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# ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY FIRST STAR ACADEMY 2025 IMPACT REPORT





# ABOUT FIRST STAR ISU ACADEMY



## FIRST STAR MISSION

First Star provides high school youth in foster care with the opportunity, tools, and support to successfully transition to self-sufficiency through higher education or other viable pathways

### Illinois State University (ISU)

#### The Center for Child Welfare and Adoption Studies

First Star at Illinois State University serves college-bound foster youth in Central Illinois and includes monthly Saturday classes, year-round academic mentoring, life skills classes, and caregiver engagement. Program participants also reside on the campus at ISU for two weeks during the summer as part of a campus immersion program.

**Academy Director:** Tameka Thompson



Email: [tfthom1@ilstu.edu](mailto:tfthom1@ilstu.edu)



Phone Number: 309-438-5841



Website: [www.childwelfare.illinoisstate.edu/first-star-academy/](http://www.childwelfare.illinoisstate.edu/first-star-academy/)



Instagram: @firststarisu



**HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATION  
COMPLETION**

**COMPARED TO 50% NATIONALLY**



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## FIRST STAR ODU ACADEMY IN THE SPOTLIGHT



First Star Summer Site Visit



National Peer Mentor Award Recipient

# THE ACADEMY MODEL

## ACADEMY PROGRAMMING INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:



### MONTHLY ACADEMIES

Monthly programming over four years for youth in foster care focused on academics and life skills while they are in high school.

### SUMMER ACADEMY

Intensive 2-4 week residential enrichment program on a university campus.

### CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

Seminars and workshops that provide tools to caregivers to become advocates for their youth.

### VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Weekly mentoring and tutoring sessions, as well as an open environment to connect and build community through virtual hangouts.



### STEAM ACADEMY

Virtual Tech Talks and access to labs that focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math.



### SCHOLAR ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC)

Leadership opportunity for scholars focused on becoming civically engaged and enacting change in their local communities.



### ALUMNI PROGRAM

Offered to scholars who graduate the Academy as a resource during their transition to adulthood.



# BRIGHT FUTURES AHEAD

## CELEBRATING SCHOLAR SUCCESS



### FIRST STAR ALUMNI PROGRAM

The First Star Alumni Program's goal is to remain connected and ensure Alumni have access to resources and the First Star network as they transition into adulthood, career, and advanced education.



**100%** of the 2025 graduating class enrolled in the Alumni Program

**79%** of enrolled Alumni engage with the program via resources, newsletters and events

**22%** of peer mentors are First Star Alumni

### FIRST STAR STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC)

First Star encourages advocacy and engagement in social justice through the Scholar Advisory Committee (SAC). SAC is composed of current scholars from across the First Star Academy network and from the Alumni Program. SAC allows scholars to build community, freely share their ideas and opinions, and dialogue about important issues!



**80%** of SAC scholars were returners from last year

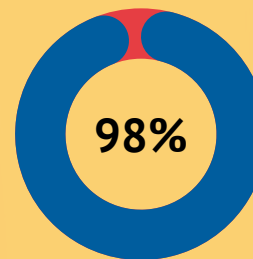
**100%** of SAC scholars stated they felt more confident taking on leadership roles

**100%** of SAC scholars stated they felt more confident in advocating for themselves

### NATIONAL FIRST STAR CLASS OF 2025

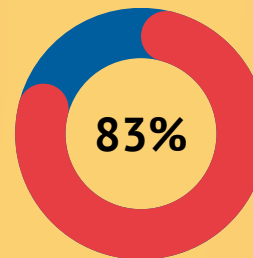


#### National Graduating Class



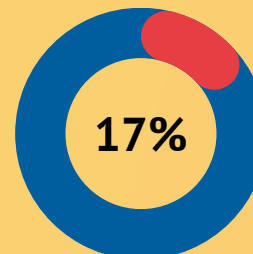
**H.S Diploma: 98%**  
Credit Recovery: 2%

