

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

FISCAL YEAR 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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INTRODUCTION FROM COMMISSIONER REARDON

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Department worked hard to define and make progress on its strategic objectives while continuing to recover and recalibrate from the pandemic. It was a year where we reflected on lessons learned and imagined ways to move forward while maintaining some of the innovations and momentum borne of necessity.

It was also a year of recognition and gratitude for our state and contracted provider staff for their perseverance through adversity. We were able to fully resume the in-person celebrations that let our staff know how much they matter and the differences they make for our young people and their families, as well as their colleagues and our communities.

Fiscal Year 2023 was also a year of transitions and the rebuilding of teams. Our Executive Team came together, with Ja'Net Smith serving as our Acting Deputy Commissioner for Operations, Stacey Bloom as our Acting General Counsel, and Lisa Belmarsh as our Assistant Commissioner for Support Services. I am thrilled to announce that as of this Introduction, these “acting” titles have been formally removed. We have most recently rounded out our Executive Team with Michael Lynch as our Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance. We have also promoted Nokuthula Sibanda to Chief Administrative Officer.

Fiscal Year 2023 marked the beginning of a “new normal” for us. It required us to acknowledge that we have yet to fully decipher the impacts of events of the last few years on the young people we serve, their families, and our communities and to accept that we will likely continue to see varying effects for years to come. We saw expected census increases as young people began resolving pending matters and our system partners and key collaborators fully returned. We also saw troubling increases in already endemic racial and ethnic disparities and faced hard questions about how we collect data regarding our LGBTQ+ young people and position them for success.



We are hopeful that our partnership with the Office of the Child Advocate to provide evidence-based, data driven, equity-focused diversion programming across the Commonwealth, will help mitigate some of the racial and ethnic disparities experienced by system involved youth. Early data suggests we are positioned to do so, and that an overwhelming majority of young people referred to the diversion programs are experiencing successful outcomes. We are also confident that our partnership with the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth and the commitment of our internal working group will help us ensure that we are effectively understanding and supporting all our young people.

Having a robust and highly skilled workforce is essential. We continue to face significant challenges fortifying a post-pandemic 24-7 workforce. We struggle, along with our sister agencies and national counterparts, with recruitment and retention. We know that our current employees are often our best referral source for new employees so in FY23 we launched an Influencer Campaign (follow us on Instagram at @mass_dys) where staff share their experiences with the Department and talk about why they work for us and others should too. We also started celebrating “You Days” in the months leading up to the end of the year, hosting weekly staff appreciation events in our regions and Central Office. These campaigns, along with Executive Team listening tours are just part of our commitment to ensuring staff are seen, heard, and valued.

Throughout this report you will find updates on key data metrics and updates regarding our strategic investments in education, vocational programming, and quality of life improvements for our young people and staff. We hope you, too, feel the joy and pride emanating from our young people and staff at the events captured in photographs and share our appreciation for the hard work that goes into fostering positive outcomes for youth, building safer communities, and collaborating for an equitable and fair justice system.

Best Regards,
Cecely Reardon
Commissioner

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cecely Reardon'.

1. WHO WE SERVE

The Department of Youth Services (DYS) is the juvenile justice agency for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its mission is to foster positive outcomes for youth, build safer communities, and collaborate for an equitable and fair justice system. The Department envisions a Commonwealth in which every young person has the skills, supports, and resources necessary to engage safely with their communities, and lead productive and fulfilling lives. DYS supports this work by valuing fairness, transparency, racial equity, and integrity.

DYS divides its statewide operations into five geographic regions¹ that serve five primary categories of juvenile justice-involved young people between the ages of 12-22: Diversion, Overnight Arrest, Detained Youth, Committed Youth, and Youth Engaged in Services.

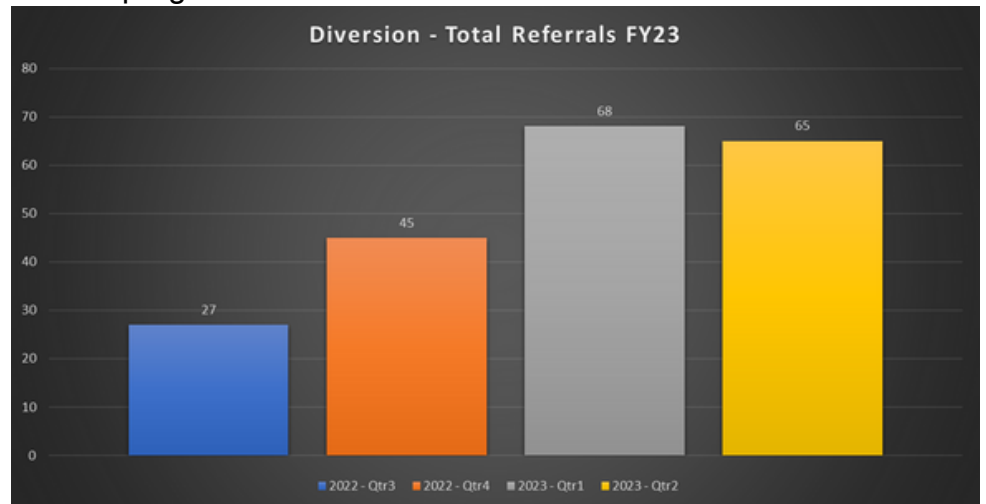
Diversion

In the Fall of 2021, the Department of Youth Services, in partnership with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), launched the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP). This state-level initiative offers high-quality, evidence-based programming that can serve as an alternative to arresting youth or prosecuting them through the Juvenile Court. A primary goal of the initiative is to promote equitable access to diversion across the state as a strategy for addressing racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system.

The MYDP was piloted in three different counties: Worcester, Essex, and Middlesex. The OCA compiled and released data detailing findings from the first year of implementation (calendar year 2022), which included:

- 134 youth were referred to the program, with the monthly referral rate steadily increasing as more potential referrers became aware of the program.
- Early data indicates progress in its goal of reducing disparities for Hispanic/Latinx youth, who comprised 46% of those reaching intake by the end of 2022.
- Black youth made up only 8% of referrals² but constitute 21% of the juvenile justice-involved population. Additional work is needed to ensure equitable access to programming for Black youth.
- 69% of all cases were closed successfully, while another 14% were returned to the original referrer for reasons other than lack of success in the program.

Based on the positive outcomes from the first year of implementation, the program expanded in 2023 to two additional sites in Hampden and Plymouth Counties. In FY23, a total of 205 youths were referred to the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program. Further expansion is planned in 2024.



