and led to some shifts to bolster academic instruction. But for many years thereafter, Haven remained in expansion mode; that means that every year, Haven leaders and staff had to operate a fundamentally different school than the year before. Many schools struggle to reach any sort of equilibrium until this kind of expansion is complete. When asked when it was first clear that the Haven model was working, several people reflected that it was clear once the school had grown enough to have successive state test score data and other academic measures that showed a repeatable pattern of improvement within cohorts. For the elementary school, 2013-14 was the first year where Haven was not adding a new grade. From 2014 onward, the test scores in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade reflect that the school had gained more of its footing.

The challenges that come with operating while in expansion mode are especially important to keep in mind when looking at Haven's middle school. Haven's first year of 8th grade, 2019-20, was disrupted mid-year when students shifted to remote learning because of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, Haven had two years of test score data for 6th grade and just one for 7th grade. Though the middle school expansion was complete in 2020, the 2021-22 school year will be the first with test score data for a full middle school.

Expansion is not costless. Adding new grade bands created operational challenges, split the attention of key leaders and staff members, and put strain on Haven's physical infrastructure. To know that its expansions were worthwhile, Haven will need to see evidence that students benefited from spending additional years at the school versus if they had attended another school in the community. For Haven's Pre-K, this impact is already clear; students gained a measurable academic benefit by starting at Haven a year earlier. For middle school, there is some emerging evidence that students benefit from spending three more years at Haven; students see continued academic and social-emotional growth in grades 6-8 and students enroll in stronger-performing high schools than their peers. However, time and additional data are still needed to make this story more clear.

Because of the incredibly disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in New York City, it is challenging to make any comparisons between outcomes before and after 2020. Notably:

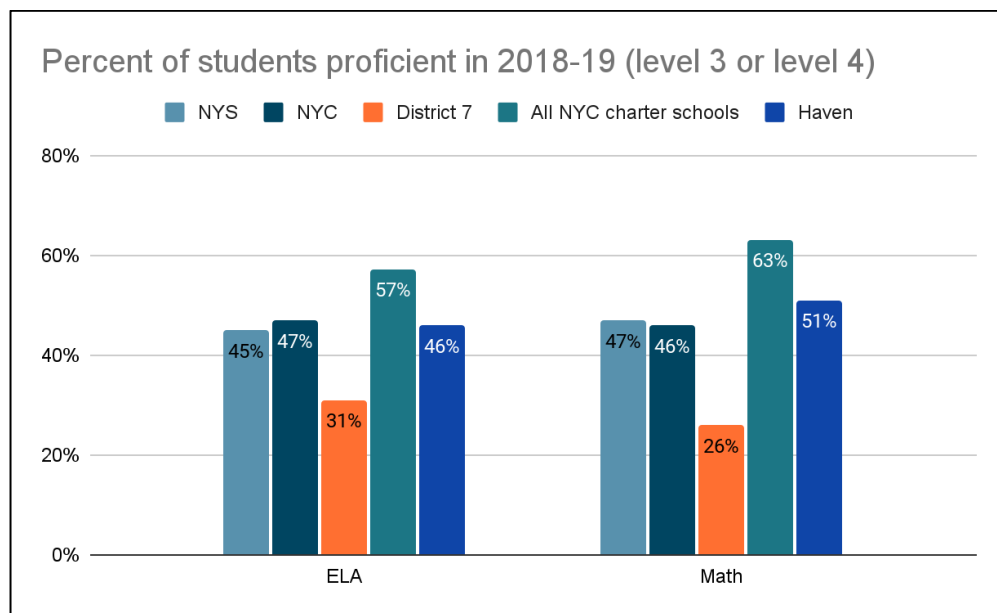
- New York State did not offer state tests in 2019-20 or 2020-21, so all analysis in this report was done using 2018-19 data. There is no test score data for Haven's 8th grade students, who would have taken tests for the first time in spring 2020.
- Though Haven collected attendance data during remote and hybrid schooling, it would not be an apples-to-apples comparison to look at attendance from 2019-20 and 2020-21 alongside prior years. Additionally, the comparison data for those years may not be fully valid as NYC DOE schools may have applied different rules for remote attendance than Haven.
- Given the trauma that students experienced during the pandemic – in addition to the challenges Haven students already faced – there may be challenges in examining behavior and other social-emotional data from those years as well.

The data we have now does not yet account for the impacts of COVID-19 and the learning loss that students may have experienced. State test scores from spring 2022 will give some information about this when they are released later in the year. One theory is that Haven may have done a better job than other schools at supporting students through the pandemic because of its wraparound model. This may be evident in post-pandemic outcome comparisons. However, it may take several years of data before any decisive conclusions can be drawn.

## State test scores

State test scores tell one part of the Haven data story. They do have some limitations - and should not be the sole or definitive measure of student achievement - but the scores do allow for natural comparisons between Haven and other schools. As one piece of the puzzle, they help us to understand how Haven’s performance compares, both for the entire school population, and particularly for student sub-groups.

On state ELA and math tests, Haven students outperformed the district, city, and state in the most recent year with available data, 2018-19. However, Haven lagged behind the charter school average.

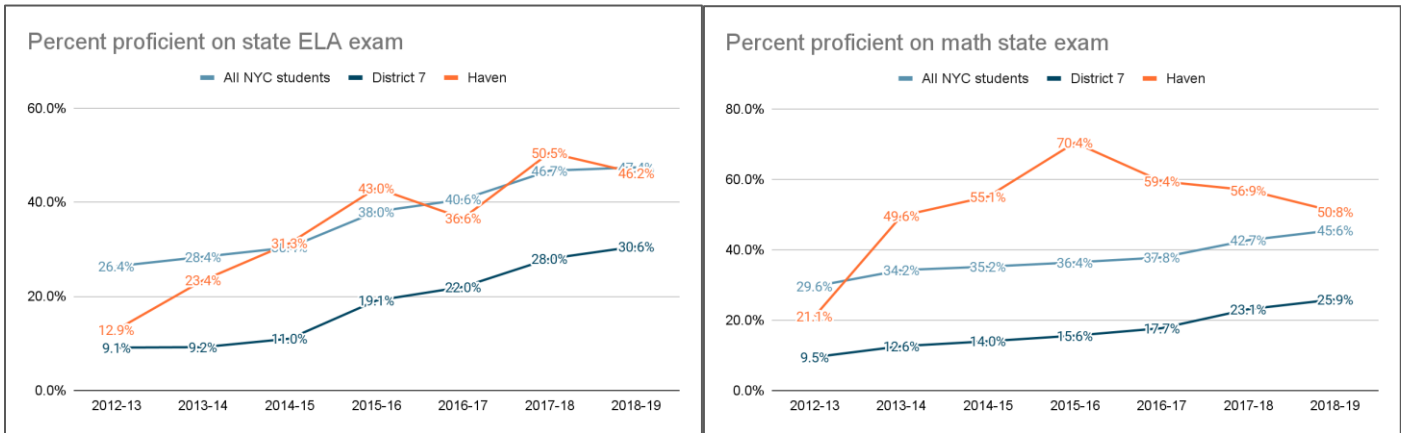


As noted above, test scores in Haven’s earliest years were much lower. Haven has since made tremendous progress with overall ELA proficiency nearly tripling from 2013 to present and math proficiency more than doubling. Over time, Haven has kept pace with city and state averages, and has significantly outperformed District 7. However, school-wide averages have seen a dip in more recent years as Haven added middle school grades. For many years, Haven far outperformed the city in math, though the gap is closing.

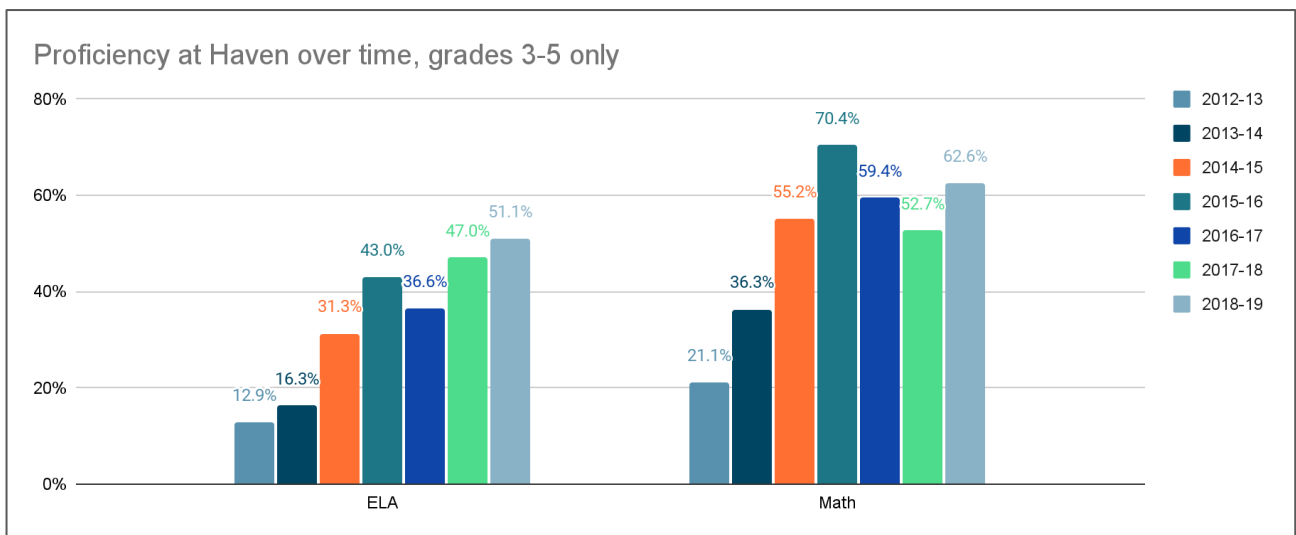
The charts below include the schoolwide average proficiency for Haven in any given year as compared to the city and district averages for all students in grades 3-8. However, when looking at the proficiency data longitudinally, it is important to bear in mind that the test has not been consistent in length or structure from year to year and so there are some limitations to our ability to interpret and make meaning of trends. As the city cautioned in its public reporting, “In 2018, NYSED rescaled the Math and ELA exams to account for a change in test administration from 3 days to 2 days.