#### Post-Secondary Pathways



**4-year: 46%**  
**2-year CC: 29%**  
**Vocation/Trade School: 8%**

#### Workforce Pathways



**Apprenticeship/ Union: 0%**  
**Full-Time Employment: 17%**  
**Military: 0%**

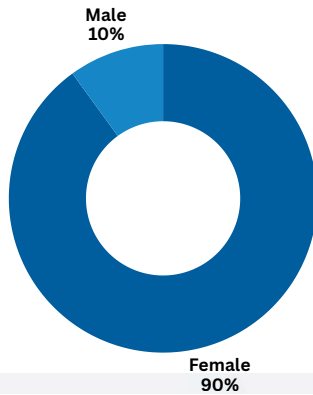




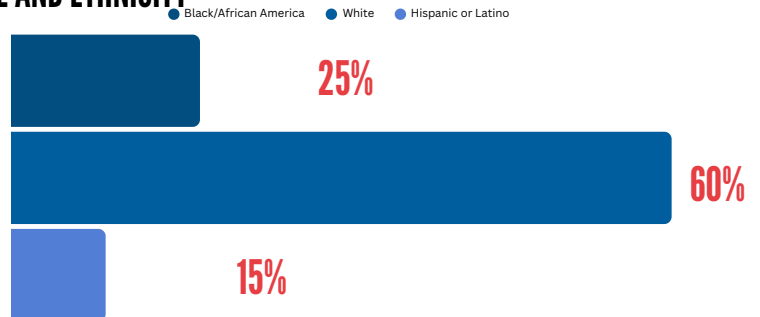
# FIRST STAR ISU ACADEMY

## SCHOLAR PROFILE

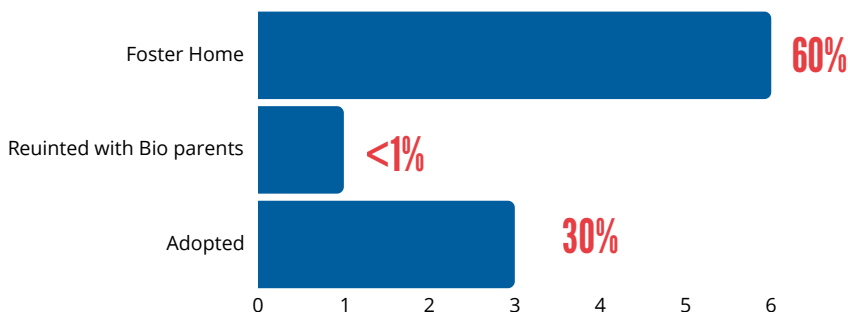
### GENDER



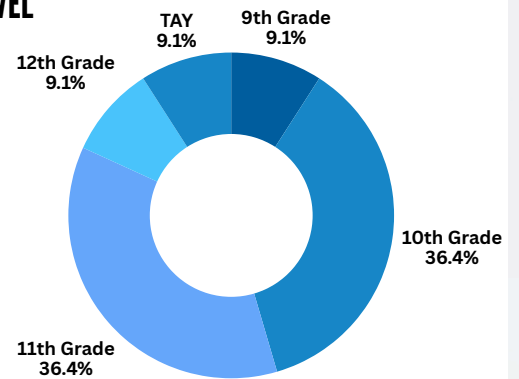
### RACE AND ETHNICITY



### PLACEMENT STATUS



### GRADE LEVEL



## Celebrating Class of 2025

100%

of First Star ISU scholars graduated High School on time!

100%

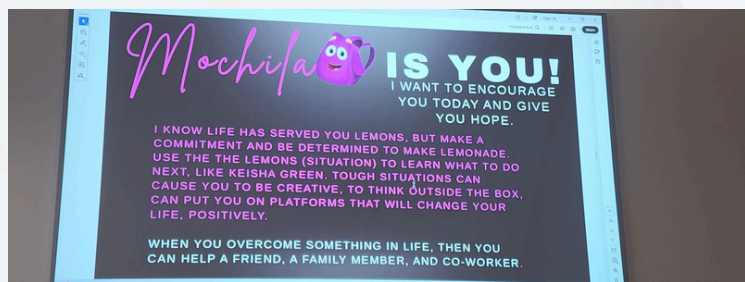
of First Star ISU graduates are pursuing post-secondary opportunities.

100%

of First Star ISU high school graduates will attend ISU in the fall!

# FIRST STAR ISU IMPACT

## 2024-2025 ACADEMIC YEAR



### LIFE SKILLS AND SELF DISCOVERY

Motivational speaker encouraged Scholars to reflect on their personal "mochila" — a symbolic backpack that represents the experiences, values, cultural roots, and tools they carry with them every day.

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Scholars attended a Spa night to encourage self-care and wellbeing. Scholars participated in a meal planning and budgeting workshop to learn how to create realistic healthy meals. Scholars completed a workshop on recognizing the consequences of risky behavior. They also spent time reflecting on how personal values and boundaries shape healthy choices.