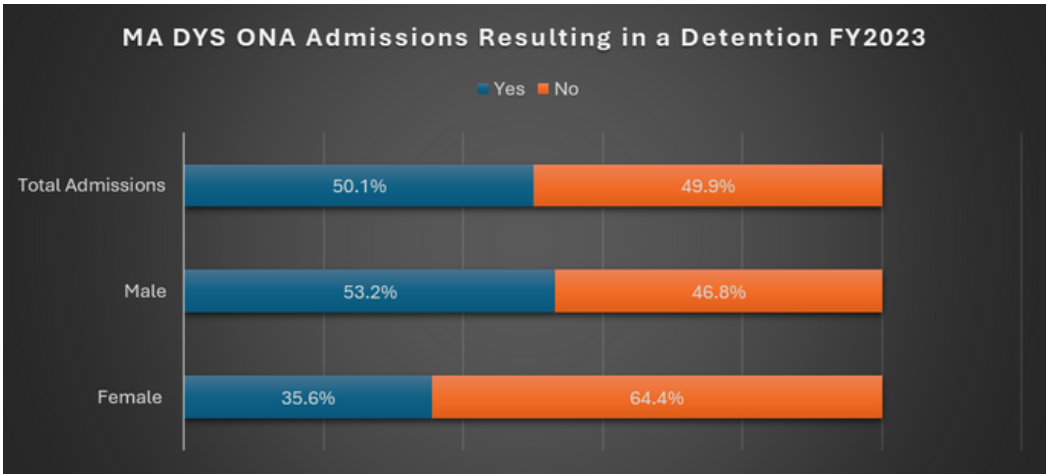
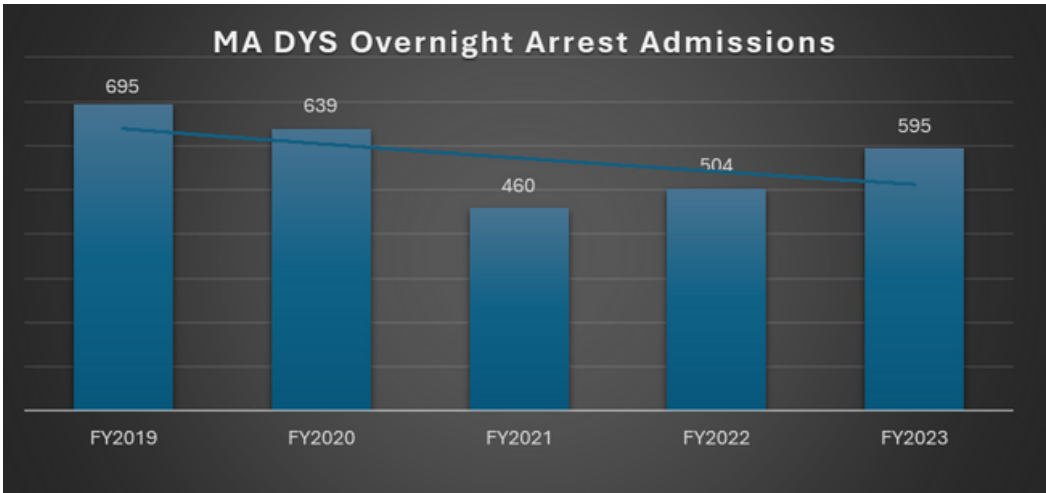
1. The Department of Youth Services is divided into five regions: Central, Metro, Northeast, Southeast, and Western which loosely track counties. The Central Region serves Worcester County; Metro serves Suffolk County; Northeast serves Essex and Middlesex counties; Southeast Region serves Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Norfolk, and Plymouth counties; and the Western Region serves Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties.

2. Office of the Child Advocate, JJPAD 2023 Annual Report, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/jjpad-2023-annual-report/download>

Overnight Arrests

DYS operates a network of juvenile overnight arrest (ONA) placements as a resource to local police departments and municipalities. ONA placements provide a safe location for youth arrested when courts are closed, who are either ineligible for or unable to post bail, to stay until court reopens. This network of placements ensures Massachusetts’ compliance with the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act, which prohibits youth from being held in adult jails or police lockups for six or more hours after arrest.

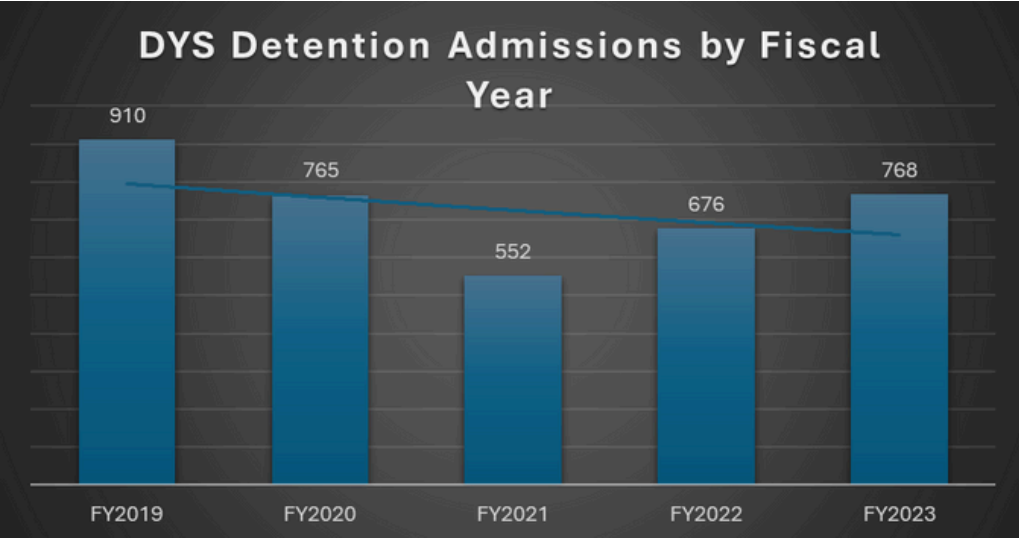
FY23 showed an 18% increase in overnight arrest admissions from FY22. Of the 595 overnight arrest admissions in FY23, 17% identify as female, compared to 83% who identify as male. In July 2017, the ONA service model expanded from ONA beds in stand-alone sites to include beds in both stand-alone and detention programs. This change allowed DHS to align services with the decline in the number of youth requiring overnight arrest placements while still maintaining geographically diverse settings to support police departments across the state. Of the 595 overnight arrest admissions in FY23, 50.1% (298) resulted in detention. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the female overnight arrest admissions resulted in detention and fifty-three percent (53%) of the male overnight arrest admissions resulted in detention.



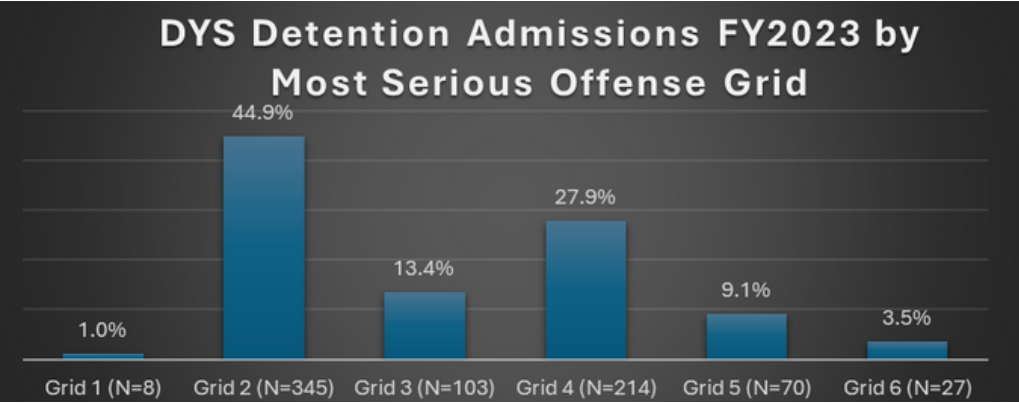
Detained Youth

Detained youth, comprised of youth detained for delinquency and youthful offender offenses, are committed to the care of the Department of Youth Services by the Juvenile Court during the pendency of their juvenile court cases.

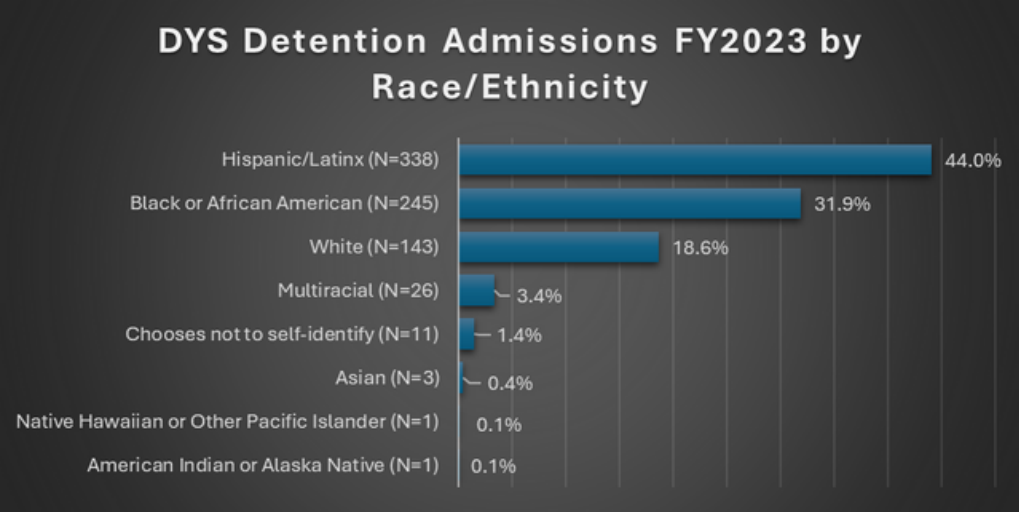
FY23 showed a 13.6% increase in detention admissions from FY22. Of the 768 detention admissions in FY23, 13.8% identify as female compared to 86.2% who identify as male.