Therefore, 2018 and 2019 results can be compared to each other but cannot be compared to prior years.”<sup>53</sup> Keeping this warning in mind, it can still be helpful to look at results over time to understand general directional progress.

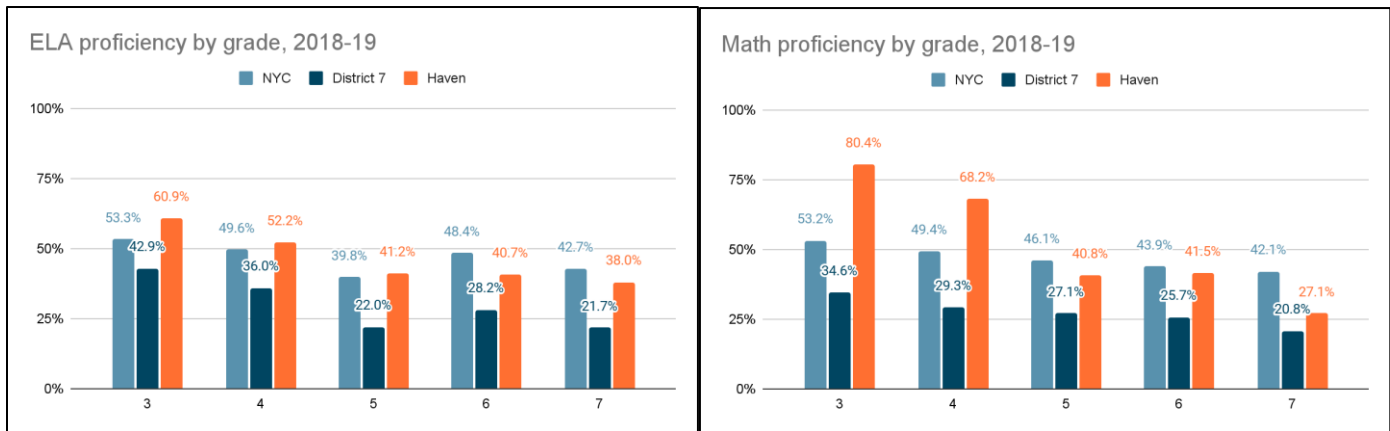


Looking at just the elementary grades, Haven students have shown steady progress in both ELA and math; proficiency rates in grades 3-5 more than tripled from 2013 to 2019 in both math and ELA. This reflects the longer time horizon that Haven has had to refine its approach in the early grades.



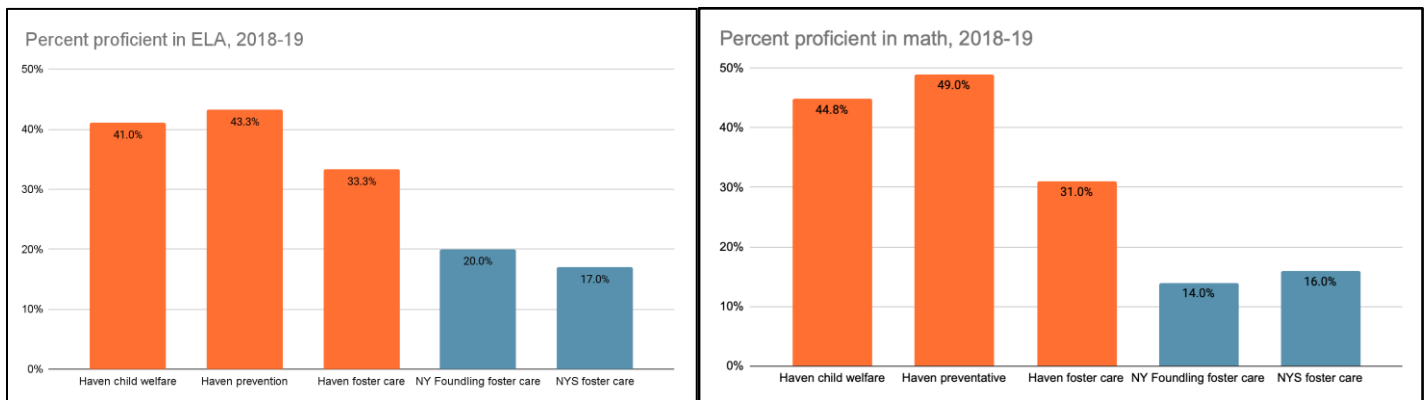
3rd grade math proficiency in particular has been a bright spot, reaching 80.4% in 2018-19 at Haven versus a citywide average of 53.2%. Looking at the data grade-by-grade confirms Haven’s stronger outcomes in the younger grades. In 2018-19, Haven students outperformed District 7 in every grade in both ELA and math. Haven students outperformed the city in ELA in grades 3-5, but lagged in middle school. Haven students outperformed the city in math by a significant amount in grades 3 and 4, but lagged in grades 5-7.

<sup>53</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Test Results*.



Students who start with Haven in younger grades and persist are most successful. Haven’s first cohort of Pre-K students outperformed their peers who did not attend Haven Pre-K on the 3rd grade state tests in 2018-19. Among the 35 students who attended Pre-K at Haven in 2014-15 and took the 3rd grade test in 2018-19, 71% were proficient in ELA and 92% were proficient in math – more than 20 percentage points higher than the 16 students who did not attend Pre-K at Haven.<sup>54</sup> This trend is consistent with the bump in test scores citywide among the first cohort of Pre-K for All students, though the scale of the difference was much greater for Haven students.

Haven’s proficiency rates for its most vulnerable students outperform comparison groups. There is limited data on how students involved in the child welfare system outside of Haven perform academically; however, the limited available information shows stronger outcomes at Haven than elsewhere. The ELA proficiency rate among Haven’s foster care students is more than 50% greater than the rate among kids in foster care with the Foundling who attend other charter schools or district schools. The state published foster care data for the first time in 2018-19, showing that Haven’s foster care students are nearly twice as likely to be proficient in ELA as the state average for children in foster care. The math proficiency rate among Haven’s foster care students is more than double the rate among Foundling foster care kids and the rate for all foster kids statewide. There is no available comparison data for Haven students who receive prevention services, though they also outperform the foster care comparison groups.



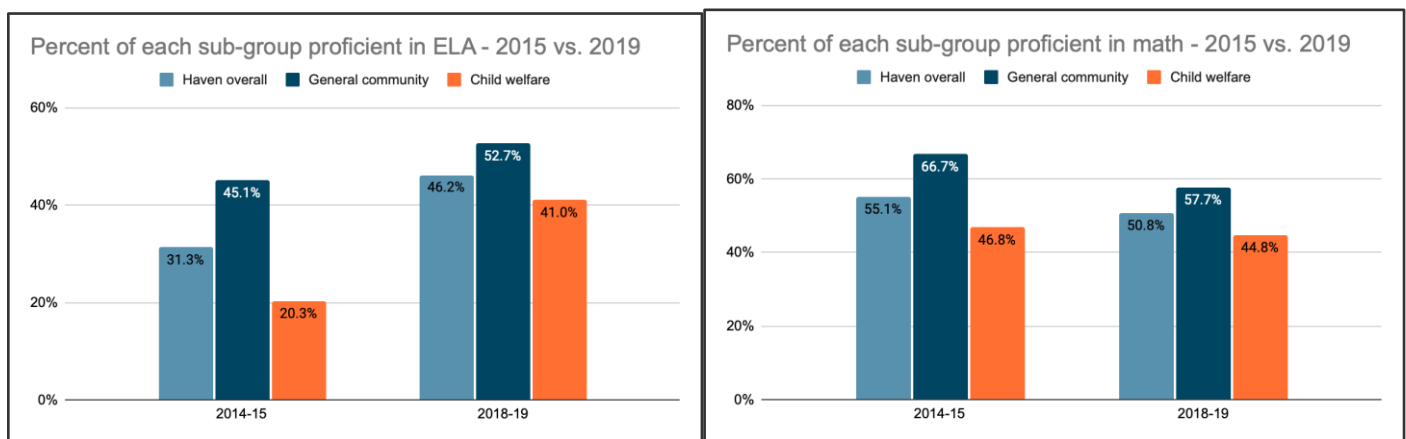
A longitudinal study of foster care students in NYC found that 8th grade ELA and math proficiency were among the strongest positive predictors of whether a student in care would graduate high school on time. Scoring a Level 4 in 8th grade math more than doubles the likelihood the child graduates versus if they score a Level 1.<sup>55</sup> 2022 will be the first

<sup>54</sup> Based on available data, we do not know whether the students who did not attend Pre-K at Haven did attend Pre-K somewhere else or whether they did not attend Pre-K at all.

