



KENT STATE UNIVERSITY FIRST STAR ACADEMY

2025 IMPACT REPORT



ABOUT FIRST STAR KSU ACADEMY



KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

University Outreach & Engagement connects the mission of the university to our surrounding communities through strong relationships with our meaningful pipeline to college initiatives and impactful community engagement.

The First Star Kent State Academy partners with child welfare agencies and other community partners to provide an immersive, specialized academic, college preparatory, mentorship, and drug education program for high school youth in foster care.

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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



**HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATION
COMPLETION**

COMPARED TO 50% NATIONALLY



FIRST STAR KSU ACADEMY IN THE SPOTLIGHT



DREION visits the scholars!



The Modeling Permanency Project

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

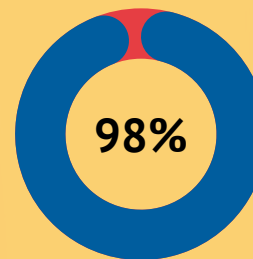
100% of SAC scholars stated they felt more confident taking on leadership roles

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

NATIONAL FIRST STAR CLASS OF 2025

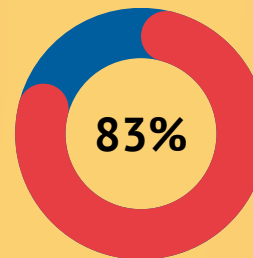


National Graduating Class



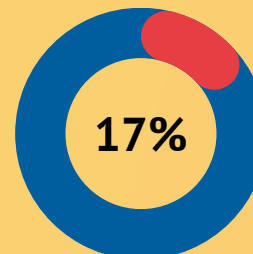
H.S Diploma: 98%
Credit Recovery: 2%

Post-Secondary Pathways



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

Workforce Pathways



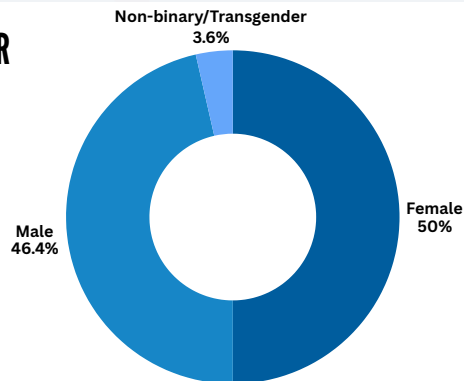
Apprenticeship/ Union: 0%
Full-Time Employment: 17%
Military: 0%



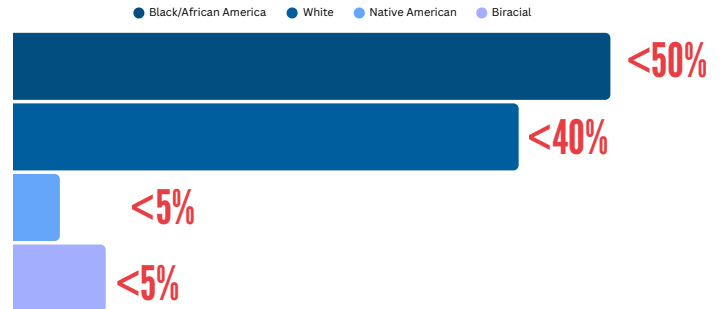
FIRST STAR KSU ACADEMY

SCHOLAR PROFILE

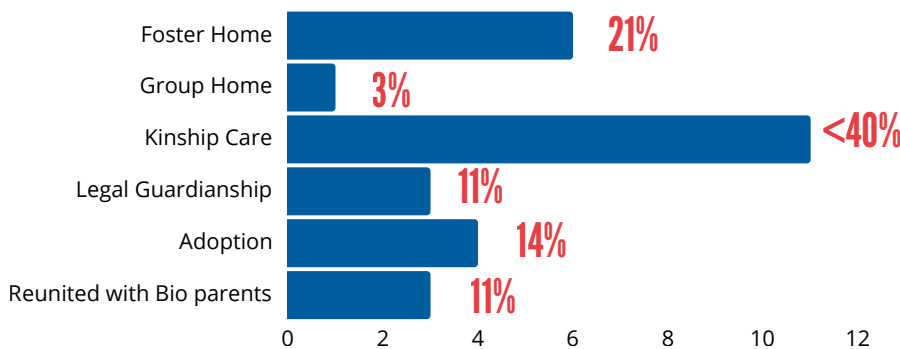
GENDER



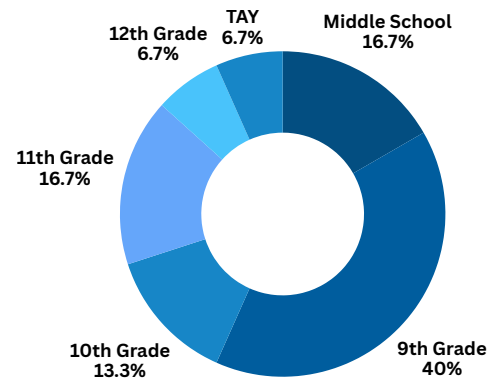
RACE AND ETHNICITY



PLACEMENT STATUS



GRADE LEVEL



Celebrating Class of 2025

100%

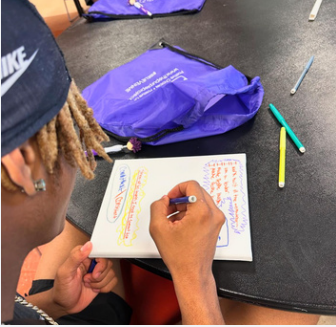
of First Star KSU scholars graduated High School on time!