Most youth held in detention in FY23 were charged with Grid 2 offenses, followed by Grid 4.³

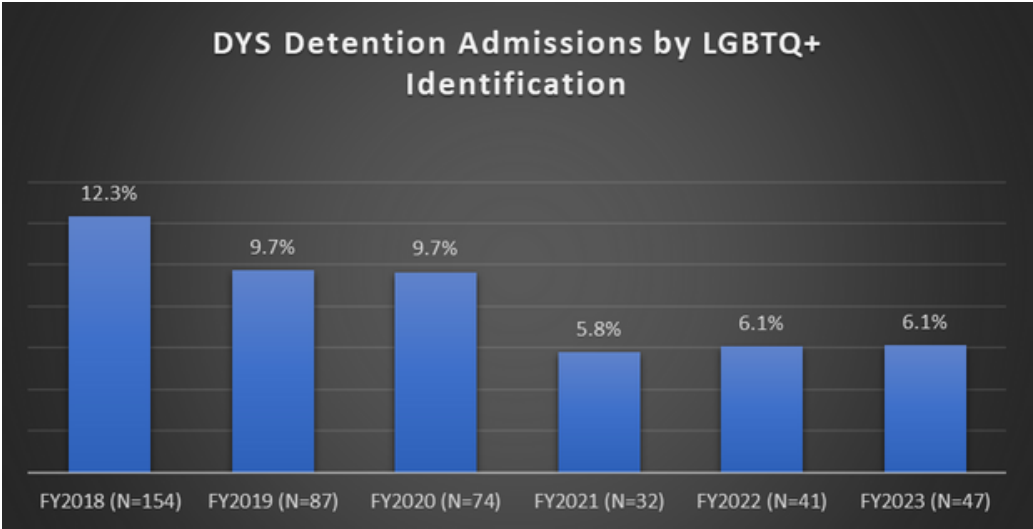


Eighty percent (80%) of the detention admissions in FY23 were youth of color.

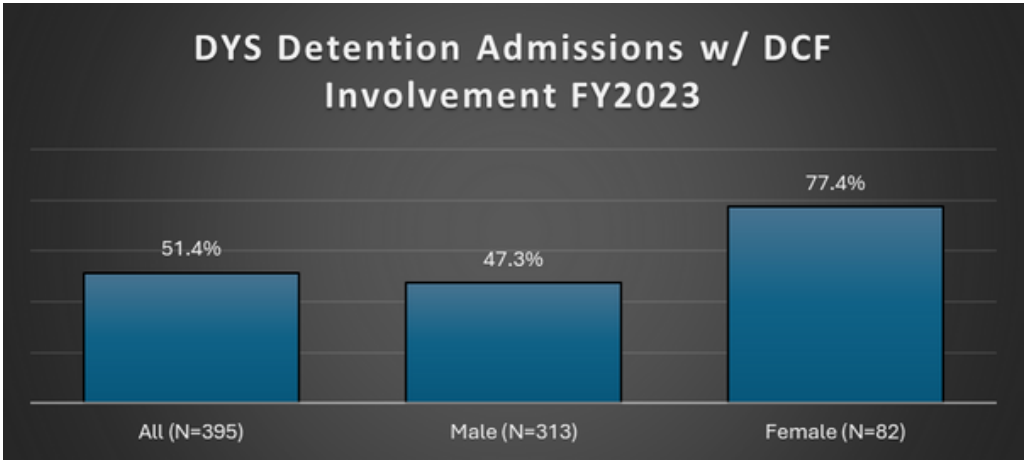


3. DYS uses a grid system that categorizes the severity of offenses to determine initial time assignments for placement. Offenses are categorized into one of these six levels. Grid level 2 offenses include possession of drugs and assault and battery. Grid level 4 offenses include armed robbery and carjacking. (Grid 7 is exclusively for murder charges.)

DYS youth who identified as LGBTQ+ represented 6.1% of all detention admissions in FY23.



DCF-involved youth represented 51.4% of all detention admissions in FY23. 77.4% of the female admissions are DCF-involved, while 47.3% of male admissions are DCF-involved.



Committed Youth

Youth may be committed to the Department’s custody after adjudication as either a delinquent or youthful offender. Most youth who are adjudicated delinquent are committed to the custody of the Department of Youth Services until the age of 18. Some youth may be committed to age 19 or 20 if their cases are not resolved in juvenile court until after their eighteenth birthday for offenses that occurred before they turned 18. In the case of a youth adjudicated as a youthful offender, the youth may be committed to age 21. A youth who is adjudicated for new offenses following their original commitment may be committed to DYS custody more than once. Once committed, DYS has sole discretion regarding the treatment and placement of a youth.

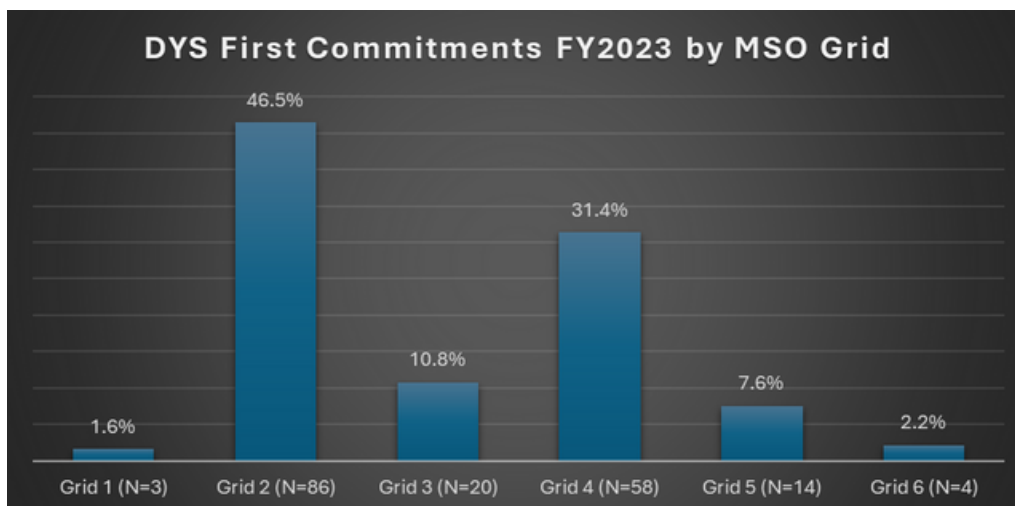
In FY23, there was a 29% increase in first-time commitments from FY22 for both delinquency and youthful offender cases. Of the 185 first-time commitments in FY23, 11% were female, compared to 90% who were male.



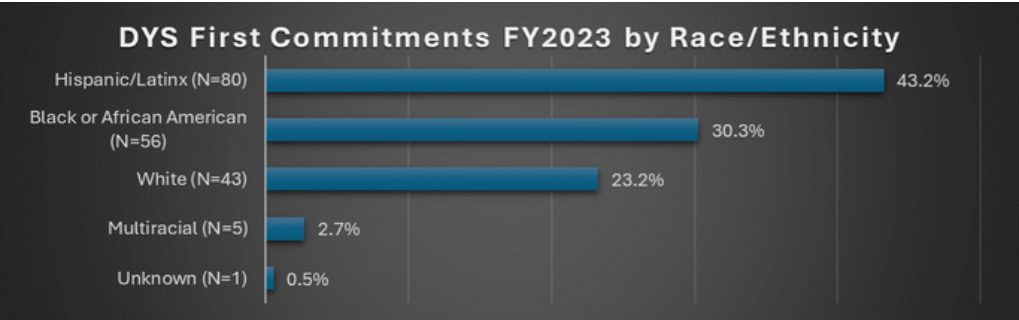
The average age of a first commitment in FY23 was 16.5 years, a slight decrease from 16.7 years in FY22.

