



# Education Outcomes Among Youth in Kinship Care & Foster Care in Washington State

## Educational Challenges of Youth in Out-of-Home Care

In the United States, youth who do not live with their parents experience unique challenges that can cause them to struggle in school.<sup>1,2</sup> Youth living in out-of-home care change schools more often than their peers, which creates barriers to forming strong school connections.<sup>3</sup> School mobility (changing schools two or more times in the past year) weakens peer and adult supports and often negatively impacts social and academic outcomes, such as a child's likelihood to graduate.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> Although youth living in both foster care and kinship care have more educational challenges than youth living with their parents, youth living in kinship care have better educational outcomes than youth living in foster care.<sup>4</sup>

## What is Kinship Care?

There are two major types of out-of-home care: foster care and kinship care. Kinship care refers to the full-time care of a youth by a relative or another adult who has a close relationship with the youth and their family.<sup>8</sup> Kinship care can be either formal or informal, depending on the level of child welfare services involvement.<sup>8</sup> Formal kinship care is state-mandated, whereas informal kinship care can be state-mediated (e.g., kinship diversion) or state-independent (a private kinship care arrangement).<sup>9</sup> Over seven million youth in the United States live in households headed by kinship caregivers.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Most of these kinship placements are informal arrangements made without the involvement of the child welfare system.<sup>13,14</sup>

## Benefits of Kinship Care

Among out-of-home placement options, kinship care is preferred over foster care because it helps maintain youths' key attachments.<sup>15</sup> Kinship care has also been shown to minimize the trauma of being separated from parents. Being placed with family members improves youths' well-being, increases permanency, and preserves youths' cultural identity and community connections. Strong community connections are vital for educational success.<sup>11,16,17</sup> While youth living in both kinship care and foster care have lower graduation rates than youth living with their parents, youth in kinship care or guardianship arrangements are significantly more likely to graduate from high school than their peers living in foster care.<sup>8</sup> These higher graduation rates can be partially attributed to the greater stability and community connections that youth in kinship care enjoy when compared to their peers in foster care.<sup>18</sup> Youth in kinship care are more likely to remain in their communities of origin and maintain their school connections.<sup>10</sup>

## Barriers for Kinship Caregivers

Kinship caregivers tend to have lower incomes and levels of educational attainment when compared with foster parents.<sup>8</sup> Many are grandparents and live on fixed incomes.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, research suggests that caregivers' level of education does not have a significant impact on children's educational outcomes.<sup>19</sup> Other factors, such as placement stability and community connections, are much more predictive of educational success.<sup>3,10</sup> Prioritizing school stability and community connections through kinship care placements has a positive impact on educational outcomes among youth who are not able to live with their parents and helps maintain community ties that support educational success. Financial hardship is another significant barrier for kinship families. Over 30% of kinship households live below the poverty line, and many potential kinship caregivers worry about their ability to adequately provide for the youth in their care and support their education.<sup>8</sup> Ensuring that kinship caregivers have adequate supports and financial resources to care for youth is important when considering strategies to support youths' educational outcomes. Washington State is responding to this need by increasing resources to support kinship caregivers, in part, due to research suggesting that kinship care can be an important protective factor for helping youth achieve educational success.

## Educational Outcomes of Youth Living in Kinship Care in Washington State

This fact sheet compares the educational outcomes of Washington State youth living in kinship care with those living in foster care. The data used in this fact sheet comes from the 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS). The HYS is a biannual survey that includes 8th, 10th, and 12th-grade public school students.<sup>20</sup> The survey offers a representative sample of young people in Washington State and provides important details about their health and well-being and helps guide policies to support healthy youth and families.<sup>20</sup>



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## Living in Kinship Care

5,410 Youth

## Living in Foster Care

794 Youth

**Note:** 142,296 youth lived with their parents.

## Healthy Youth Survey Sample Demographics

The 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) sample included 148,500 public high school students. Youths' living situations were determined based on the question: *Who did you live with most of the time in the last 30 days?*

### School Mobility

Youth living in kinship care experienced significantly more school stability.

- Compared to youth living in kinship care, school mobility was **3.1** times higher among youth living in foster care.

### Involvement in School Activities

Youth in living in kinship care were significantly more likely to say that they felt they had chances for involvement in school activities, such as sports or clubs.

