



first star
putting students first



ABOUT FIRST STAR, INC.

MISSION

First Star's mission is to provide high school youth and young adults who have experienced foster care with the opportunity, tools, and support to successfully transition to self-sufficiency through higher education or other viable pathways.

HISTORY

First Star began in 2000 as a policy organization advocating for youth who had experienced abuse or neglect and lacked a voice in decisions affecting their lives. In 2011, we launched a direct-service Academy model that brings high school youth in foster care onto college campuses, where they receive long-term mentoring, academic support, and life skills training.

Since then, we have improved the lives of over 3,000 youth and young adults who've experienced foster care, with over 95% of First Star scholars graduating high school and over 90% pursuing higher education. Through our four core pillars, encompassing Academies, Alumni Services, STEAM, and Coalition Building, we empower youth in foster care by replacing instability with steady guidance, meaningful opportunities, and sustained investment in their growth.

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2025 FIRST STAR NATIONAL FACT SHEET

Youth in Foster Care and Higher Education: National Outcomes

Youth in foster care face significant barriers to pursuing and completing higher education. Many lack strong academic foundations, consistent family or adult support, and access to critical resources, all of which places them at a severe disadvantage when it comes to entering, staying in, and graduating from college.

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), **approximately 343,000 youth were in foster care in the U.S. in 2023**, representing about **1% of the national youth population**. Of these, roughly **184,094 youth exited care**, and **15,590 aged out without being reunified, adopted, or placed in permanent guardianship**. This means **8.5% of youth** who exited care aged out of the system without a stable support network.

The outcomes for these youth are stark. Nationally, only **10% of foster youth enroll in college**, and of those, **just 3% graduate**. Based on the 15,590 youth who aged out in 2023, this translates to only about **1,559** starting college, and a mere **47** ultimately earning a degree. The outlook for those who do not pursue or complete higher education is even more dire:

- **61% face unemployment,**
- **46% experience incarceration, and**
- **24% become homeless.**

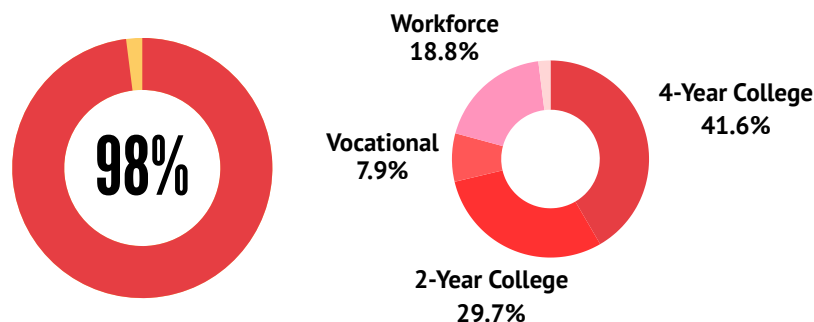
These statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions, supportive services, and systemic reforms to ensure foster youth have a real chance at educational and life success.

First Star Scholars: Changing the Odds

Through First Star's long-term, relationship-centered model, youth are not only staying in school—they are thriving! Among scholars who participate in the First Star Academy for at least two or more years:

- **Over 95% graduate from high school, compared to just 50% nationally.**
- **Over 90% enroll in higher education, almost 10 times the national average of 10% among foster youth.**

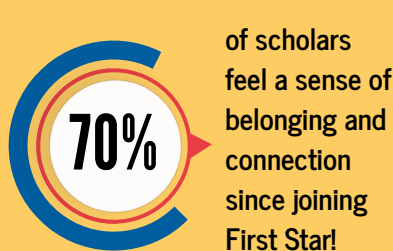
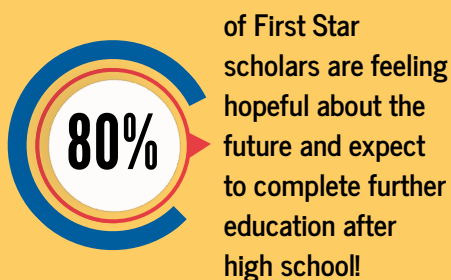
First Star goes beyond a traditional college-prep model. We take a whole-scholar approach, supporting youth in exploring diverse post-secondary pathways, including the military, workforce certifications, and direct-to-career opportunities, to ensure that success is defined by the young person's goals and interests. These outcomes are not anomalies. They're proof of what's possible when foster youth are equipped with consistency, mentorship, and a supportive community. At First Star, we don't just imagine a better future for youth in care. We help them build it.