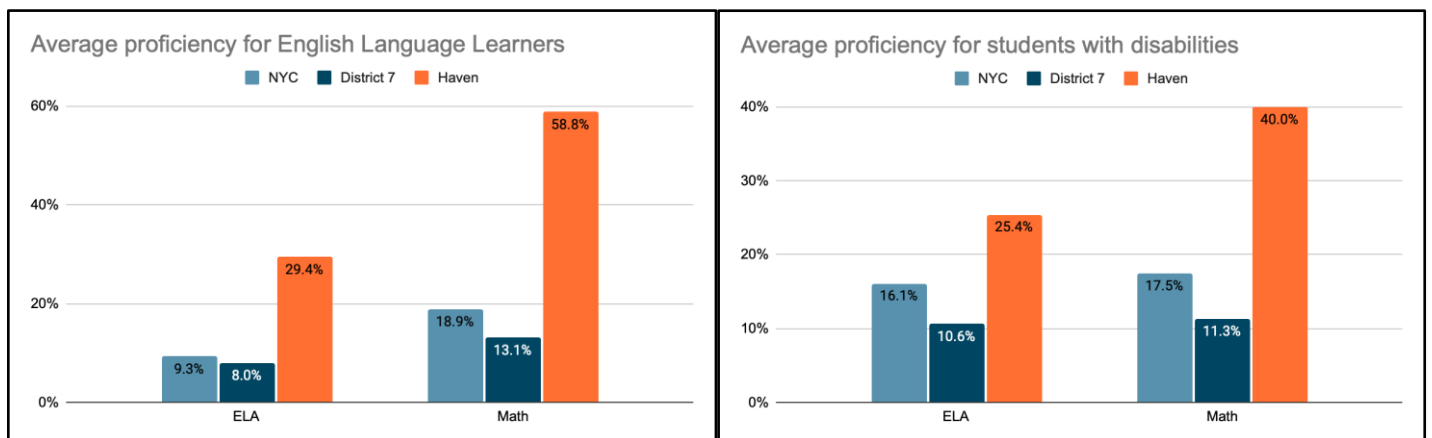
<sup>55</sup> Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). *Education Outcomes of NYC Youth in Foster Care*.

year that Haven has test score data for 8th grade students; this will be an important measure to watch in the future.

Haven has closed the gap between general community and child welfare students over the years. ELA proficiency among children involved in the child welfare system (foster care and prevention combined) more than doubled from 2015 to 2019; overall ELA proficiency grew over the same time period, but at a slower rate. Overall math proficiency has not changed significantly over this same time period, though cohort-specific gains among general community students have been mirrored by the child welfare population. A 2018 study of children in Michigan found that those who had been through a child protective services investigation at a young age scored approximately half a standard deviation below their peers on reading and math.<sup>56</sup> By comparison, the gap for Haven students is much more narrow; in ELA, the average numeric score for a child welfare student was four points below a general community student (599 versus 603), and in math, the difference was just one point (603 versus 604). This gap is much smaller than the half a standard deviation found in Michigan. This suggests that Haven may be doing a better-than-average job at closing the gap between its students.



Lastly, English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities also do disproportionately well at Haven. ELLs and students with IEPs at Haven significantly outperform their peers citywide and in District 7 in both ELA and math. Though this is a positive reflection on Haven, it is also in part a reflection of how dismal proficiency rates are for these student groups citywide. Haven has had some success at narrowing the gap, though; Haven had a smaller gap between ELLs and non-ELLs and between students with disabilities and general education students than the citywide averages.



<sup>56</sup> Ryan, J. P., Jacob, B. A., Gross, M., Perron, B. E., Moore, A., & Ferguson, S, "Early Exposure to Child Maltreatment and Academic Outcomes."

Haven has shown tremendous growth and outsized performance among vulnerable students. However, Haven's absolute proficiency rates are still not that high objectively, hovering near 50%. Proficiency at Haven falls below many other charter schools, including those that serve a high poverty population. Of the 192 charter schools with test score data in 2018-19, Haven ranks 131st -- in the bottom half -- for ELA proficiency. Of the 191 charter schools with math test score data in 2018-19, Haven ranks 123rd -- also in the bottom half -- for math proficiency. When compared to only other charters with a poverty rate greater than 90%, Haven is squarely in the middle: 14th of 34 schools in both ELA and math proficiency.

Haven has made different policy choices than many other charter schools, particularly around enrollment, that may account for some of this difference. Many other charter schools do not accept students outside of primary entry years. Haven has a strict policy against expulsion and serves students with significant behavioral challenges, which sets it apart. Haven has historically enrolled children who have left other charter schools. Additionally, though many other charter schools serve a high-poverty population, there is a difference between being poor and being poor and under the surveillance of ACS; other schools do not necessarily serve a student body that has experienced the same level of trauma as Haven students. Still, there may be other factors contributing to Haven's middling performance as compared to other charters, including differences in instructional approach.

## Other key metrics

Haven performs well in other key metrics, particularly when looking at outcomes for children involved in the child welfare system. Highlights from a comprehensive analysis of Haven's performance are summarized below and explored in further detail.

### *Academic performance*

- Student performance on the NWEA, especially in 2021-22, suggests Haven students were able to continue making academic growth during and following the pandemic
- Haven students have lower rates of referral to special education than average for children in foster care
- Haven students in foster care are much less likely to repeat a grade than average for children in foster care.

### *Student behavior and social-emotional health*

- Average daily attendance rates for children in foster care are higher at Haven and chronic absenteeism is lower
- Aggressive behaviors and incidents leading to suspension have decreased over time.
- Haven students show social-emotional growth as measured by DESSA.

### *School environment*

- Most students who start at Haven in Pre-K or Kindergarten stay through middle school
- Haven is able to support families through major transitions, and fewer child-welfare involved students leave Haven as a result
- Haven students feel more supported emotionally at school than their peers.
- Haven students feel more supported with the high school admissions process and make more well-informed choices
- Haven parents feel welcomed and trusted

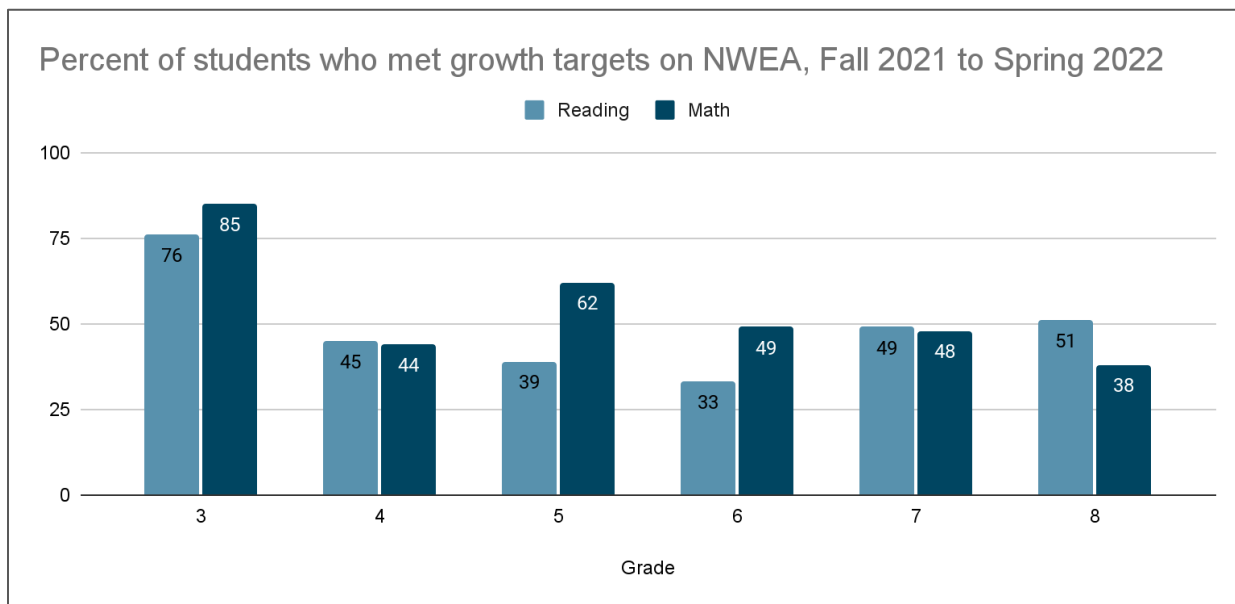
## Academic performance

**Student performance on the NWEA, especially in 2021-22, suggests Haven students were able to continue making**

**academic growth during and following the pandemic.** Since 2018-19, Haven has used NWEA - a student-level academic assessment - to assess growth and achievement. The overall achievement score compares students to grade-level expectations on a national level. Because NWEA is administered multiple times a year, it also measures progress in performance from one point in time to another. Students who meet the growth target for the year are considered to have made one grade level's worth of progress.

Because Haven administered NWEA immediately prior to the pandemic, during the two disrupted school years (2019-20 and 2020-21), and then again in 2021-22, it provides perspective on how students fared across this tumultuous time period. In 2021-22, nearly all Haven cohorts (from K-8) saw an increase in math achievement from the beginning to the end of the year. 3rd grade students saw a significant spike in achievement; this may be reflected in state tests when they are released. Reading performance was less consistent than math – some cohorts made gains in achievement percentile from the start of the year to the end, whereas others lost ground. Several cohorts stayed largely flat. Growth data was even more encouraging. Students in 4th and 7th grade made close to a year's worth of growth in math and reading in 2021-22 and students in 3rd grade made well over a year's worth of growth in both reading and math.