Upon commitment to DYS’ custody, youth are assigned a caseworker who will remain assigned to them throughout the pendency of their commitment as well as during any period of voluntary services post discharge. All newly committed youth undergo a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment. At the conclusion of the assessment period, a “Staffing” meeting is held for each youth, during which their Treatment Team discusses the assessment findings regarding the youth’s strengths, assets, risks, and needs and develops treatment recommendations. The youth, their family, their attorney, and other relevant adults in the youth’s life are active participants in the Staffing. The Treatment Team’s recommendations are then considered in conjunction with the youth’s Classification Grid Level by a team of regional managers known as the Regional Review Team (RRT). The RRT determines the anticipated amount of time in treatment a youth may need to successfully return to the community and identifies a location for that treatment.

A majority of youth in FY2023 were adjudicated on offenses that fell in Grids 2 and 4.



In FY23, youth of color represented 76.2% of the DYS committed population. According to the most recent census in 2020, youth of color represent 34% of total juvenile court-aged population in Massachusetts clearly demonstrating their over-representation in the juvenile justice system despite research that shows that white youth and youth of color commit offenses at the same rates.⁴



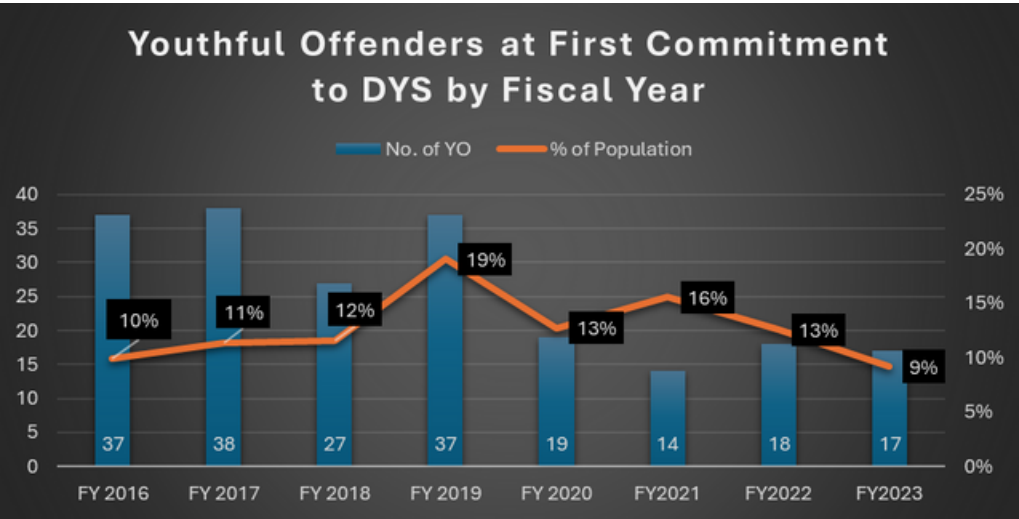
Youthful Offenders

A youth between the ages of 14 and 17 who commits an offense may be indicted and prosecuted as a youthful offender if the youth is also:

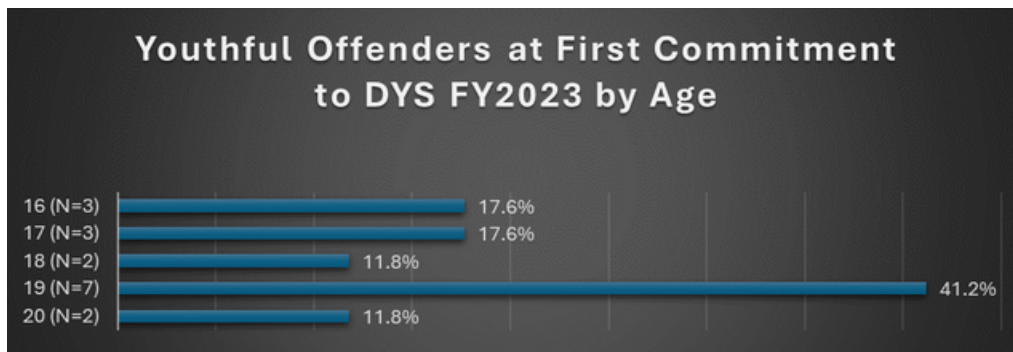
1. accused of committing a felony under Massachusetts law and has previously been committed to DYS; or
2. accused of committing an offense that involves the infliction or threat of serious bodily harm in violation of the law or
3. accused of certain violations of MA gun laws.

A youth adjudicated as a youthful offender can be committed to DYS until age 21, sentenced to the same maximum penalty as an adult facing the same charges, or receive a disposition that combines a commitment to DYS with a suspended adult sentence.

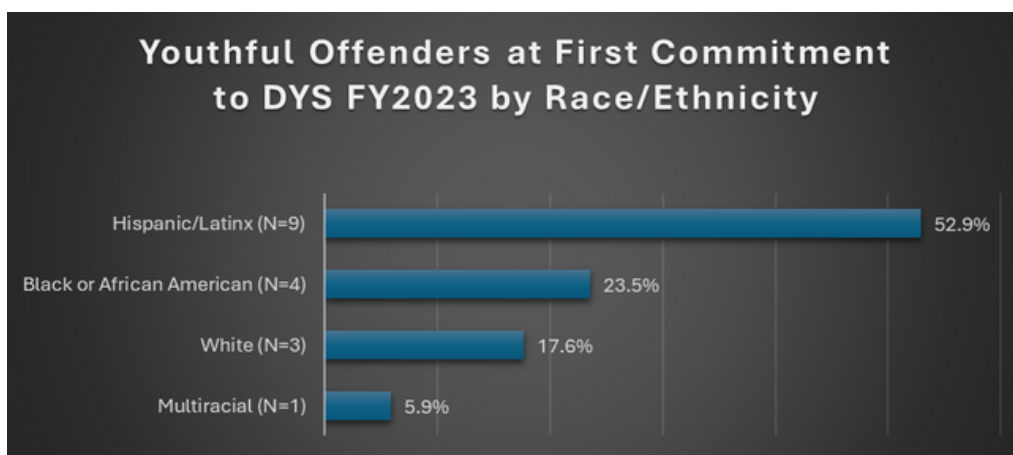
Of the 185 first-time commitments in FY23, 18 (9%) were youthful offenders.



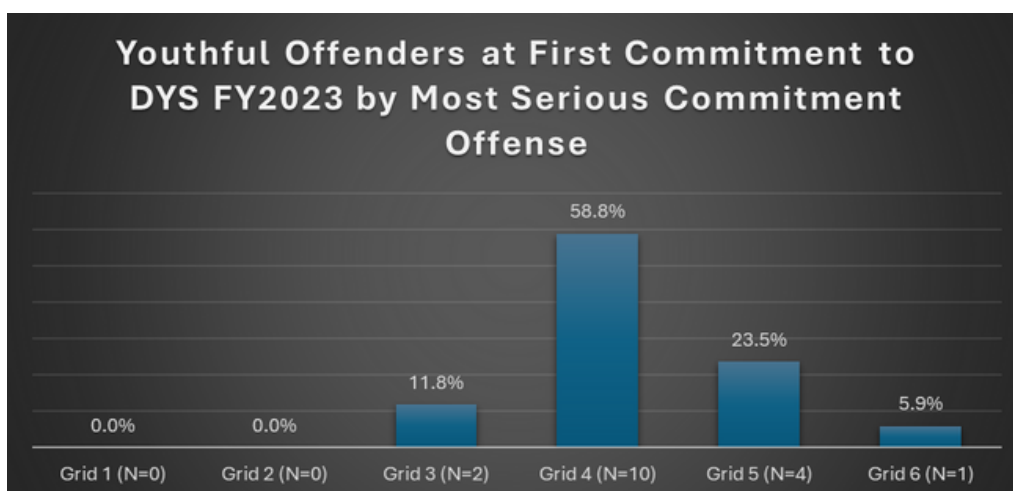
In FY23, the average age of youthful offenders at first commitment was 18.1 years.



