



National Foster Care Month 2025

Understanding Shared Vulnerabilities

National Foster Care Month is an initiative of the Children's Bureau, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Each May is designated as a time to recognize the experiences of more than 400,000+ youth in foster care and acknowledge the families, professionals, and advocates who support them and champion their need for safety, well-being, permanent homes and connections.

There is a significant overlap between students in foster care and those experiencing homelessness. Understanding these intersections can lead to more effective and holistic support systems for vulnerable youth.

For instance, did you know that in school districts and K-12 institutions across the country, McKinney-Vento Liaisons often serve as the Foster Care Point of Contact? Also, school social workers – an important group of NAEHCY stakeholders – often serve as the consistent adults at school who understand the situations faced by students in foster care AND the situations faced by students experiencing homelessness.

Some shared vulnerabilities and risk factors include:

- Trauma
- Instability and Mobility
- Lack of Consistent Adult Support
- Poverty
- Mental Health Challenges
- Lower Educational Outcomes

NAEHCY aims to support our stakeholders so that you may educate *your* stakeholders about the interconnected needs of these vulnerable student populations and the importance of coordinated and comprehensive support systems.

For National Foster Care Month, we recommend that NAEHCY stakeholders who are affiliated with school districts share the information below (and images from the toolkit at childwelfare.gov) with your district's leadership team, school board members, and especially your communications office!



Some Facts About Foster Care and Education

Youth in foster care experience significantly higher rates of school mobility compared to their peers, often leading to academic disruptions and challenges in building consistent relationships with teachers and peers.

Students in foster care are more likely to have experienced trauma, which can impact their behavior, learning, and social-emotional well-being in the school setting. Understanding and addressing trauma is essential for their academic success.

Graduation rates for youth in foster care are significantly lower than the national average. Research indicates that less than 50% of youth in foster care graduate high school by age 21, highlighting the need for targeted support and interventions.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes specific provisions aimed at ensuring the educational stability and success of children in foster care. This includes requirements for immediate enrollment, transportation to remain in their school of origin when in their best interest, and collaboration between child welfare and education agencies.

Youth in foster care are disproportionately represented in special education programs. This may be due to a variety of factors, including trauma, frequent school changes, and unmet educational needs.

Access to reliable transportation can be a major barrier to school attendance and participation for students in foster care, especially when they are placed outside of their original school district.

Foster parents play a vital role in supporting the educational success of children in their care by advocating for their needs, attending school meetings, and providing a stable home environment conducive to learning.

There are resources and programs specifically designed to support the educational success of youth in foster care, including tutoring, mentoring, college access programs, and financial aid opportunities.



Youth aging out of foster care are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing homelessness. The lack of a stable family and support system upon leaving care can lead to housing instability. Therefore, services and supports aimed at older foster youth often need to address potential homelessness.

Some youth in foster care may run away from their placements and become homeless. This means they are eligible for services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), which provides programs assisting with shelter, counseling, and support services for runaway and homeless youth.

Did You Know?

Did you know that youth who age out of the foster care system are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing homelessness compared to their peers? This highlights the need for robust transition services and housing support.

Did you know that the McKinney-Vento Act, designed to support students experiencing homelessness, can sometimes provide crucial protections and services to children awaiting foster care placement?

Did you know that both students in foster care and those experiencing homelessness benefit from the educational stability provisions in federal law, allowing them to remain in their school of origin despite changes in their living situation?

Did you know that the trauma experienced by students in foster care and those experiencing homelessness can have similar impacts on their learning and behavior in school, requiring trauma-informed approaches from educators and support staff?

Did you know that McKinney-Vento Liaisons often work to support both students experiencing homelessness and those in foster care, recognizing the common barriers they face in accessing education?

Did you know that a history of foster care is a significant risk factor for youth homelessness, underscoring the importance of preventing youth from aging out of care without stable housing?



Did you know that both groups of students may struggle with obtaining necessary enrollment documents, and federal law mandates immediate enrollment regardless of missing paperwork?

Did you know that transportation can be a major barrier for both students in foster care (especially with placement changes) and students experiencing homelessness, and schools have obligations to help ensure access to their school of origin?

How You Can Help Raise Awareness and Support Systemic Improvements

If you are a McKinney-Vento State Coordinator:

- Promote cross-system training on foster care and homelessness intersections.
- Support integrated data systems to track cross-system students.
- Disseminate best practices to LEAs for school stability and academic success.
- Host or support statewide Foster Care month webinars or resource drives.