Though it will require multiple years of data to draw significant conclusions, this growth data suggests Haven students were able to return to learning in 2021-22 and in some cases, to make up ground that may have been lost. If true, this speaks well to the Haven's culture and the foundation set prior to and during the pandemic. By comparison, many teachers and school leaders from across the country have reflected publicly that they had to spend much of 2021-22 on social-emotional recovery and were not able to make as much academic progress as they would have hoped.<sup>57</sup>

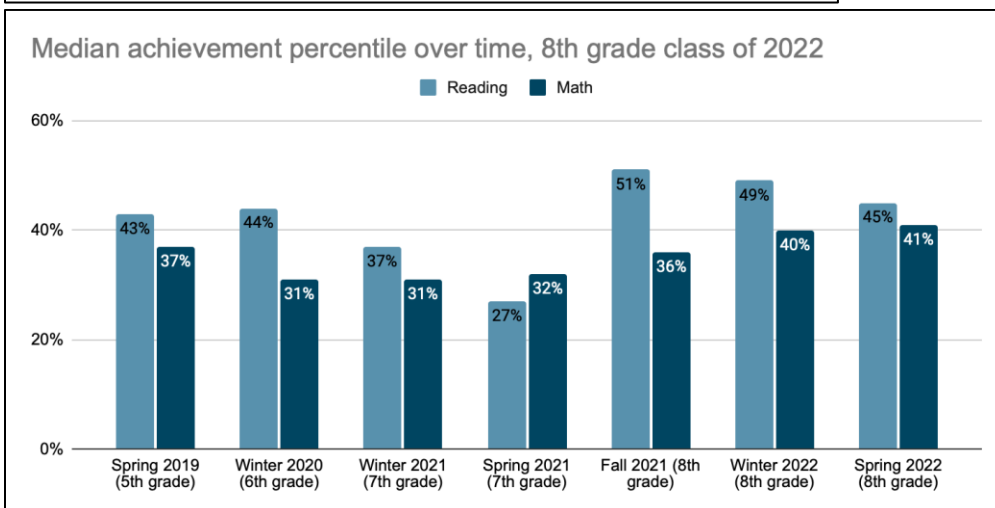
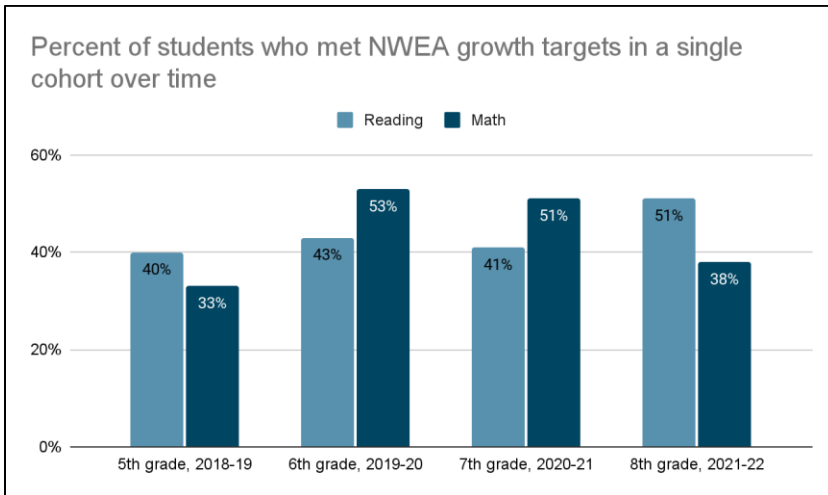


Because Haven has administered NWEA for four years, there is a growing body of longitudinal data. For the class that graduated in 2022, they have NWEA results for fifth grade and all of middle school. From 5th grade to 8th grade, we see an increase in the share of students who made adequate annual growth in both reading and math. The share of students who met growth targets increased even during the years most disrupted by COVID-19. Looking at achievement for the same group of students over time, the median achievement percentile was slightly higher in the spring of 8th grade than the spring of 5th grade. Achievement was nearing the national norm in math (50th percentile) and within the margin of

<sup>57</sup> "The comeback we didn't expect: Inside the stop-and-start school year of 2021-22." Chalkbeat, June 3, 2022.

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/6/3/23151765/the-comeback-we-didnt-expect-inside-the-stop-and-start-school-year-of-2021-2022-pandemic>

error in reading. Median achievement was lowest in the 2020-21 school year; this is to be expected since this NWEA administration was done partially virtual and not all students were learning in person. Students made a significant recovery following the pandemic with a return to more consistent achievement in 2021-22. By the time they graduated, the cohort had nearly reached the national norm in achievement (50th percentile).



**Haven students have lower rates of referral to special education than average for children in foster care.** Citywide, 47% of children in foster care have an IEP compared to 24% of Haven’s foster care and prevention students.<sup>58</sup> Children in foster care are often referred for services at a higher rate because of blurry lines between behavioral issues and learning disabilities. Haven staff have been much more successful at differentiating between those needs and providing short-term interventions first before looking to more intensive services. Over the years, there has been an increased push within Haven to ask, what will really change for this child if we get them an IEP? The team wants to make sure they have ruled out anything medical, whether some targeted academic support might help, or whether some sort of social-emotional support might help first. Recommending students for IEP services can have unintended consequences; students in foster care in NYC classified as a student with disabilities in 8th grade are less likely to graduate high school than other students in foster care.<sup>59</sup>

Foster care youth in New York City are over-referred to more restrictive special education environments; they are much

<sup>58</sup> “Oversight - Foster Care Students in the DOE System.” NYC City Council Committee on Education remote hearing, April 20, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). *Education Outcomes of NYC Youth in Foster Care*.

more likely to be in self-contained classrooms and twice as likely to be placed in District 75 programs than other special education students.<sup>60</sup> Haven provides only an inclusive model with special education students learning alongside their general education peers. It is generally considered to be best practice to steer as many students toward inclusive environments as possible, though an average of one to two kids leave Haven each year because they need or their parents prefer a more restrictive environment.

Many schools in NYC struggle to navigate the IEP process with kids in foster care given the strict rules around paperwork and which adults can consent on behalf of a child. Over the years, other schools have asked Haven for advice. The DOE's Committee on Special Education, which manages the special education placement process, has even asked Haven to clarify processes and protocols for children in foster care. Advocates for Children found that students in foster care experience significant delays in accessing the special education services they need because administrators do not understand the process.<sup>61</sup> Anecdotal evidence would suggest that Haven is able to appropriately advocate for its foster care students and move them through the process faster.

**Haven students in foster care are much less likely to repeat a grade than average for children in foster care.** A DOE and ACS task force in 2017 found that citywide, 22% of children in foster care repeated a grade.<sup>62</sup> Since 2016, 5% or less of the child welfare population (prevention and foster care) at Haven repeats a grade. In the school's earlier years, the number was much higher. However, starting in 2014-15, Haven shifted policies around retention, recognizing that the negative impact of being over-aged can often outweigh the benefits of retention. Haven students can now only be retained in grades K-2 and a small number of children are impacted each year.

## Student behavior and social-emotional health

**Average daily attendance rates for children in foster care are higher at Haven and chronic absenteeism is lower.** Prior to COVID-19, Haven attendance data was stronger than comparison groups, both for the student body as a whole, as compared to NYC and District 7, and specifically for kids in foster care. Haven's overall daily attendance rate was 94%, versus 93% for elementary and middle school students citywide and 90% in District 7.<sup>63</sup> Haven's foster care students had an average daily attendance of 92% versus an 88% average daily attendance rate for elementary and middle school students in foster care citywide.<sup>64</sup>

However, the average attendance rate alone can often mask the most severe issues within a school. Looking at the share of students who are chronically absent, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, can be far more revealing. There is a documented negative link between chronic absenteeism and academic outcomes, and students in poverty and with risk factors in their home lives are more likely to be chronically absent than their more affluent peers.

Haven students have lower rates of chronic absenteeism than comparison groups; this is particularly true for families involved in the child welfare system. Prior to COVID-19, 28% of Haven prevention students and 20% of students in foster care were chronically absent. This represented a marked improvement from earlier years for children in prevention

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<sup>60</sup> "Oversight - Foster Care Students in the DOE System." NYC City Council Committee on Education remote hearing, April 20, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Advocates for Children of New York, *Building a Network of Support: The Case for a DOE Office for Students in Foster Care*.

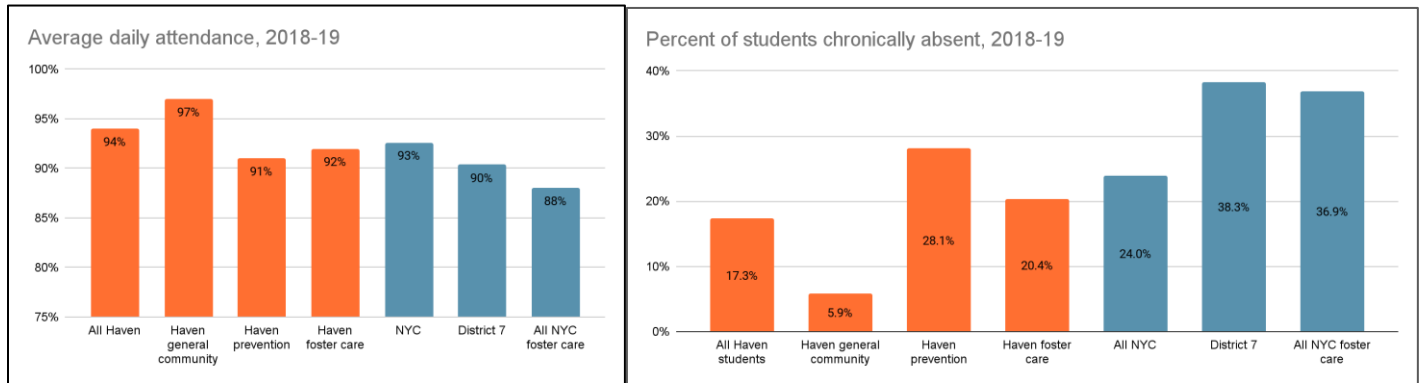
<sup>62</sup> Administration for Children's Services, *Report Of The Interagency Foster Care Task Force*. March 2018.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/testimony/2018/TaskForceReport.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> NYC Department of Education, *End of Year Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Data*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/school-quality/information-and-data-overview/end-of-year-attendance-and-chronic-absenteeism-data>