Eighty-two percent (82%) of the youthful offenders were youth of color in FY23. Youth of color are overrepresented in this category compared to the percentage of the overall Massachusetts youth population.



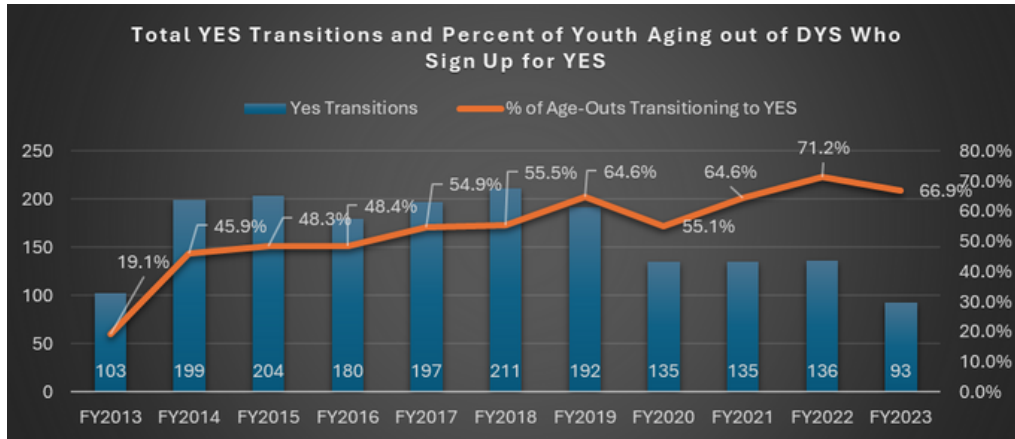
About fifty-nine percent (59%) of the youthful offenders committed to DYS for the first time in FY23 were adjudicated for Grid 4 level offenses.



Youth Engaged in Services

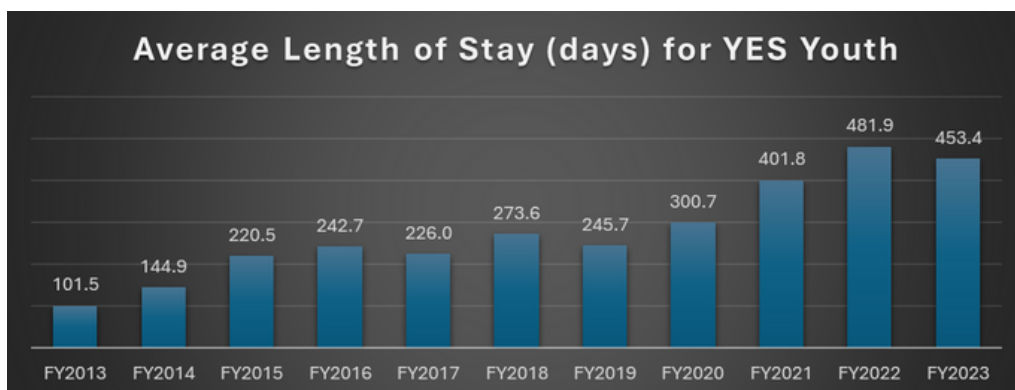
DYS offers voluntary, post-discharge services to all committed youth, until age 22. This initiative, known as Youth Engaged in Services (YES), provides transitional supports and services to youth when they are at the highest risk of recidivism within the first six months after discharge.

In FY23, nearly 67% of discharged youth opted-in to YES.



Through YES, youth work with their Caseworker and enter into a voluntary agreement for transitional services to meet agreed-upon goals, such as High School graduation or Hi-Set attainment, taking college courses, obtaining housing or getting a paying job.

A youth's progress in meeting their YES goals is reviewed every three months. All youth approaching the age of mandatory discharge from DYS are offered YES as part of the discharge planning process. Youth who do not enroll in YES immediately upon discharge can enroll at a later date, and youth who voluntarily leave the program may choose to reenroll at any point prior to turning 22. In FY19, the average length of time a youth participated in YES was about eight months. In FY23, the average length of participation was 15 months. Over 5 years, the average YES duration increased by seven months.



2. KEY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Strategic Plan Implementation

The Department finalized its 2022-2024 Strategic Plan, formally establishing a new mission, vision, and values and setting strategic goals that provide a framework to reach our vision and fulfill our mission. The strategic planning process identified incredible opportunities for the Department to impact positive change for young people in its care and custody.

Strategy Matters, the consulting team assisting DYS with operationalizing its 2022-2024 DYS Strategic Plan goals, hosted an all-day strategic planning implementation session in November of 2022 (pictured to the right).



A significant part of the development of the strategic plan included identifying goals that provide a framework for the agency to reach the vision and fulfill the mission. Workgroups were created to develop proposed action items to help the agency achieve its strategic goals.

The Department of Youth Services has set goals and objectives in three areas: youth, families, and communities; staff and organizational help; and the juvenile justice system.

1. Goal: Ensure that every youth committed to DYS has the personalized support they need to successfully and safely live, learn, and work in their communities.

Workgroups:

- Family Engagement
- Quality of Life
- Educational/Vocational Supports for Youth

2. Goal: Invest in and Sustain a Healthy, Agile, and Excellent Organization

Workgroups:

- Safety Committee
- Workforce development (recruitment/hiring)
- Training and professional development, management training



3. Goal: Collaborate with partners on behalf of a more equitable, fair, and supportive Juvenile Justice System

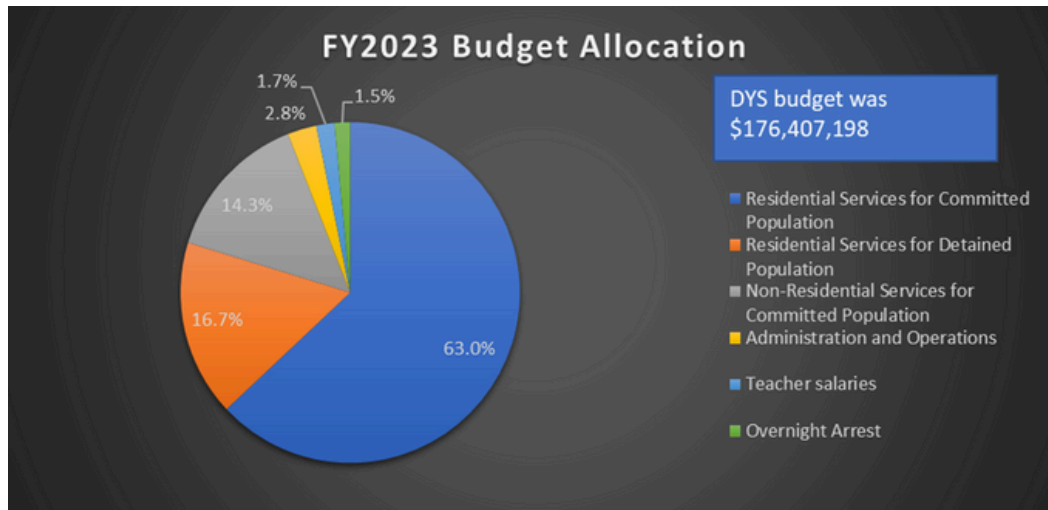
Workgroups:

- DYS REI
- JDAI Governance
- Providers

As the Department enters the next phase of its strategic plan work, we will continue to develop and promote new strategies for enhancing program safety, improving engagement with youth and their families, and ensuring effective coordination and collaboration with our contracted providers and system partners.

FY23 Budget

The Commonwealth's Fiscal Year 2023 budget allowed DYS to continue to invest in quality education, career readiness and employment opportunities for the young people we serve to successfully navigate the challenges of reintegrating into the community. The budget also supported DYS's Strategic Plan by funding innovative new recruitment and retention strategies for highly qualified staff necessary to operate a service continuum that supports and engages youth, families, and communities in strategies that promote positive youth development.