- Feeling as though they had fewer chances to participate in school activities was **1.6** times higher among youth in foster care.

### Motivation for School Success

Youth in kinship care were significantly more likely to say that they gave their best effort in school.

- Compared to youth living in kinship care, saying that they did not try to do their best work in school was **1.4** times higher among youth living in foster care.

### School Safety

Youth living in kinship care were significantly more likely than youth living in foster care to say that they felt safe at school.

- Not feeling safe at school was **1.2** times higher among youth living in foster care.

### School Access

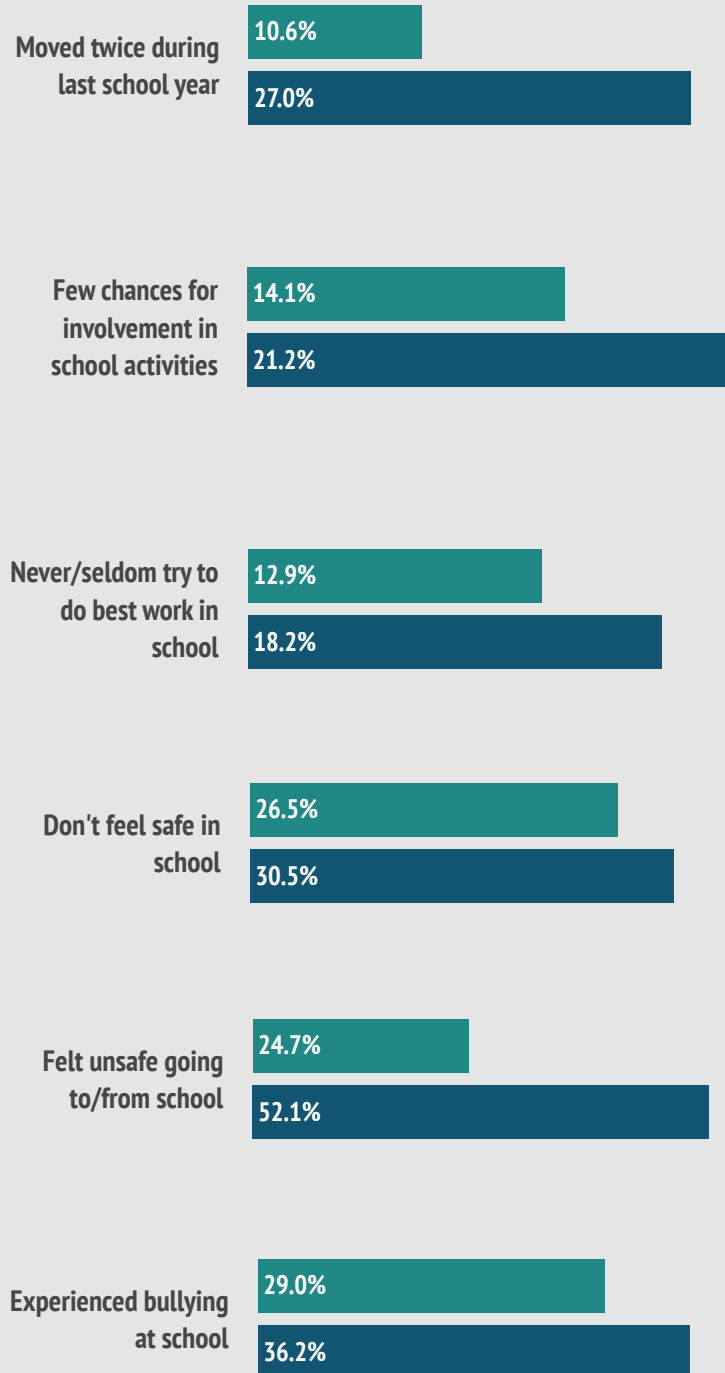
Youth living in kinship care were significantly more likely than youth living in foster care to say that they felt safe going to and from school.

- Not feeling safe going to and from school was **3.3** times higher among youth living in foster care.

### School Bullying

Youth living in kinship care were significantly more likely than youth living in foster care to say they experienced bullying at school.

- Experiencing school bullying was **1.5** times higher among youth living in foster care.



## Key Takeaways from the Washington Healthy Youth Survey

- Youth living in kinship care have better educational outcomes than youth living in foster care.
- Kinship care can be an important educational support for youth who might otherwise enter foster care and face educational instability.





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