<sup>64</sup> Administration for Children's Services, *Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care, School Year 2018-2019*. [https://a860-gpp.nyc.gov/concern/parent/76537272f/file\\_sets/4x51hk542](https://a860-gpp.nyc.gov/concern/parent/76537272f/file_sets/4x51hk542)

services, who have historically struggled most with attendance among Haven students. In the same comparison year, 36.9% of elementary and middle school students in foster care citywide were chronically absent.<sup>65</sup>



Haven’s comparatively strong attendance records are the result of intentional efforts. Haven staff closely monitor student attendance and have a tiered system of interventions they can put into place at the first sign of an issue. Successful changes in behavior come from intensive one-on-one support with a family that requires time and attention from dedicated staff members, including personalized strategies like a Haven staff member texting the parent every single morning to help them get to school on time. This approach is made possible by Haven’s robust staffing, the mindset that Haven staff hold that this is part of their responsibility, and the expectation that Haven staff can and will engage with families outside of the traditional school day. Supporting strong attendance behavior is a topic where Haven has identified its practices to be distinctive. Working with LeverageED Foundation, Haven has developed materials and a workshop for other schools to learn from their best practices.

Attendance is an important metric to consider, particularly given the dismal rate of attendance for kids involved in the child welfare system more broadly. The previously referenced longitudinal study of foster care students in NYC found that “one of the most salient predictors of diploma receipt was a student’s 8th grade attendance rate.” For every 20 percentage point increase in attendance, there was a significant increase in the likelihood that a student would graduate on time.<sup>66</sup> This link underscores the need to examine the data on a student-by-student basis and the importance of Haven’s student-level interventions.

**Aggressive behaviors and incidents leading to suspension have decreased over time.** Over the period from 2015-2019, Haven refined its approach to social-emotional learning and behavior management, and as a result, saw a decrease in the number of incidents resulting in out-of-school suspensions. In 2015-2016, 40 incidents resulted in suspensions. In 2018-2019, incidents that resulted in suspensions declined to 33, even with an additional 100 students and two new grades added. During the same time period, in-school suspensions did rise as Haven shifted its policies to keep kids in the building whenever possible.

Haven students in the child welfare system were no more likely than their peers to be suspended; in fact, data from 2018-19 suggests that child welfare students were less likely to be suspended. Child-welfare involved students made up over 50% of the student population in 2018-19, but less than a third of in-school or out-of-school suspensions.<sup>67</sup> This is a big contrast to the disproportionality in suspensions citywide. Foster care students represented 8.5% of unique

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). *Education Outcomes of NYC Youth in Foster Care*.

<sup>67</sup> The data showing the child welfare status of each child who was suspended in 2018-19 in Haven’s data is incomplete; however, child-welfare involved students made up between 17% and 34% of in-school suspensions and between 29% and 36% of out-of-school suspensions.



suspensions citywide, but less than 1% of the city's public school population.<sup>68</sup>

Haven's reduced number of behavioral incidents is linked to its approach to managing and addressing behavior, including Tier 1 supports that impact all students and more targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. Haven's overall philosophy toward discipline has evolved over time. Prior to the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS), in 2011-12, Haven experienced 289 acts of aggression from students in grades K through 4. In 2018-19, Haven experienced 205 acts of aggression from students in Pre-K through 7. This is a marked decrease in total incidents, even while the student body grew by four grades. Access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 services grew during this time as well. From 2013-14 to 2018-19, the share of Haven students who received individual counseling grew from 27% to 38% and the share of child-welfare involved students who received individual counseling grew from 44% to 51%.

**Haven students show social-emotional growth as measured by DESSA.** Devereux Student Strengths Assessments, or DESSA, is a standardized and normed assessment of social-emotional competencies that is now used widely in NYC; Haven was an outlier when it first implemented the tool many years ago. Haven's administration protocol has varied over time; because DESSA is a time-intensive assessment to delivery, it was given to select students or select cohorts in particular years. In 2021-22, it was administered to all students in grades K-12 to gather a new baseline and assess where students were coming out of the pandemic. Students are administered the DESSA twice: once in the fall to measure a baseline and a second time in the spring to assess growth. Students' raw scores are assigned to one of three bands: Need, Typical, or Strength. The lowest scores are coded as "Need," and the publisher of the assessment notes: "Children with scores in this range can be considered at risk for exhibiting or developing social-emotional problems."

In 2021-22, Haven saw a small decrease in the share of students who tested in the "Need" category on the DESSA from the beginning of the year to the end. The share of students who tested in the "Strength" category increased slightly from the beginning of the year to the end. A majority of students (60%) scored in the same category in May as they did in October. Without comparisons to prior years or other student populations, it is challenging to put the 2021-22 Haven data into context. However, the relatively small portion of students who tested as "Need" – even after two disrupted school years – suggests a high degree of resilience among Haven students.

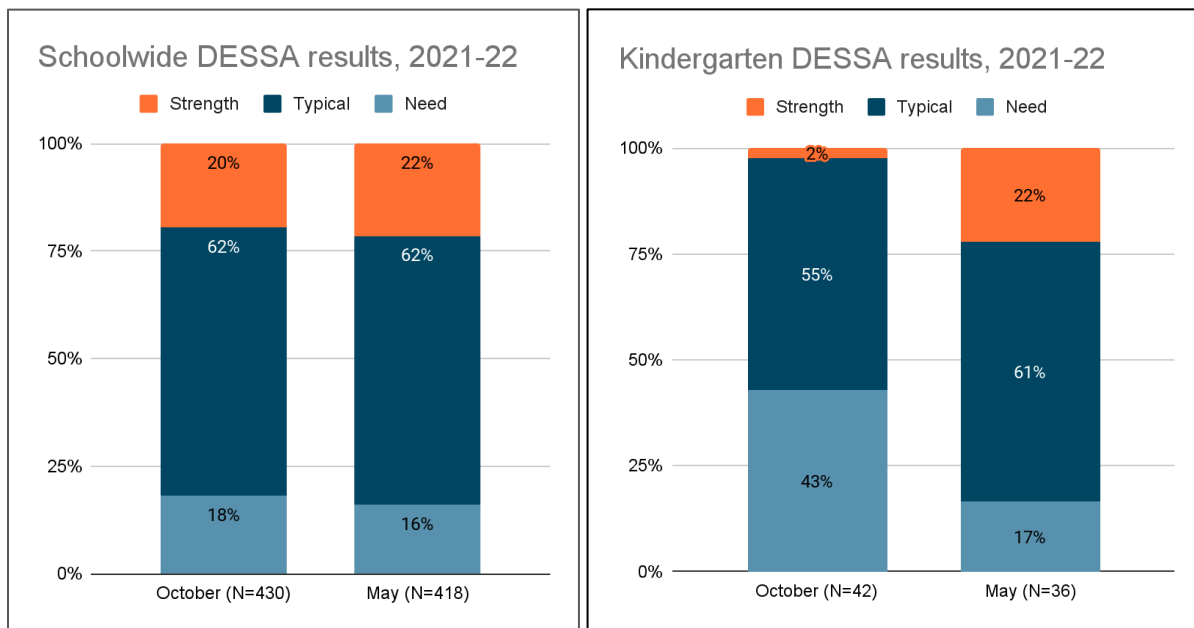
Unsurprisingly, given the traumas they face in their home lives, child welfare involved students were more likely to test in the "Need" range than general community students in both the fall and in the spring. However, the discrepancy is much smaller than might have been expected. This has at least two potential explanations: that Haven's child welfare students receive sufficient support at school to address some of the trauma from their home lives or that Haven's general community students, many of whom live in poverty and with housing instability, also face significant trauma in their home lives.