In Fiscal Year 2023 the Department of Youth Services Budget was \$176,407,198. This was broken down into:

- 63.0% for Residential Services for Committed Youth (\$111.14M)
- 16.7% for Residential Services for Detained Youth (\$29.53M)
- 14.3% for Community-based Services for Committed Youth (\$25.17M)
- 2.8% for Administration and Operations (\$4.89M)
- 1.7% for Teacher Salaries (\$3.06M)
- 1.5% for Overnight Arrest (\$2.61M)

This budget has allowed DYS to make strategic investments in evidence-based interventions and service models geared toward reducing recidivism of youth in our care and custody.

Education

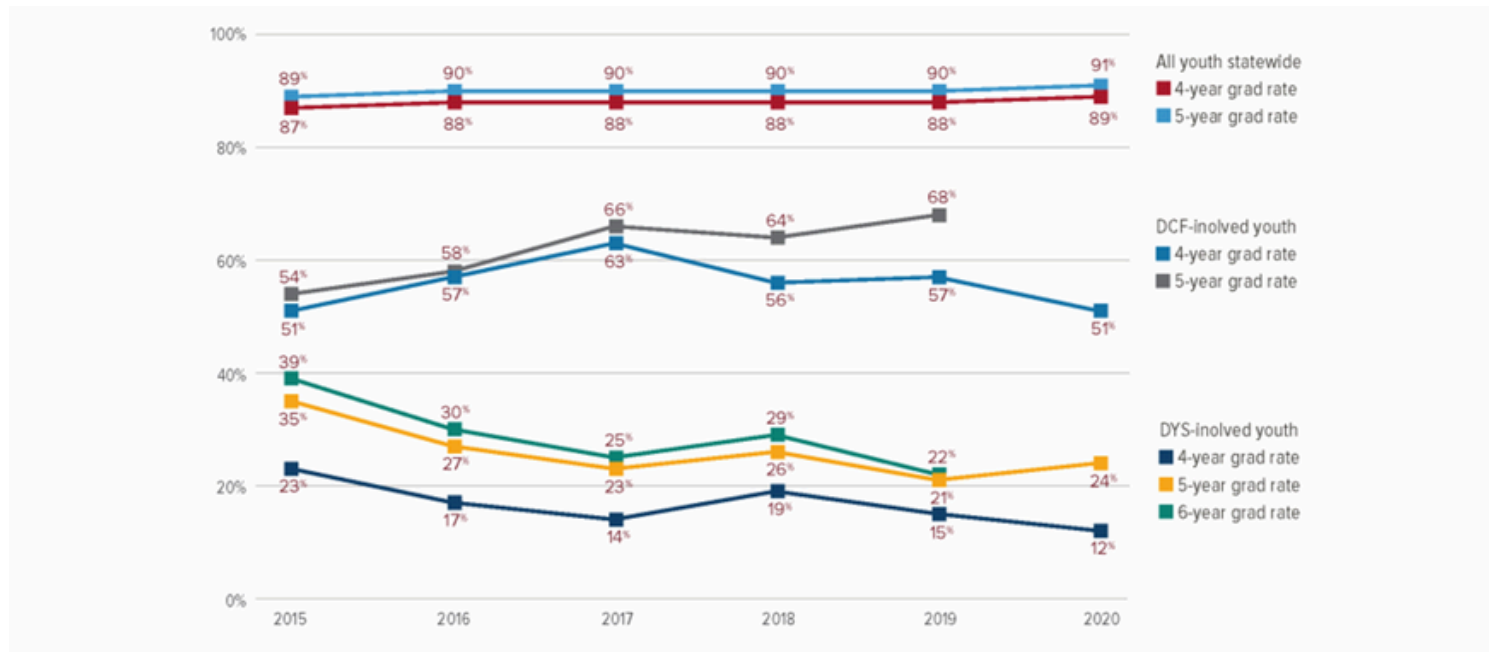
DYS is dedicated to offering educational programming that empowers young people to achieve their maximum potential. DYS provides general educational services to youth in DYS state and provider-operated residential programs through a contract with the Collaborative for Educational Services ("CES"). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ("DESE") and its Special Educational Services in Institutional Settings ("SEIS") provide special educational services through a contract with CES.

Research and data play pivotal roles in the DYS addressing challenges like meeting the developmental needs of justice-involved youth, monitoring education progress, assessing program effectiveness in reducing recidivism, and ensuring equitable practices. These tools enable DYS to make evidence-based policy decisions, promoting youth well-being and facilitating efficient cross-sector collaborations in juvenile justice. Integrating research into education initiatives further enhances DYS's ability to understand the complex needs of its population and tailor services for successful youth reintegration.

Exploring Secondary/Postsecondary Attainment Among Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth

In FY22, the Boston University CERES Institute for Children and Youth (CERES) partnered with DYS and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to evaluate the educational attainment of former DYS youth after their commitments with the Department ended. CERES analyzed data sets from 2015-2020, developed research questions, and presented their findings to DYS leadership this past fall. CERES concluded that:

- DYS-related supports are a critical factor in predicting high school and college success
- Students are more likely to finish high school if the graduation date occurs during their commitment
- Youth who participated in YES were less likely to drop out and more likely to graduate from high school

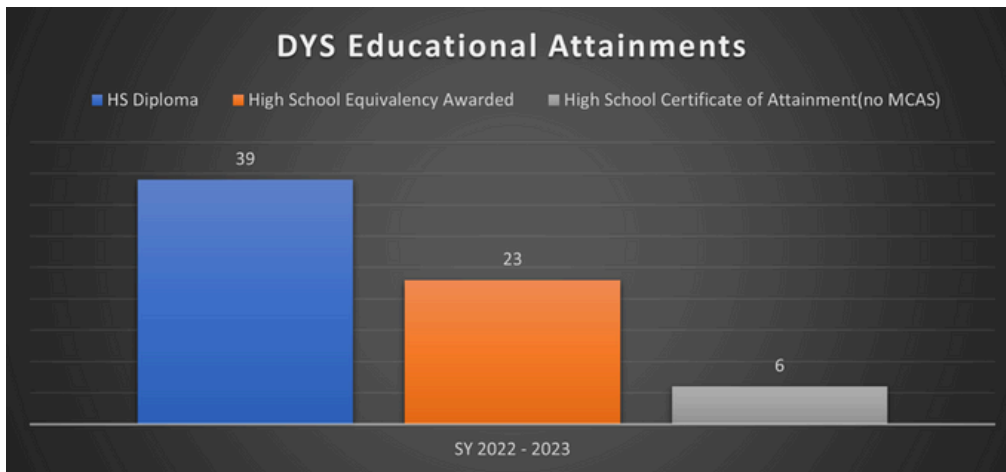


According to the report’s results, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has one of the highest high school graduation rates in the United States; however, DYS youth graduate at rates more than three times lower than the statewide public school student population. Twenty-six percent (26%) of young people involved with the Department of Youth Services completed high school within five years.

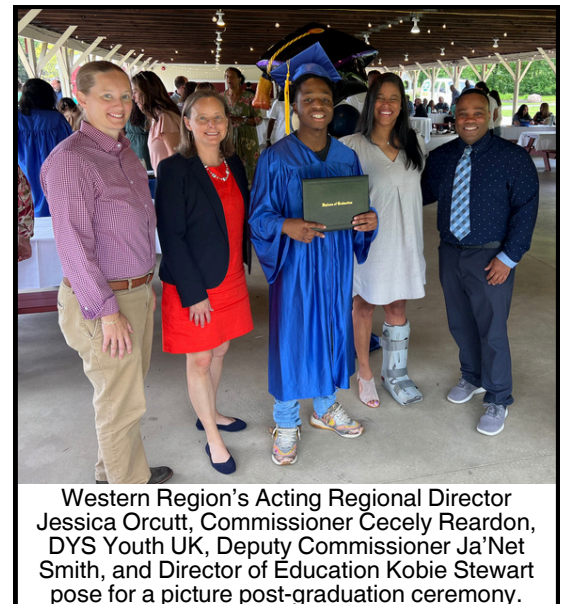
DYS is still in the process of determining the best way to use this data in its service models. CERES and DESE have agreed to continue to evaluate this data over the next decade, allowing DYS to continuously improve its education services to provide supports that will benefit youth in their educational pursuits post-discharge.