50%

of First Star KSU graduating scholars will be pursuing workforce pathways!

FIRST STAR KSU IMPACT

2024-2025 ACADEMIC YEAR

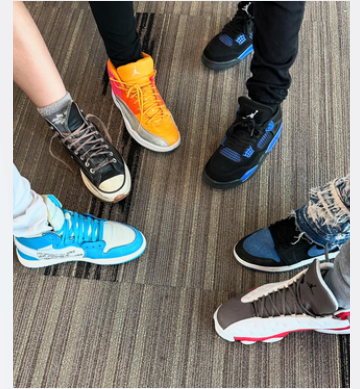


LIFE SKILLS AND SELF DISCOVERY

Students completed the LifeSkills Reimagined (LSR) web-based curriculum, a 66-hour, evidence-based program developed by Lyft Learning for youth impacted by the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. The curriculum builds essential skills in personal finance, communication, resiliency, employment readiness, and independent living, equipping students with practical tools for long-term success.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Students engaged in a series of experiential learning activities focused on physical, financial, and emotional wellness. Highlights included a hands-on cooking demonstration where they prepared vegetable and fruit salsa; yoga and mindfulness sessions; and participation in the one-day Purple Project conference, which featured art expression workshops and a collaboration with the Refresh Collective. During this session, scholars wrote hip-hop lyrics exploring emotions, self-doubt, and the process of transforming negative feelings into empowering narratives.



CAREER EXPLORATION

Students participated in résumé-writing workshops and completed a career exploration inventory with the Department of Career Exploration & Development. Scholars also engaged in business etiquette sessions led by community partner Charm Your Way, where they practiced interview skills, crafted elevator pitches, and learned confidence-building "power poses." In addition, First Star Ambassador DREION visited the academy to share his personal journey of overcoming trauma and using music as a tool for healing and advocacy.

LEADERSHIP AND SELF ADVOCACY

Scholars participated in a one-day film school where they created short films illustrating their understanding of restorative justice and conflict management within their communities. They also took part in an inspiring workshop led by "Da GoalGetta" Jamar Blackmon, focused on self-advocacy and becoming the change they want to see.



COLLEGE READINESS

The academy hosted two campus visits for middle and high school students in DCFS care. Scholars also participated in workshops focused on academic planning and goal-setting, along with interactive sessions at the Design Innovation Hub and the College of Aeronautics. In addition, students toured the Kent State Fashion Museum, where they learned about the program's influence on the fashion industry and explored related career opportunities.

FIRST STAR KSU 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

The Summer Residential Program offers scholars an immersive and transformative experience, fostering personal growth, meaningful connections, and hands-on learning that equips them with the skills and confidence to thrive in their future endeavors.



Scholar Affirmations



Outstanding Community Partner Award



CiviDJ'ing Workshop

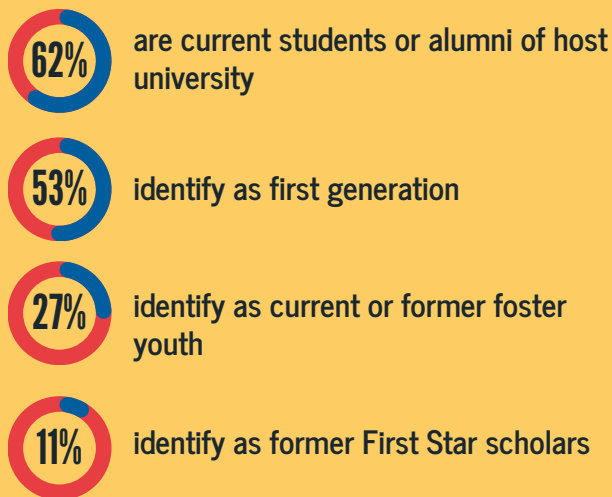
FIRST STAR KSU ACADEMY

COMMUNITY IMPACT



PEER MENTOR RECOGNITION

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



CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

During the end of 2025 Summer Showcase, the first "Outstanding Caregiver" award was given to a caregiver who has been an active caregiver engaging in workshops and supporting the growth and advancement of their scholar(s).



CREATION CONFERENCE

First Star Hosted the first-ever nationally broadcast creation conference. This Conference was a student-centered opportunity for students to engage with speakers and feel connected to the entire First Star network. During the conference, scholars experienced:

- A nationally recognized keynote speaker sharing insights on resilience and leadership
- An interactive storytelling workshop led by the showrunner and cast of Marvel's Runaways
- Education sessions, team games, and networking opportunities
- Access to valuable resources and ongoing support from First Star's national network

FIRST STAR KSU ACADEMY

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®
Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



Community Stakeholder Acknowledgments

Academy Programming Partners

The Purple Project
Purple Umbrella Project
Refresh Collective
Kent State SRVSS Office
Pride Among Daughters & Sisters Inc.
Bessie's Angels
KSU Wick Poetry Center
Jewish Wemon's Society
Vernon Ministries

Scholar Recruitment Partners

City of Akron & City of Cleveland Public Schools
Ohio CASA
Ohio Department of Children & Youth

Funding Acknowledgements

Dave Thomas Foundation
City of Akron, Violence Intervention and Prevention Program
LeBron James Family Foundation
OHIO Reach Designation

Thank you to our First Star board member and Kent State Alum, Judy Hackett for her continued support in uplifting the KSU Academy.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED



REFER A STUDENT.



VOLUNTEER.



DONATE.