Kindergarten students in particular saw significant gains on the DESSA in 2021-22. Half of the Kindergarten students who tested in the "Need" category in October made significant enough gains to move to "Typical" or "Strength" by May and nearly all students who tested in the "Typical" category in October maintained their level or moved to "Strength" by May. This demonstrates both the deficit that Haven's youngest students entered with, particularly on the heels of the pandemic, but also the tremendous growth these students made over the course of a year. Just 1 kindergarten student tested in the "Strength" range at the start of the year versus 8 at the end. For this cohort, 2021-22 was their first full school year in person. By comparison, the cohort entering kindergarten in fall 2022 will have had a relatively normal Pre-K year; we should expect to see slightly stronger DESSA results in the October 2022 administration for kindergarten

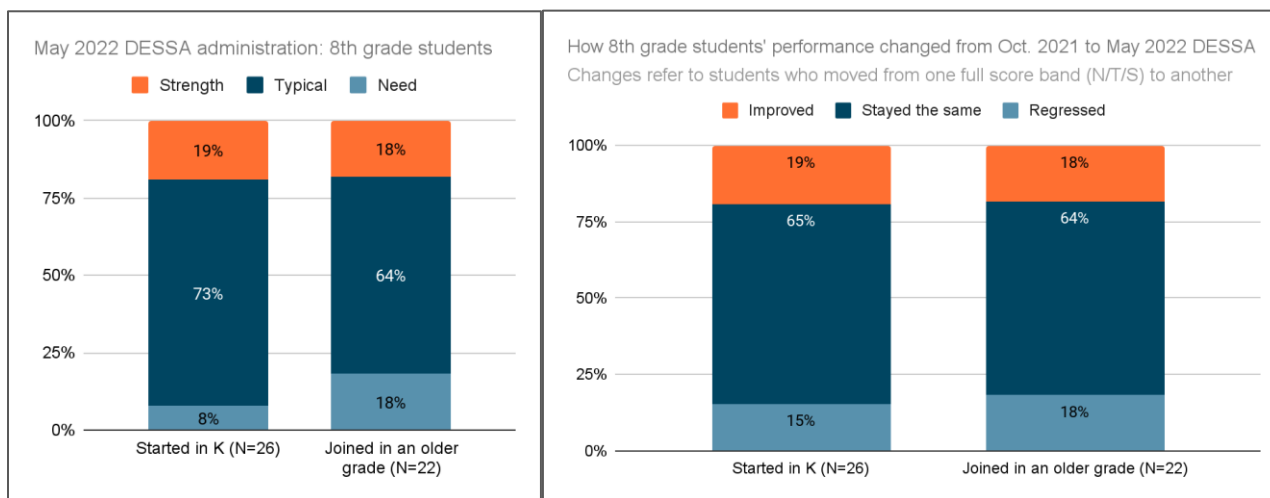
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<sup>68</sup> "Oversight - Foster Care Students in the DOE System." NYC City Council Committee on Education remote hearing, April 20, 2022.

students, which will also provide some evidence of the impact of Haven’s Pre-K program.



Longtime Haven students tested slightly better on DESSA than their peers who started at Haven later. Haven 8th grade students who started in Kindergarten were less likely to test in the “Need” range at the end of the year than their peers who joined Haven in an older grade. Students who started in Kindergarten were also slightly more likely to have improved or stayed at the same level from October to May than their peers who joined later. Though the differences are not overly significant, this adds to the growing body of evidence that there is increased impact for students who spend more time at Haven.



NYC DOE started to use DESSA in 2021-22, but no data has been published yet to allow for comparisons.

### School environment

**Most students who start at Haven in Pre-K or Kindergarten stay through middle school.** Just over 50% of 8th grade students in 2021-22 had been enrolled at Haven since Kindergarten. Over 60% of 5th grade students had been at Haven since Pre-K or Kindergarten. Though it varies class by class, the percent of child welfare students and general community

students who have stayed at Haven is relatively consistent. In many cohorts, the child welfare students actually persist at greater rates. Looking at the 2021-22 8th grade cohort as an example, 20 of 29 8th grade students involved in the child welfare system (65.5%) started at Haven in Kindergarten; comparatively, 7 of 20 general community students (35%) started at Haven in Kindergarten.

Research on school stability for child welfare involved families suggests this rate of persistence is unusual. One study of foster care youth in the Pacific Northwest published in 2005 found that 65% of foster care youth experienced seven or more school changes from elementary through high school.<sup>69</sup> A 2013 study of foster care youth from Philadelphia found that over a two-year period, the average child in foster care attended 2.7 schools and 20% of children attended 4 or more schools; just 1 in 5 children stayed at the same school for the duration of the study.<sup>70</sup> The importance of school continuity is clear: foster care students in NYC who attended two more schools in a given year in high school were less likely to graduate on time.<sup>71</sup>

**Haven is able to support families through major transitions, and fewer child-welfare involved students leave Haven as a result.** Haven defines a transition as any occurrence in a student's life that can be considered a disruption to typical routines and may result in a traumatic experience. Examples include moving in and out of foster care, being reunited with a biological family member, being placed in the shelter system, being hospitalized for mental health stabilization, being temporarily transferred to New York City's Children Center while awaiting foster placement, and others. When Haven staff know a transition is coming, they coordinate with the appropriate internal and external staff to develop a support plan to minimize the impact of the transition on the child's enrollment or attendance. Anecdotally, Haven staff have been able to successfully intervene in cases where there might be a more supportive foster care placement for a particular child. When transitions do occur, Haven staff go to great lengths to keep students enrolled at Haven. In 2018-19, 23 children experienced 55 unique child-welfare related transition events.

In each of the last several school years, a total of just under 30 students left Haven during or at the end of the school year. In 2017-18, 29 children left Haven; 24 of them were child welfare involved students, representing 11% of all child welfare involved students that year. The most typical reasons that students left were because of a transportation issue or because they moved too far away, because they were graduating 5th grade and chose a different middle school, or because a different school could better meet their family's needs. Though it's not a perfectly apples-to-apples comparison, city data suggests Haven's child welfare students had a more stable experience than their peers in other schools. ACS reported in 2017-18 that 27% of children in NYC entering foster care switched schools within 90 days of their initial placement and 20% of children who changed placements moved schools.<sup>72</sup> Still, Haven's child welfare students left at a much higher rate than general community students; in 2017-18, fewer than 3% of them left Haven.

**Haven students feel more supported emotionally at school than their peers.** Based on survey data, Haven students feel more supported, are more likely to believe they can talk about their feelings, and have a greater sense of belonging than the average NYC middle or high school student. 91% of Haven students reported that there was at least one adult at

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<sup>69</sup> National Center for Homeless Education, *A Look at Child Welfare from an Education Perspective*. Nov. 2018, <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Child-Welfare-03-19-19.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> Rubin, David, Amanda O'Reilly, Sarah Zlotnik, Taylor Hendricks, Catherine Zorc, Meredith Matone, Kathleen Noonan. "Improving Education Outcomes for Children in Child Welfare." PolicyLab at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Spring 2013. [https://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab\\_EtoA\\_%20Improving\\_Education\\_Outcomes\\_for\\_Children\\_in\\_Child%20Welfare\\_2013.pdf](https://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab_EtoA_%20Improving_Education_Outcomes_for_Children_in_Child%20Welfare_2013.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). *Education Outcomes of NYC Youth in Foster Care*.

<sup>72</sup> Administration for Children's Services, *Educational Continuity of Children in Foster Care, School Year 2017-2018*. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2019/LL142SY20172018.pdf>

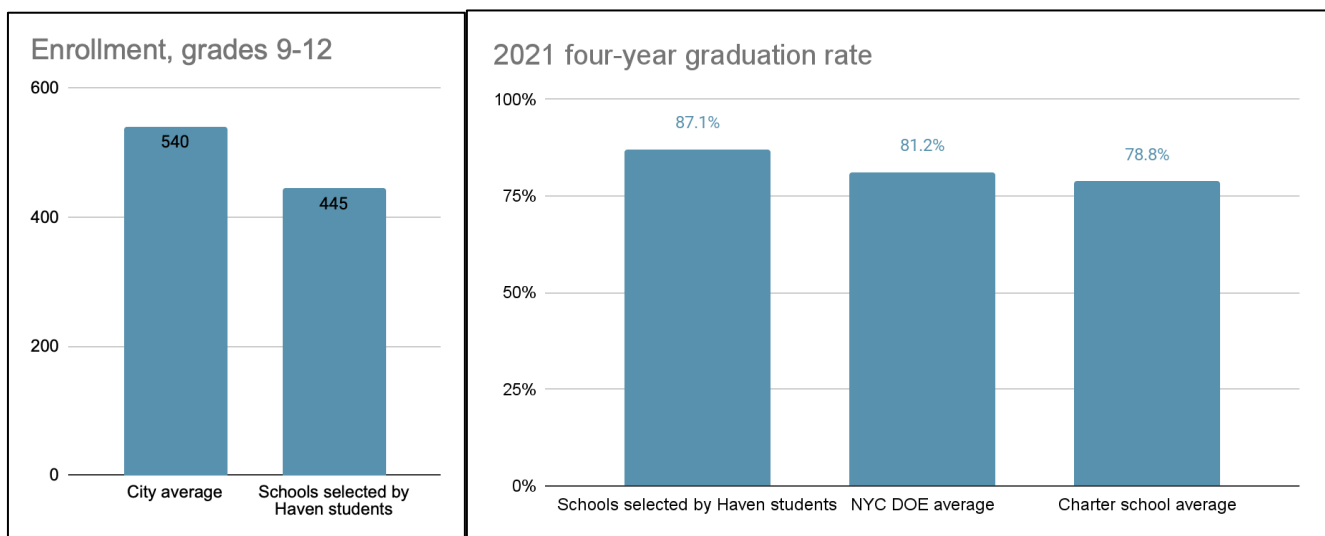
school they could confide in, versus 81% of all NYC students. This is likely tied to the availability of counseling and Haven’s overall staffing numbers.

**Haven students feel more supported with the high school admissions process and make more well-informed choices.**

Haven students report that they feel more supported in the high school application process than their peers in other city middle schools. 96% of Haven students reported that their school provides guidance for the high school application process, versus 89% of students citywide. An overwhelming majority of Haven students – 93% – responded that the school educates families about the high school application and enrollment process. Haven has one guidance counselor for its roughly 50 8th grade students. This is a much smaller ratio than most middle schools in the city; the citywide average for middle schools in 2020-21 was one counselor for every 288 students.<sup>73</sup>

Haven students made relatively well-informed choices in the high school admissions process based on this support. Haven students were more likely to rank public high schools with very high graduation rates at the top of their application than other students in the Bronx. Haven students were also more likely to receive an offer to a school or program on their application.<sup>74</sup>

Of the students who graduated from Haven in 2020 through 2022, 45% enrolled in a charter high school and 35% enrolled in an NYC DOE public school; small numbers of students enrolled in public schools outside of NYC and in parochial and private schools. 6 students from the class of 2022 were still making their decision at the time of this analysis. Child welfare-involved students were more likely to choose a charter school than general community students, who equally chose between charter and DOE public schools. Haven students were more likely to choose a smaller high school; many were advised to do so based on the support that might be available. The charter and district schools ultimately chosen by Haven graduates in the classes of 2020, 2021, and 2022 have a higher average graduation rate (87.1%) than the citywide public school average (81.2%) and charter high school average (78.8%).<sup>75</sup>



Haven has limited data for students in its earliest cohorts who left after 5th grade and went on to middle and high school elsewhere. Going forward, Haven’s alumni support program may allow for better data tracking on high school performance, graduation, and ultimately, college matriculation.