Graduations

In celebration of the end of the 2022-2023 School Year, DYS and the Collaborative for Education Services staff organized graduation ceremonies throughout the regions. The regional ceremonies served as a platform for recognizing the hard work and accomplishments of DYS youth who obtained their HS Diploma, HiSET, or equivalency. Throughout the school year, the youth displayed determination and grit, which allowed them to overcome challenges and achieve their goals, from academics to personal growth. During the 2022-2023 School Year, a total of 69 DYS youth received high school attainments (diploma, Certificate of Attainment, or equivalency).

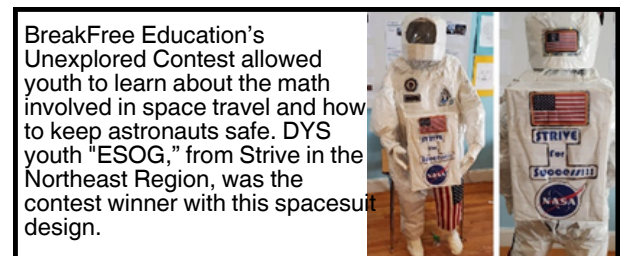
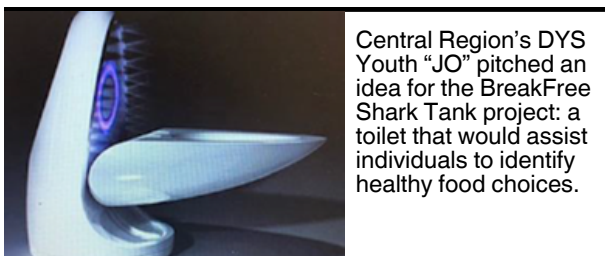


The atmosphere at each graduation ceremony was filled with excitement and anticipation as graduates, families, educators, and department staff gathered to mark this significant milestone. Inspiring speeches, including one by Essex County District Attorney, Paul Tucker, encouraged the graduates to continue their journey of success and reminded them of their immense potential.



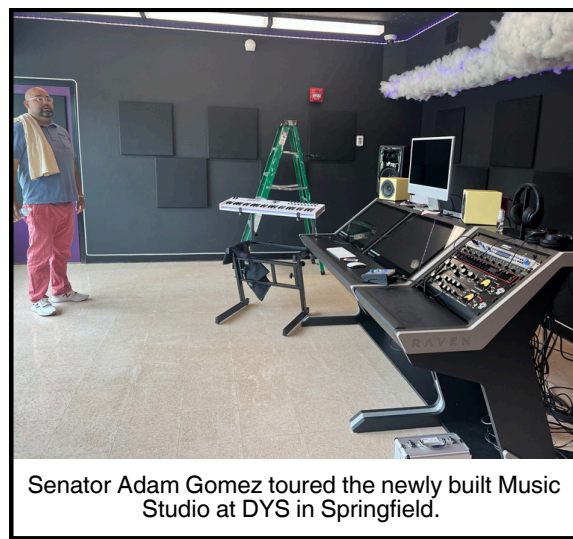
Breakfree Education

DYS Youth participate in BreakFree challenges through the CES partnership with BreakFree Education, a non-profit dedicated to enhancing education for youth in juvenile justice education spaces.



Career, Vocational, and Employability Services (CVES) Skill Up Update

In FY 23, DYS expanded its Skill Up vocational program with new initiatives to provide hands-on vocational training, mentorship, and transformative experiences. DYS added new programs in culinary arts, barbering, music production and staging, bike mechanics, and silk screening to empower youth with a range of vocational options and help them develop essential skills for future success.



Collaboration

One of the primary goals of DYS's 2022-24 Strategic plan is to collaborate with partners to work towards a more equitable, fair, and supportive Juvenile Justice System. DYS has begun implementation of this goal through its ongoing partnerships and work with other justice and human services agencies across the Commonwealth. Below are a few key highlights from the past year.

Diversions

Based on the positive outcomes from the first year of implementation, the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP) ⁵ expanded in FY23 to two sites: Hampden County and Plymouth County, through contracted services with the Gandara Center and Old Colony YMCA, respectively. Further expansion to additional sites and the hiring of more Diversion Coordinators are planned for 2024.

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Interactive Data Dashboard

JDAI, in partnership with the Department of Youth Services and Executive Office of Technology Services and Security, launched a new Data Dashboard offering an interactive analysis of juvenile detention data through an equity lens. The goal of the Dashboard is to bring JDAI collaborators, system stakeholders, and members of the public up-to-date, accurate data about detention trends across the Commonwealth. The interactive Dashboard allows users to filter and compare Massachusetts Department of Youth Services data related to JDAI across several categories. The Dashboard will enable users to examine the equity of aspects of the juvenile legal system to ensure that, moving forward, disparities based on race, age, gender/sexual orientation, and other elements of a youth's identity are not perpetuated by the system.

Boston Area Research Initiative Presentation: Integrating data across state agencies to understand educational trajectories among justice-involved youth in Massachusetts

DYS and DESE recently collaborated on a project presented at the Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The presentation, titled "Integrating data across state agencies to understand educational trajectories among justice-involved youth in Massachusetts," explained how data was shared between the two departments, highlighted the benefits of such data sharing, and discussed key insights resulting from their collaboration.

DYS Workforce and Training

At DHS, continuous investment in the workforce is essential for achieving lasting positive change for the youth in our care and custody. The dedication, commitment, and skills of DHS staff are crucial in creating an environment that fosters positive outcomes in education, vocational training, and interpersonal and life skills for youth. DHS, like other human service agencies locally and

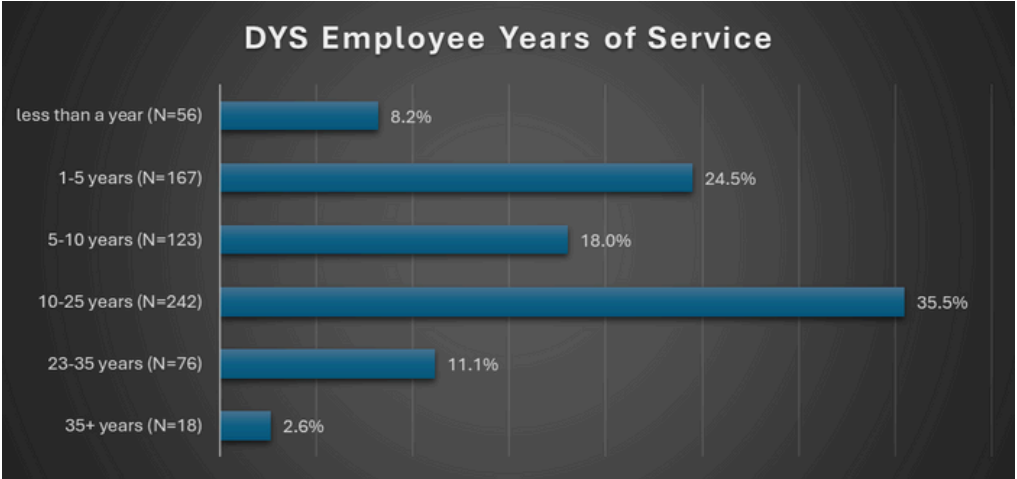
nationally, has experienced significant pandemic-related labor market challenges, especially related to the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Vacancy rates and significant turnover in staff have required DHS to consolidate programs to meet required staff-to-youth ratios temporarily. DHS has consistently implemented recruitment and retention strategies to address hiring challenges created by a difficult labor market post the COVID-19 pandemic.



In FY23, DHS hired 200 new staff, which is a 57% increase from the previous year.