If you are a McKinney-Vento Liaison:

- Identify and support McKinney-Vento students who have also experienced foster care.
- Collaborate with foster care points of contact to develop strategies for school stability.
- Host awareness events or campaigns with district leaders, staff, and students.
- If you serve a dual role as your district's McKinney-Vento Liaison and Foster Care Point of Contact, create a fact sheet for district stakeholders highlighting your responsibilities as an advocate for both populations of students.

If you are a superintendent or school district leader:

- Publicly recognize National Foster Care Month.
- Request regular data updates on the academic outcomes of youth experiencing foster care within your district.
- Champion policies that prioritize educational equity for youth in foster care.
- Encourage cross-departmental collaboration and program alignment that recognize the lived experiences of foster care youth.



If you are a school board member:

- Advocate for the passage of resolutions honoring National Foster Care Month and support of youth in foster care.
- Request data reflecting the academic outcomes of youth in foster care.
- Advocate for district budgets that support transportation, counseling, and enrichment for foster care students.
- Build partnerships with local child welfare, foster care, and youth- serving agencies.

If you are a School of Child Welfare Social Worker:

- Facilitate coordination between schools and child welfare agencies.
- Educate school staff on rights and protections for students experiencing foster care.
- Advocate for educational evaluations to ensure students receive specialized services and supports (e.g. Special Education, ESOL, Gifted Education).
- Provide trauma-informed care and case management.
- Identify mentoring and peer support opportunities for youth.

If you are a classroom teacher or school personnel:

- Create trauma-informed classrooms that offer stability, predictability, and emotional safety.
- Respect confidentiality while being sensitive to the unique experiences of foster youth.
- Foster belonging and inclusion by avoiding assumptions about family structure or living situations.
- Collaborate with school support staff (e.g., guidance counselors, social workers) to address academic or social-emotional needs.
- Integrate awareness activities or literature highlighting resilience and foster care experiences during May.

If you are a parent or concerned community member:

- Learn about foster care and educate others about the challenges foster youth face and how to support them.
- Volunteer with local foster care programs or school-based initiatives that serve vulnerable students.
- Advocate for inclusive school policies that recognize the needs of foster youth.



- Encourage youth engagement by supporting extracurricular access and mentorship opportunities.
- Share information about National Foster Care Month and child welfare reform through local media, PTA meetings, or faith/community groups.

If you are a district communications professional:

- Support your superintendent to publicly recognize National Foster Care Month.
- Collaborate with your McKinney-Vento Liaison to craft awareness content during May, and beyond.
- Focus on helping your stakeholders gain a broader understanding of the unique challenges of vulnerable youth, and how your district staff supports these students, with a year-round awareness campaign on social media.
- Ensure updates about your district's vulnerable populations and the work of your McKinney-Vento staff are always included in monthly board meeting materials, district newsletters, and other established channels.
- Create evergreen graphics and talking points for your divisions and departments, supporting their materials for PTA and community engagement meetings, etc.

Suggested Resources

- **[The Children's Bureau \(Administration for Children and Families\)](#)**: This federal agency provides resources and information on child welfare, including foster care. Search for "Children's Bureau education foster care."
- **[The U.S. Department of Education](#)**: The agency's website has information on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and guidance related to the education of **[students in foster care](#)**. Search for "ESSA foster care" on the Department of Education website.
 - **["Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care"](#)**- 2024 Nonregulatory Guidance from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services
- **[The National Center for Homeless Education \(NCHE\)](#)**: This organization provides resources and information related to the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and often collaborates with those supporting foster youth. Search for "NCHE foster care" on their website.



- **[The National Foster Parent Association \(NFPA\)](#)**: This association offers support and resources for foster parents, who are key partners in the educational success of children in care.
- **[The National Court Appointed Special Advocate \(CASA\)/Guardian ad Litem \(GAL\) Association](#)**: CASA is a nonprofit organization that trains and supports volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. CASA/GAL volunteers are appointed by judges to ensure that each child's voice is heard in court and that they receive the services they need to thrive.
- **State-specific Child Welfare Agencies**: Each state has its own child welfare agency that provides information and resources related to foster care in that state. You can find your state's agency website through a web search.
- **Foster Care Alumni Associations**: Connecting with foster care alumni can provide valuable insights and perspectives on the educational experiences of youth in care. Search for foster care alumni networks in your region or nationally.

Sources and Related Content

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/california-students-foster-care-brief>

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/supporting-students-homelessness-brief>

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7377953/>

<https://housingmatters.urban.org/research-summary/how-does-way-we-define-homelessness-affect-students>

https://www.childwelfare.gov/provisions-every-student-succeeds-act-essa/?ktfa=1248_1251_1259_1282_1285_1286&top=122_259_312