<sup>73</sup> NYC Department of Education, *DOE Guidance Counselor Reporting*.

<sup>74</sup> Internal Haven Academy analysis

<sup>75</sup> NYC Department of Education, *Graduation Results*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/graduation-results>

**Haven parents feel welcomed and trusted.** Based on survey data, nearly all Haven parents feel respected and engaged by Haven staff. 98% of Haven parents reported that staff at the school work to build relationships with “parents/guardians like me” and that their child’s teacher views them as a partner in educating their child. Only 26% of Haven parents completed the survey though, so there may be some bias; this is on par with the citywide response rate of 25%.

## Closing and considerations for further research

Haven Academy has built a unique model to serve an incredibly high-needs population. Haven’s culture is designed around its students and its robust staffing structure allows for high-touch service delivery. The experience and longevity of its staff help to reinforce the model, as does the relationship with New York Foundling. The results of this model are clear: Haven students academically outperform their peers, both on state tests, but also in many other important predictive metrics, like special education referrals, attendance, and behavior.

There are key lessons in this model for other schools and organizations to consider when serving students involved in the child welfare system. Some critics would suggest that there should not be schools explicitly for kids in the foster care system; kids in the foster care system should be able to attend their neighborhood school, just like any other students, and should have access to supportive adults who have context for the trauma they are experiencing outside the school building. There are elements of what Haven does that should be best practice in *all* schools, not just those with a particular focus. To date, Haven has done some work to distill strong practices into modules that other schools can learn from. There are additional factors to consider when determining how best to continue spreading the Haven model including who the target audience might be, what kind of content might be most useful, and what role Haven should play in supporting replication.

Separately, there are some long-term outcomes questions that we do not currently have the data to answer. Additionally, it will be important to track the long-term impact of COVID-19 on Haven students and how the experience at Haven compares to other schools. Though we can definitively say that Haven has had a positive impact on its students even without this additional data, these questions are important in understanding the long-term impact that Haven has on its students and should all be considered in future work. These include:

- How do Haven students perform in high school? At this point, three cohorts of Haven alumni should have graduated high school, though Haven does not currently track comprehensive data on academic performance in high school and high school graduation. Data collection may improve with Haven’s relatively new alumni support program.
- At what rate do Haven alumni enroll and persist in college? At this time, Haven’s earliest cohort should be finishing their second year of college.
- Does enrollment at Haven have a positive effect on foster care outcomes? – i.e., Are Haven students moved to permanency more quickly than their peers? Do Haven students experience fewer foster care transitions?
- Does enrollment at Haven benefit families who receive prevention services in any measurable way? – i.e., Are Haven students in prevention services less likely to enter foster care than their peers?
- Are general community families less likely to come into contact with the child welfare system because of their Haven enrollment?

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## Interviews

*The following is a near-comprehensive list of individuals engaged for this report from April through July 2022. Interviews were conducted by phone, Zoom, or in a few cases, via email. Some individuals were interviewed multiple times.*

### Haven Academy employees and Board members (current and former)

Alyssandra Jaquith, ENL Coordinator  
Anthony Cerasi, Middle School Social Worker  
Ashlyn Field, Former Lower School Principal  
Bill Baccaglini, Board Trustee; former president and CEO, The New York Foundling  
Dalvin Bartley, Restorative Justice Specialist  
Gabi McBride, Former Director of Social Services  
Gleendy Marte, Assistant Principal, 3-5  
Jessica Nauiokas, Head of School and Founder  
Kate Hagenbuch, Director of Special Education Services  
Liann Gutierrez, Guidance Counselor  
Meghan Mackay, Board Trustee  
Michael Windram, Lower School Principal  
Trish Mulvaney, Board Chairperson  
Zennea Chetta, Director of Data and Technology

### External interviews

Beth Finnerty, Cardinal McCloskey  
Caitlin Klein, LeveragED Foundation  
Drema Brown, Children's Aid College Prep Charter School  
Erika Kramer, Advocates for Children  
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# Addendum

## Haven Academy and the COVID-19 pandemic

March 2023

Since its founding in 2008, Mott Haven Academy Charter School has operated with a unique model, designed to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of a student population that has experienced significant trauma. Two-thirds of the student body have had experience with the child welfare system, over 20% of students live in temporary housing, and the school has among the highest poverty rates in the city.

Haven Academy's model includes a trauma-informed approach with emphasis on social-emotional learning, widely available counseling services, and a strong and supportive school culture. Haven staff are deeply educated on the child welfare system and are given the tools and information to support the whole family. The results that Haven students achieve reflect the impact of this model. Haven students have consistently outperformed comparison groups on state math and ELA tests, particularly in younger grades. In 2019, Haven students in foster care were more than twice as likely to be proficient in math and ELA than children in foster care statewide. In other key metrics, like attendance, chronic absenteeism, special education referrals, and suspensions, Haven students involved in the child welfare system performed better than the city and state averages for child-welfare involved children.

Beginning in March 2020, COVID-19 wreaked havoc on Haven's community, as it did throughout the nation, with disproportionate impact on low-income communities of color. High rates of asthma, obesity and diabetes in Mott Haven left neighborhood residents vulnerable to COVID-19, and large numbers of essential workers and overcrowding housing increased risk and exposure.<sup>[1]</sup> Families in the area suffered economically, too; unemployment in the South Bronx reached 25% in 2020.<sup>[2]</sup> The rate of COVID-19 deaths in Mott Haven was higher than city and Bronx averages.<sup>[3]</sup> Many Haven families experienced job loss, food insecurity, housing instability, and loss of loved ones.

### Haven was able to quickly deploy support during the pandemic

Once it became clear that the pandemic would disrupt typical learning environments, Haven was able to pivot to remote learning perhaps more easily than other schools because they already had much of the technology infrastructure in place. Over 500 Chromebooks and over 70 hotspots with connectivity were sent home to families. Technology support was available almost 12 hours a day for staff and families, and teachers were already trained in many of the digital tools they would need. Haven's staffing model meant staff had the capacity to do individual follow-up with children as needed. As a result, Haven was able to maintain critical services to students. The vast majority of Haven students had a daily interaction with a teacher or staff member.<sup>[4]</sup> Counseling and other support services continued, albeit remotely, including throughout the summer for specific students. Haven developed safety plans with over 20 middle school students and their families. Haven was also able to connect families - and staff - who lost loved ones to grief counselors. Perhaps as a result of all the added support, Haven saw relatively low student attrition through the pandemic.

Haven was also able to provide support for many of the other critical gaps families were facing, providing emergency food supplies, connections to social service agencies, and help navigating the city's complicated web of available services. Families received nearly 2,000 meals from Haven's kitchen and outside partners and many donations of boxed food and fresh fruits and vegetables. A total of \$31,200 was provided to families to address the financial impacts of

COVID-19, including loss of job, decrease in hours, ineligibility for unemployment, costs of funeral arrangements. Haven also provided gift cards and separate funds specifically for food insecurity. This likely staved off an even greater crisis for many families.

## The pandemic was profoundly traumatizing for many Haven students

All across the country, experts noted the increase in anxiety and stress that school-aged children experienced during the pandemic. But the pandemic did not impact all children equally; experts at Yale noted that the impact of the pandemic was most significant for children with a history of anxiety, depression or mental health issues – all issues that are more common among children who have previously experienced trauma.<sup>[5]</sup> Children who had previously experienced trauma were more likely to develop “complex trauma” – a phenomenon with profound long-term physical and mental developmental impacts.<sup>[6]</sup> Nationally, experts observed that young children in particular saw more emotional dysregulation and a loss in social skills as a result of the pandemic. Researchers found a measurable increase in the percentage of young children with social and emotional difficulties during the pandemic. For very young children, “nearly any major change or disruption can be traumatic,” especially for children without a strong support system.<sup>[7]</sup>

For many students, Haven was their “safe place” – the place where they felt most comfortable and secure and had strong attachments to adults. In the DOE’s school survey, 91% of Haven students reported that there was at least one adult at school they could confide in, versus 81% of all NYC students.<sup>[8]</sup> Losing this physical place they could go to everyday was significant, particularly if they did not have strong attachments to the adults in their home.