5. See "Who We Serve" (above).

The average years of service for current DYS employees is 12.5 years.



DYS Trauma Response Specialists

In 2022, JDAI was awarded a grant from the Lookout Foundation to fund three new positions for a two-year initial period to support DYS staff. These positions, called Trauma Response Specialists (TRSes), serve as a resource and as trainers to support staff to combat vicarious trauma, post-incident trauma, racial trauma, and racial inequity faced in their roles and communities.



“You Days” Campaign

DYS' "You Days" campaign was created to show the department’s appreciation for our staff. The campaign consisted of weekly staff appreciation events hosted throughout DYS’ five regions between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.



Employee Recognition Awards

Each year, DYS hosts two annual staff appreciation events--the Commissioner's Awards and the Years of Service Awards. The Commissioner's Awards recognizes DYS staff, contracted providers staff, and Community Partners, and the Years of Service awards celebrates milestone career service.

Commissioner's Awards

The Annual Commissioner's Awards were held on September 28, 2022, in DYS' Western Region.

Candidates are nominated by their coworkers, contracted provider staff, and youth in our programs. The awards are divided into four categories: State Employee, Youth Voice, Provider Partner, and Community Partner Award. At the ceremony, three teams of employees, eighteen individuals, and three Community Partners were recognized. Also acknowledged at the awards ceremony were the recipients of the Commonwealth's Performance Recognition Program's 2022 Citations for Outstanding Performance.



Commissioner Cecely Reardon with award recipients in the metro region at the Commissioner's Awards.

2022-2023 Years of Service Ceremonies

DYS held its annual Years of Service Award Ceremonies celebrating employees' commitment to the Department.

Each year, the ceremonies serve as an opportunity to recognize the Department's first-year employees as well as honor the long-standing service of staff who have dedicated 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and even 40 years to the Department's mission.

The Years of Service recipients cumulatively had over 1700 years of dedicated service and commitment to DYS.



Equity and Inclusion

DYS serves a population of young people who overwhelmingly identify as youth of color (83%). Forty percent (40%) or more of the young people we serve have identified learning disabilities, and about seven percent (7.3%) of youth identify as LGBTQ+. The Department places a high priority on implementing strategies to reduce the racial and ethnic disparities experienced by the young people who enter our care and custody, as well as to recognize and address other forms of inequity.

In addition to various activities and partnerships detailed below, DYS has implemented a curriculum specifically designed to educate staff regarding the racial and ethnic disparities experienced by our young people. DYS has also integrated training on the importance of youth self-identification into our agency-wide Basic Training for new employees and our Annual Review for existing staff. Regional-based diversity book clubs and youth identity work groups have been established, and a racial trauma conference for educators has been held for the past four years. The Department is also evaluating its hiring policies and practices through a racial equity lens. These strategies reflect DYS' commitment to reducing, mitigating, and, where possible, eradicating racial and ethnic disparities within the framework of our strategic plan.

4th Annual DYS Racial Trauma Conference

In March 2022, over 300 educators, community partners, clinicians, and professionals convened for the Fourth Annual DYS Racial Trauma Conference. The goal of the conference is to deepen the collective understanding of how racial trauma impacts youth involved in the juvenile justice system in Massachusetts. This year's conference centered on the theme "Building Pathways to Promote Healing" and provided both inspiration and professional development for attendees.



DYS' LGBTQ FY23 Recommendations

The MA Commission on LGBTQ Youth ("Commission") continued its annual work with DYS to develop its recommendations⁴ for LGBTQ Youth in DYS' care and custody. The Commission's FY 2023 recommendations continued to focus on tracking and sharing data related to sexual orientation and gender identity to foster data-driven decision making, providing LGBTQ training and resources to staff, and implementing LGBTQ-inclusive material into the existing educational curriculum for youth.

FY 2023 Commission Recommendations:

1. Share and continue to develop data related to sexual orientation and gender identity and analyze its implications.
2. Continue to provide LGBTQ trainings and other resources and review them for currency and effectiveness.
3. Continue implementing LGBTQ-inclusive material into existing curricula and programming for youth in its care.
4. Develop an LGBTQ curriculum for parents to offer through the Mass Youth Diversion Program sites.
5. Investigate whether LGBTQI youth, particularly transgender and intersex youth, are generally staying longer in detention vs. individual youth, skewing numbers and collaborating with juvenile justice partners to determine root causes.

DYS' internal workgroup meets monthly to review data and progress regarding these recommendations.

Health and Wellness

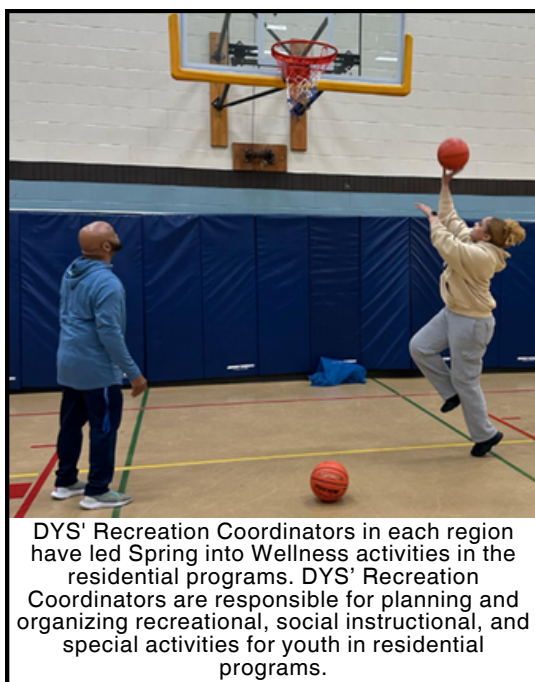
The Department of Youth Services has made the health and wellness of youth a top priority.

In accordance with our "Youth Wellness in Residential Settings" policy (updated in FY22), DYS's food service staff worked diligently to make healthy food accessible to our youth in residential programs. Through participation in the USDA School Lunch and School Breakfast programs, school-aged children receive nutritionally balanced meals with whole grains, multiple vegetables, healthy protein, and low-fat milk at breakfast and lunch daily. Through this program, DYS youth have the nutrients that support their physical and mental growth.

DYS was recently awarded the School Nutrition Equipment Assistance Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The money will cover the cost of updating equipment in the DYS kitchens in the Northeast and Central Regions. The new equipment, including a commercial-size mixing bowl, a slow cook oven, and an outdoor grill, will allow DYS to explore new recipes for tasty and healthier meals.

Spring Into Wellness

Spring into Wellness is an annual campaign organized by the Department's Human Resources Division and Workforce Coordinators that promotes health and wellness among staff members. This year's focus was on physical activity and body movement. Spring into Wellness gives DYS' Workforce Coordinators an opportunity to talk with DYS staff about the importance of their health as well as providing information about GIC health insurance benefits including smoking cessation programs and fitness reimbursements.



2023 DYS Arts Initiatives

At DYS, the arts are powerful tools for healing, self-expression, and community building. In 2023, DYS initiated a series of events aimed at fostering the artistic expression of DYS youth.

DYS hosted its annual Art Rally at the Massachusetts State House, providing DYS youth with a unique platform to engage with State Representatives and Senators. DYS youth focused on highlighting the transformative impact of the arts in their treatment and overall wellness while at DYS.

DYS organized the 10th Annual "Share Your Art, Share Your Voice" Youth Arts Showcase at WGBH Studios. The event featured an art gallery and sale, showcasing over 400 pieces of artwork created by DYS youth, including paintings, drawings, and clothing. All proceeds from the sale directly benefited the youth.



Senator Pavel Payano, a former DYS teacher, met with youth at the Statehouse for DYS' annual Art Rally.

As part of DYS' ongoing collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts, DYS staff and youth participated in an MFA Restorative Justice Project workshop led by Boston-based artist Ayana Mack. DYS staff and youth (see picture below) explored the themes of race and status in Kehinde Wiley's painting "John, 1st Baron Byron" and gained new artistic skills to navigate moments of uncertainty through visual expression.

