



National Conference for Hidden Student Populations

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<https://nchp.okstate.edu>

Current Hidden College Student Populations

May include those who have foster care histories, justice-involved experiences, who are survivors of sexual violence or sex workers, recovering substances addicts, who face housing insecurity, who have sought/seeking abortion care, or who have undergone or are in the process of gender reassignment.

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The Scholar-Practitioner is a monthly publication of research summaries that targets the research-to-practice-to-research gap for U.S. scholar and practitioner advocates for hidden college student populations.

This publication reinforces the work of the **National Conference for Hidden Student Populations (NCHP)** by providing a space to share research applications for practice. **NCHP** was the first research conference dedicated to this multidisciplinary area of study. The **6th NCHP** will be held on February 2026 at the University of Georgia.

A Landscape Scan of Research on the K-12 Education of Young People in the United States Who Experience Foster Care, Incarceration, and/or Homelessness

Krauss, S. M., Day, M., Ferber, T., & Wallis, D. (2025). A landscape scan of research on the K-12 Education of young people in the United States who experience foster care, incarceration, and/or homelessness. (Report January 2025). The Annie E. Casey Foundation. https://www.stephaniemalikrauss.com/_files/ugd/fd22f9_6d55d52dff66460b8e351e5ccf317b40.pdf

Adapted from the Executive Summary by Maddy Day and Stephanie Malia Krauss

Every year in the United States, more than 1.6 million young people navigate their K-12 education while experiencing homelessness, foster care, and/or incarceration. Though these students collectively surpass the population size of New Hampshire or Hawaii, they are often hidden from education discussions and decisions. Additionally, these young people are disproportionately students of color, living in poverty, and face numerous barriers to educational access, stability, and achievement. Commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this study is focused on sharing findings from a comprehensive review of research published between 2010 and 2024.

Research questions

- What research has been published on the education experience of youth in the U.S. experiencing homelessness, foster care, and the juvenile justice system between 2010 and 2024?
- What are new and persistent research gaps and opportunities?
- What can we learn from available research that can positively impact the educational experience and outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness, foster care, and/or the justice system?

Methods

The authors identified 400 relevant peer-reviewed articles and field produced research reports, 207 of which were focused specifically on the K-12 educational experiences of young people in the U.S. experiencing homelessness and systems involvement. Of the 207 publications that were analyzed and coded, 132 were peer-reviewed articles and 75 field reports. Additionally, the research team considered 27 federal clearinghouses with studies on young people and selected ten relevant clearinghouses to search for studies on this topic. Finally, 20 interviews and two focus groups were conducted with leading researchers from multiple disciplines.

Findings

Research Landscape

- By student experience, 81 publications focused on foster care, 66 on

homelessness, and 39 on juvenile justice.

- Only 21 publications (~10%) examined multiple system experiences, and just three (~1%) studied all three populations together.
- Of the publications with a geographic focus, 41 studies focused on the West (over half from California), while the Southwest (7 studies) and Southeast (21 studies) were underrepresented. Nearly 30 studies were from the Northeast.
- Nearly half of peer-reviewed publications were led by education or human development researchers, with social work scholars comprising the second largest group.

Research Gaps

Several research limitations were repeatedly discussed in the literature:

- Limited access to student-level data due to privacy concerns and bureaucratic obstacles
- Incomplete or inaccurate datasets due to student mobility and system barriers or differences in how populations were defined and tracked
- Funding constraints and challenges in tracking highly mobile populations

While interviewees and focus group participants spoke about the power and importance of participatory research, the scan suggests this type of research is underutilized and often yields small sample sizes, which limits generalizability.

Federal clearinghouses contain remarkably few studies about these students, limiting publicly available and vetted evidence-based interventions. The What Works Clearinghouse, for example, includes no studies on youth experiencing homelessness and only one on juvenile justice.

Research Opportunities

Despite these gaps, promising opportunities exist. Research partnerships and collaboratives such as the National Conference for Hidden Student Populations, the Juvenile Justice Multi-Institutional Consortium, and the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools are vital platforms for multi-disciplinary work, generating new research, and field-building. Interviewees and focus group participants elevated the importance of supporting emerging and established scholars with lived experience and developing coordinated research agendas focused on these hidden student populations.

Implications for Practice

Studies showed that comprehensive wraparound services, trauma-informed practices, and policies promoting educational stability and positive school climate can be effective intervention and prevention strategies for young people having these experiences. The evidence base points to the importance of cross-system collaboration between schools, child welfare, housing, and juvenile justice systems. Studies amplified the critical role of caregivers and the need for

educators and system leaders to work with families in positive, productive ways.

Findings also suggest these strategies work best when students are considered holistically, and strategies are customized to context. Studies examining the compounding harms of homelessness, foster care, and juvenile justice involvement and the broader interconnected societal and systemic injustices (sometimes referred to as the "carceral state") point to the value of researchers conducting root cause analyses that focus on the intersecting impacts of race, gender, disability, and more. The research base is limited, and more research is needed to know which supports and strategies work best depending on context and circumstances.

Conclusion

The path forward requires sustained commitment, funding, and elevated visibility from decision-makers so emerging and established researchers focused on this topic can continue to build evidence for improving educational experiences and outcomes for young people most harmed by systems that should support them.

See the accompanying research repository on AirTable: <https://airtable.com/appvhr7bvrufZ22i1/shr6ywkRnZ8rX5wtf/tblsSFD9o3ZC9oNTL>

2026 NCHP

See you at

University of Georgia
February, 2026

More information: nchp.okstate.edu

To sign up for ongoing email updates about the 2025 national conference and/or for archives of *The Scholar-Practitioner*, go to: <https://risforthursday.okstate.edu>