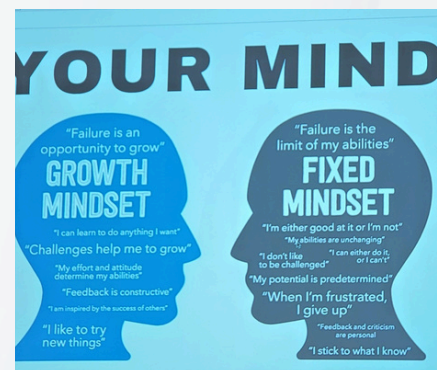
### CAREER EXPLORATION

Staff reviewed Scholars' career assessments and helped Scholars connect their career to a college major and investigate the average income for potential careers. During the H.E.R.O.S. Program, Mentors and Scholars talked about academic and professional goals and learning more about Scholars' chosen fields. Empowerment was used as a foundation to guide reflection, discussion and connection.



### LEADERSHIP AND SELF ADVOCACY

Empowerment was introduced during the year. Scholars participated in empowering activities that challenged them to recognize their inner strength and personal power. They reflected on how small victories contribute to greater success, explored what it means to own their voice, and celebrated the courage it takes to grow, persevere, and lead with confidence. Scholars were able to identify their personal leadership style through self-assessment and peer discussion.



### COLLEGE READINESS

Scholars worked to distinguish between short-term goals and long-term dreams while identifying challenges between balancing academic, social and personal responsibilities. Staff reinforced the need for intentional planning and flexibility in managing a college schedule. Also, equipping Scholars with the self-awareness and skills needed to manage conflict and communicate assertively in college, personal and social settings.





# FIRST STAR ISU ACADEMY

## BRIGHT FUTURES AHEAD

The National Bright Futures Survey was developed in partnership with Dr. Philip Hong from the University of Georgia to better understand our scholars' hopes and aspirations as it relates to their academic and future goals. In creating this survey and collecting feedback from scholars, we are embracing the challenge young people face and how we can be better stewards of their emotions and feelings as we support their growth in our Academies!

80%

of First Star scholars are feeling hopeful about the future and expect to complete further education after high school!



70%

of scholars feel a sense of belonging and connection since joining First Star!



70%

of scholars are confident that they have the necessary skills to succeed in college since joining First Star!

## SUMMER ACADEMY

Summer Residential Program Dates: June 1st to June 14th 2025

Summer Academy Showcase: Saturday June 14th



Summer Showcase



# FIRST STAR ISU ACADEMY

## COMMUNITY IMPACT



### PEER MENTOR RECOGNITION

First Star recognizes the positive impact peer mentos have on our scholars. The First Star ISU Academy awarded peer mentors for their years of service and unwavering support of the academy.

**62%** are current students or alumni of host university

**53%** identify as first generation

**17%** identify as current or former foster youth

**11%** identify as former First Star scholars



### CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

First Star ISU Academy hosted Caregiver Orientations and other engagement events on campus during the year.

**100% of families at ISU Academy receive monthly check-in's on their scholar's participation in the program and are involved in their student's academic case management meetings.**



### FOSTER CARE AWARENESS MONTH ADVOCACY

ISU hosted a community stakeholder open house in Spring of 2024 to bring awareness to the on and off campus community.



# FIRST STAR ISU ACADEMY

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



**ILLINOIS STATE  
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**ISU Center for  
Adoption Studies**

Illinois Department of  
**DCFS**  
Children & Family Services



**Special Olympics**  
Illinois

## Community Stakeholder Acknowledgments

### Academy Programming Partners

City of Bloomington, Illinois Wesleyan University

Ivy Lane Bakery, Urban Air Trampoline

Hy-vee, State Farm Park

Karent Fryer Red Aspen Ambassador

Tori Fryer Expressions Body Art and Design

Illinois State University

Center for Child Welfare and Adoption Studies

Campus Recreation, Athletic Department

Career Services, Multi-Cultural Center

Family and Consumer Science Department

Police Department, Emergency Services and Safety

### Scholar Recruitment Partners

Illinois Department of Children and Family  
Services (DCFS)

### Funding Acknowledgements

Illinois Department of Children and Family  
Services (DCFS)

## SCHOLAR TESTIMONIALS

First Star means  
making new  
connections and  
enjoying the people  
around you and  
getting out of your  
comfort zone.

First Star has taught me to  
always believe and find the  
positive in every situation,  
even the toughest of times.  
This program has given me  
an experience of a lifetime.  
There is one thing I can say  
that has stuck with me  
indefinitely and that is to  
ALWAYS speak life."

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED



**REFER A STUDENT.**



**VOLUNTEER.**



**DONATE.**