

Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care

January 2014

Why Education Matters to Children in Foster Care

When supported by strong practices and policies, positive school experiences can counteract the negative effects of abuse, neglect, separation, and lack of permanency experienced by the nearly 400,000 U.S. children and youth in foster care. Education provides opportunities for improved well-being in physical, intellectual, and social domains during critical developmental periods and supports economic success in adult life. A concerted effort by child welfare agencies, education agencies, and the courts could lead to significant progress in changing the consistent and disheartening picture about educational outcomes for children in foster care the research portrays. The promising programs and interventions highlighted below represent innovative efforts to address a wide range of factors influencing the disparities in education outcomes. With cross-system collaboration, we are positioned to build on what is being learned, bring about change, and promote success for all children and youth in foster care.

Fast facts from national and multi-state studies*

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012	399,546
Average number of living arrangements during first foster care stay	2.8
Number of foster children of school age	249,107
Likelihood of being absent from school	2x that of other students
Percent of foster youth who change schools when first entering care	56%-75%
Percent of 17-18 year olds in care who have experienced 5+ school changes	34%
Likelihood of 17-18 year old foster youth having an out-of-school suspension	2x that of other students
Likelihood of 17-18 year old foster youth being expelled	3x that of other students
Average reading level of 17-18 year olds in foster care	7th grade
Likelihood of foster youth receiving special education	2.5 - 3.5x that of others
Percent of foster youth who complete high school by 18	50%
Percent of 17-18 year old foster youth who want to go to college	84%
Percent of foster youth who graduated from high school who attend college	20%
Percent of former foster youth who attain a bachelor's degree	2 - 9%

* All *Fast Facts* are referenced in *Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care* (2014). These facts were compiled based on findings from multiple studies where a consistent picture is emerging that points to widespread deficits on a number of markers of educational progress or success. Data points represented here are either from national studies or multiple studies conducted in different states (in which case a range is provided for the data point).

National Foster Care Data

National data on the number of children and youth in foster care and their characteristics provide a context for the research on the educational experiences of children and youth in foster care. Table 1 provides data on the characteristics of children and youth in foster care.

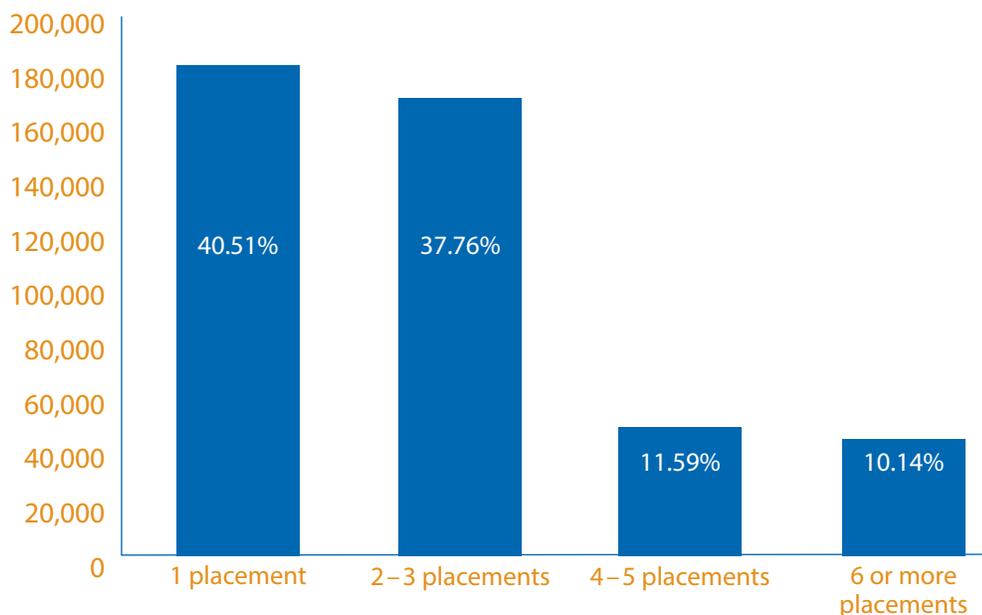
Table 1.
Characteristics of Children and Youth in Foster Care

Number of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012		399,546	
Characteristics of children and youth in foster care on September 30, 2012		Number	Percentage
Age			
Young children (age 0–4)		132,845	33
School age children and youth (age 5–17)		249,107	62
Young adults (age 18–20)		17,302	4
Race/Ethnicity*			
White		166,195	42
Black		101,938	26
Hispanic (any race)		84,523	21
Other children and youth of color		34,371	9
Gender			
Male		209,131	52
Female		190,355	48

* Includes 3 percent whose race/ethnicity was unknown

School age children in foster care commonly experience a number of moves while in out-of-home care as shown in Figure 1. These changes can significantly impact their school experiences. Data from Chapin Hall’s Center for State Child Welfare Data shows that among school-aged youth who entered care between 2005-2009, each experienced an average of 2.8 living arrangements by the end of 2011, including their initial out-of-home placement when removed from home.

Figure 1.
**School-Age Children and Youth in Foster Care (5–17 Years) Who Entered Care Between 2005-2009:
 Number of Children by Number of Living Arrangements**



Source: The Center for State Child Welfare’s 2011 data. The Center draws data from 29 states and two counties. Each youth who first entered care between 2005-2009 is represented in this data. The number of living arrangements was counted from entry date through the end of 2011.