

CHANGING THE ODDS FOR OUR CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE FOSTER CARE

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“Children in foster care test far behind their peers and are more likely to drop out, repeat grades, be in special education classes, and be suspended or expelled.”¹

FACTS AND FIGURES

Foster children lag behind other children academically.

- Across grades, the percentage of Chicago foster students who scored in the bottom quartile of standardized tests was 13 to 21 percentage points higher than other Chicago Public School students.²
- Children in foster care in Chicago were, on average, one year behind other students in the same schools.³
- Fifty-two percent of students who were ever in foster care read below grade level, compared to 38% of the overall population.⁴
- Depending on the academic content, 10 to 17 percent of foster youth fail courses. Other students earn twice as many “A’s” in their classes than foster children.⁵
- Almost 40 percent of former foster youth have repeated one or more grades.⁶
- The rate of foster youth who were old for grade in first grade was one in ten, double the rate of other students.⁷
- Foster children in Chicago were 2.3 times more likely to be old for their grade than other students.⁸

Youth in the foster system are more likely to be placed into special education.

- Nearly half of children in foster care were placed in special education at some point during their education,⁹ compared to 12 percent of all school-aged children.¹⁰
- Foster children in Chicago were three times more likely than other students to be placed into special education during the year they entered state care.¹¹

Foster children often change schools frequently, as their placement is modified.

- On average, the placement of children in foster care is changed one to two times per year.¹² However, more than one-quarter of foster children experience five or more foster home placements.¹³
- Reducing the number of placement changes per year by one almost doubled the likelihood that foster children would graduate from high school before leaving care.¹⁴
- More than one-third of foster children reported having five or more school changes during their time in foster care.¹⁵
- Sixty-six percent of the youth change schools after their initial placement.¹⁶
- None of the Chicago elementary schools serving 20 or more foster children qualified as high-achieving schools. In fact, almost one-third of these schools were classified as extremely low-achieving and another 48 percent were considered low-achieving.¹⁷

- Lost or misplaced school records prevented 42 percent of children in a New York study from beginning school immediately when they entered foster care.¹⁸

Graduation rates for foster youth are low.

- School changes often lead to grade retention and, ultimately, make it less likely that the foster child will complete high school.¹⁹
- Twenty-three percent of foster youth dropped out of school before turning 16, which is much higher than the national average of 9 percent.²⁰
- Only 20 to 30 percent of youth in foster care graduated high school by age 19.²¹
- Less than three percent of former foster youth obtained a bachelor's degree.²²

Because they lack an adequate education, many foster youth are unable to earn a living wage.

- Only 6 percent of foster care alumni had a 2- or 4-year degree by age 23 or 24.²³
- At age 19, more than three-quarters of youth who aged out of foster care earned less than \$5,000, and 90 percent were paid less than \$10,000.²⁴
- Two-thirds of women and 22 percent of men who were previously in foster care receive one or more form of need-based government assistance by age 21.²⁵
- One-third of youth lived at or below poverty after leaving foster care, three times higher than the national rate.²⁶

Many youth become homeless after leaving foster care.

- Almost 40 percent of foster care alumni had been homeless or couch-surfed by age 23 or 24.²⁷
- Most (63 percent) of the young people who became homeless within three years of leaving foster care did so during the first year.²⁸
- More than 25 percent of these youth had been homeless four times or more and 36 percent had couch surfed on four or more occasions.²⁹

¹ Lesnick, J., Goerge, R., Smithgall, C., Gwynne, J. (2010). A Longitudinal Analysis of Third-Grade Students in Chicago in 1996-97 and their Educational Outcomes. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

² Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

³ ³ Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

⁴ Lesnick, J., Goerge, R., Smithgall, C., Gwynne, J. (2010). A Longitudinal Analysis of Third-Grade Students in Chicago in 1996-97 and their Educational Outcomes. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

⁵ Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

⁶ Dworsky, A. (2010) Does Extending Foster Care beyond Age 18 Promote Postsecondary Educational Attainment? Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

⁷ Walker, L., Smithgall, C. (2009). Underperforming Schools and the Education of

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- Vulnerable Children. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ⁸ Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ⁹ Courtney, M., Terao, S., Bost, N. (2004). Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ¹⁰ IDEA Part B Child Count (2005), Table 1-10 and IDEA Part B Data Fact Sheet.
- ¹¹ Walker, L., Smithgall, C. (2009). Underperforming Schools and the Education of Vulnerable Children. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ¹³ Courtney, M., Terao, S., Bost, N. (2004). Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ¹⁴ Pecora, P., Kessler, R., Williams, J., Kessler, R.C., Downs, A.C., O'Brien, K., Hiripi, E., Morello, S. (2003). Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey National Alumni Study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.
- ¹⁵ Courtney, M., Terao, S., Bost, N. (2004). Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ¹⁶ Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ¹⁷ Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
- ¹⁸ Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. (2000). Educational neglect: The delivery of educational services to children in New York City's foster care system. New York: Advocates for Children.
- ¹⁹ Smithgall, C., Gladden, R.M., Howard, E., Goerge, R., Courtney, M. (2004). Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
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- ²³ Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., Raap, M. (2010). Midwest Evaluation of

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