For some students, spending more time at home had a deleterious effect. Nationally and locally, child welfare advocates worried about the impact the pandemic might have on families with a history of abuse or other risk factors.<sup>[9]</sup> Research has shown that parents and caregivers were more likely to experience added stress during the pandemic than non-parents. For parents with their own histories of trauma, this added stress was particularly impactful, compounding their existing challenges and negatively impacting their ability to provide adequate support and nurturing to their children.<sup>[10]</sup> Many child welfare agencies noted an uptick in family needs, but insufficient resources to address them.<sup>[11]</sup> The pandemic may have also increased stressors for children already in care: There were fewer discharges or adoptions from foster care in 2020 in New York City, delaying permanency for many families.<sup>[12]</sup> Kids in care accustomed to regular visits with biological family members may have shifted to only phone or video calls or nothing at all.<sup>[13]</sup>

The pandemic also exacerbated trends in child welfare policy and practice. For over a decade, the number of children in foster care in NYC has been shrinking. This shift was made possible in part by the significant increase in investment in prevention services, helping to address issues before removal became necessary. During the pandemic, the city paused many prevention services, and following the launch of new prevention services contracts in 2020, these services are now reaching fewer families than before. Anecdotally, many child welfare agencies have struggled to staff up case worker roles and so not all families who should be receiving services are. The number of children in foster care has also continued to decrease. It is unlikely that there are fewer families who need services – particularly given the confluence of health, mental health, and economic crises over the past few years. More likely, there are more families who could benefit from services who are not receiving them until their situation becomes dire. As a result, Haven’s total number of students in the child welfare system is smaller than before, but it is likely that more of Haven’s general community students have unstable home lives without outside support than in previous years.

Lastly, “home” for one in five Haven students during the pandemic may have been a shelter. Even before the pandemic,

there was a mounting housing crisis with record numbers of children across New York City living in homeless shelters or other temporary housing. Child homelessness in Mott Haven increased by 66% from 2010 to 2017.<sup>[14]</sup> Housing instability at Haven has also risen dramatically; from 2013-14 to 2018-19, the number of housing transitions experienced by students increased by more than 3X. Over the same time period, enrollment increased by 1.7X. In 2020-21, more than 20% of Haven students were living in temporary housing.<sup>[15]</sup>

## How to understand the impacts of the pandemic

Academic data from during the pandemic is limited because many typical assessments were not administered at all or were administered in only a limited way. With state math and ELA test scores now available from spring 2022, we see that proficiency at Haven in 2022 was higher than the District 7 average, meaning that Haven students continue to be in a stronger environment than they likely might otherwise be. However, Haven's schoolwide math and ELA proficiency scores in 2022 fell more significantly from 2019 levels than the citywide scores.<sup>[16]</sup> This does not mean that students lost skills necessarily, but means that students did not reach the same levels of achievement in 2022 as their peers did in 2019.

In the areas where students did well citywide, Haven students did as well if not better; in middle school ELA, Haven kept pace with the city and Haven continued to outperform citywide results in 3rd grade math. This suggests that even with the challenges of remote learning, Haven was able to build on its instructional strengths. Haven's continued strength in 3rd grade math is particularly notable given the disproportionate challenges young children had during the pandemic.

In the areas where students citywide struggled, Haven students struggled equally or more – younger Haven students struggled in reading, whereas older students struggled in math. Haven had a sharper decline from pre-pandemic levels in these subject areas than the citywide numbers. This suggests that Haven students face a more significant academic recovery than their peers in other communities.

There are some differences in performance among Haven students that provide insight into how different students may have experienced the pandemic. Proficiency gaps between general community students and child welfare involved students at Haven widened in 2022. This is consistent with what we might expect to see, given the disproportionate impact the pandemic likely had on the mental health and wellbeing of children who previously experienced the traumas of the child welfare system. 3rd grade students who started at Haven in pre-K outperformed their peers who joined later, a trend we also saw in 2019. This supports the theory that more time in person at Haven benefits students; students who took the 3rd grade test in 2022 would have had remote or hybrid instruction for their 1st and 2nd grade years. Those who started in pre-K had two full years of in-person instruction prior to the pandemic.

Performance for students with disabilities in particular showed a meaningful decline on the state tests. During the pandemic, Haven administered special education services remotely, via teletherapy, with very limited guidance from state or federal regulators. Special education evaluations were paused for all of spring 2020. These service disruptions may have impacted learning, though further analysis is needed to understand each particular case.

Haven students might have seen even more of a performance dip without the additional support they received during the pandemic and the strong foundation they had from prior years. And certainly, now that students are back in school full-time, those supports remain more significant than ever. Children who entered kindergarten at Haven in 2021-22 showed significantly more concerning results on social-emotional assessments in fall 2021 than older Haven students.

This is consistent with the increase in emotional and behavioral challenges for very young children during the pandemic. As one expert at the University of Texas predicted, “We will see kids show up to kindergarten feeling less secure, needing more assistance and services.”<sup>[17]</sup>

Experts also predicted that the worst impacts of the pandemic could be mitigated by providing robust and immediate access to mental health supports and services. This kind of support is baked into the Haven model, and so despite the challenges they faced in their preschool years, kindergarten students at Haven were able to make significant growth once back in school. By spring 2022, their social-emotional health measured on par with other students at Haven, suggesting strong positive effects from a year of in-person Haven instruction and support. Though we lack comparison data for other similar populations, this level of growth is quite notable.<sup>[18]</sup>

Other test results suggest that Haven students are accelerating their learning now that they are back in the classroom as well. NWEA, an academic assessment that Haven administers to all students, measures both achievement and growth. In 2021-22, students in grades 2-7 made at least a year’s worth of growth in math; some cohorts made significantly more than a year’s worth of growth. Growth won’t necessarily appear on proficiency tests right away, particularly if students have significant ground to make up; however, this is a strong indicator that students at Haven are receiving the academic support they need after several years of disrupted progress.

## What happens next

It will likely be years, if not decades, before researchers can fully assess the impact that COVID-19 had on school-aged children whose education was disrupted. Haven students continue to be a highly vulnerable population, with greater housing instability and fewer prevention services available than when the school first opened. For many, there is still lingering trauma from how they experienced the pandemic and the ways in which it compounded their existing trauma. Moving forward, the focus must be on supporting students in the classroom with the full range of academic and social-emotional needs they present so that they can reach their highest potential. Haven’s past successes at boosting academic and social-emotional outcomes, the stability of Haven’s leadership, and the continuity of Haven’s robust model suggest that students will recover from the impacts of the past few years. Further, the experience that Haven students had during the pandemic more than makes the case for why they need the robust, trauma-informed supports that Haven Academy provides.

<sup>[1]</sup> Gonzalez, David. “The City Fumbled It: How 4 Families Took On the Virus.” The New York Times, Sept. 26, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/24/nyregion/coronavirus-public-housing-new-york.html>

<sup>[2]</sup> Garsd, Jasmine. “COVID economy fallout keeps hitting already impoverished neighborhoods hardest.” Marketplace, Oct. 1, 2020.

<https://www.marketplace.org/2020/10/01/covid-economy-fallout-keeps-hitting-already-impoverished-neighborhoods-hardest/>

<sup>[3]</sup> COVID-19 Data. NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data-neighborhoods.page>

<sup>[4]</sup> In Spring 2020, 85% of Pre-K to 5 students and 94% of students in grades 6-8 had a daily touchpoint with a teacher or staff member.

<sup>[5]</sup> MacMillan, Carrie. “Will the Pandemic Scar Our Children?” Yale Medicine, July 8, 2021. <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/how-pandemic-affects-children>

<sup>[6]</sup> Jude Mary Cénat, Rose Darly Dalexis. “The Complex Trauma Spectrum During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Threat for Children and Adolescents’ Physical and Mental Health.” Psychiatry Research, Volume 293, 2020, 113473, ISSN 0165-1781, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113473>.

<sup>[7]</sup> Mader, Jackie. “We know how to help young kids cope with the trauma of the last year — but will we do it?” The Hechinger Report, Oct. 25, 2021. <https://hechingerreport.org/we-know-how-to-help-young-kids-cope-with-the-trauma-of-the-last-year-but-will-we-do-it/>

<sup>[8]</sup> NYC Department of Education, *School Survey Results, Survey Archives*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/school-quality/nyc-school-survey/survey->

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- [10] Vivrette, Rebecca. "Supporting Parents and Caregivers with Trauma Histories during COVID-19." Child Trends, March 23, 2021. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/supporting-parents-caregivers-trauma-histories-during-covid-19>
- [11] "Advocates Urge State to Protect Child Welfare Programs Supporting Pandemic Recovery." Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, March 16, 2021. <https://cccnewyork.org/press-and-media/advocates-call-on-state-leaders-to-protect-funding-for-programs-that-support-child-safety-and-family-stability-during-the-pandemic/>
- [12] "Watching the Numbers 2022: Covid-19's Effect on Child Welfare System." Center for NYC Affairs, April 11, 2022. <http://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/2021/2/4/watching-the-numbers-2022-monitoring-new-york-citys-child-welfare-system-hx4nf>
- [13] Stewart, Nikita. "Child Abuse Cases Drop 51 Percent. The Authorities Are Very Worried." The New York Times, Aug. 7, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/nyregion/coronavirus-nyc-child-abuse.html>
- [14] Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. "On The Map: The Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City 2018." <https://www.icphusa.org/reports/on-the-map-the-atlas-of-student-homelessness-in-new-york-city-2018-section-1/>
- [15] NYC Department of Education, *2020-2021 Diversity Report*. Published March 4, 2022. <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Education/2020-2021-Diversity-Report/8vk5-fzts>
- [16] NYC Department of Education, *Test Results*. <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/test-results>
- [17] Mader, Jackie. "We know how to help young kids cope with the trauma of the last year — but will we do it?" The Hechinger Report, Oct. 25, 2021. <https://hechingerreport.org/we-know-how-to-help-young-kids-cope-with-the-trauma-of-the-last-year-but-will-we-do-it/>
- [18] The NYC DOE provided all schools with access to DESSA and worked to apply it universally for the first time ever in 2021-22. However, no data has been published on implementation or outcomes.