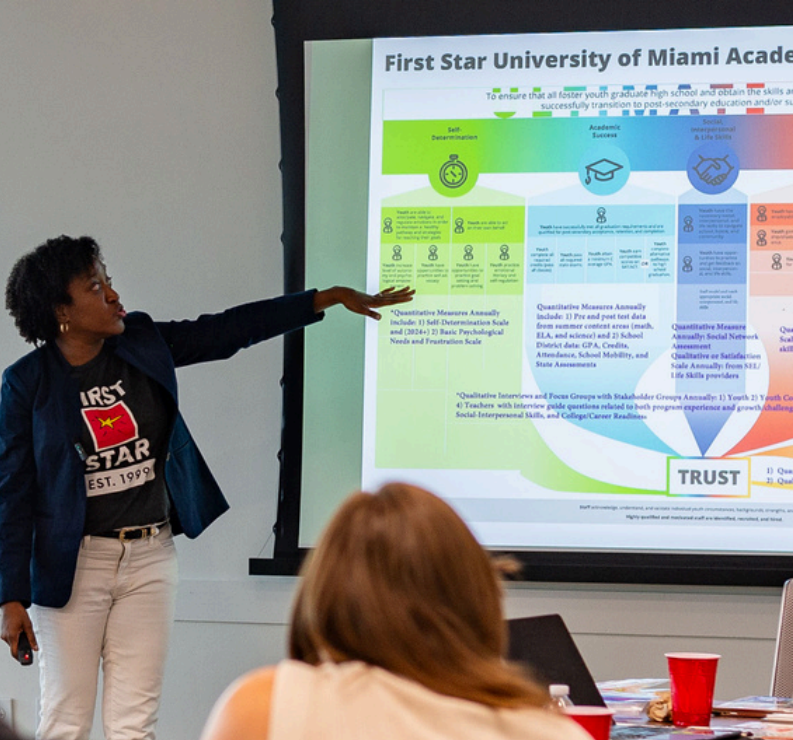
Graduated from High School	98%
GED/ Credit Recovery	2%
Post Secondary Education Pathways	83%
4-year University	46%
Community College	29%
Vocational School	8%
Workforce Pathways	17%
Enlistment in Military	0%
Full-Time Employment	17%
Apprenticeship/Certificate Program	0%

Source: All data above is reflective of internal data submissions of graduating scholars by Academy Directors using the First Star Data Dashboard

WHAT SCHOLARS ARE SAYING ABOUT FIRST STAR'S IMPACT



Source: All data above is reflective of a report compiled from the Bright Futures Survey, a scholar survey developed in collaboration with Dr. Philip Hong and University of Georgia (UGA)'s School of Social Work, June, 2024



National Foster Youth Demographics

Advancing Racial Equity

First Star is deeply committed to serving students of color who are disproportionately represented in the foster care system. By providing holistic support, academic enrichment, and a sense of belonging, First Star works to address systemic inequities and create opportunities for these young people to thrive despite the challenges of foster care.

RACE/ETHNICITY IDENTIFICATION

33%	30%	22%	2%	9%	3%	1%
Black/ African Amer.	Latino/a	White	Amer. Indian	Multi- Racial	Asian/ Pacific Isl	Other

Addressing Gender Disparities

National foster care demographics are nearly evenly split (51% male, 49% female). Within First Star 40% of scholars identify as male and 59% as female. **This gap underscores the urgency for targeted outreach strategies to better engage male-identifying youth in care and ensure equitable access to support and opportunity.**

GENDER IDENTIFICATION

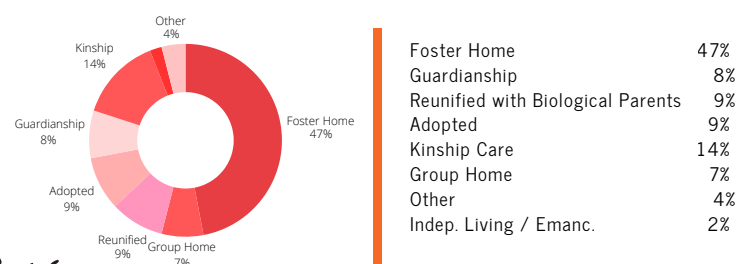


Source(s): Foster Care Race Statistics, The Annie Casey Foundation

National Foster Youth Placement Data

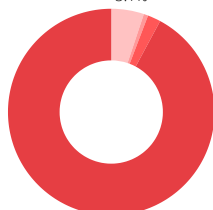
National foster care placement data shows youth are placed in a variety of settings. These placement types often reflect varying levels of stability, with youth in group homes, independent living, or runaway status typically facing greater vulnerability.

First Star focuses on serving some of the most vulnerable youth in care, particularly those lacking consistent placement or long-term permanency. Through **sustained engagement** in the First Star Academy program, scholars experience **improved placement stability and permanency outcomes**. These outcomes reflect First Star's holistic approach and its measurable, positive impact on youth well-being and long-term stability.



First Star is also reaching **highly mobile youth—students navigating multiple systems such as juvenile justice, immigration, and housing insecurity**—ensuring that some of the most vulnerable young people have access to stability, support, and educational opportunity.

Special Immigration Status
5.1%



Source(s): Adoption and FosterCare Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY2020 data U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration of Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau



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