



Estimates

We estimate that 192 young adults would be eligible for this tuition waiver per annual cohort, and that of these, 50 to 87 at most would enroll in some sort of higher education program. A combined 3-year cohort, which is a conservative estimate considering the low retention and completion rates for this population, result in approximately 150 to 261 students with foster care experience using this tuition waiver, overall, at any given time.

For our total population eligible, we combined all 4 population types. This would be youth who aged out (this would include extended foster care) (33 annually), those adopted after 12 years old (71 annually), and those who have 3 or more years in foster care who had not fallen into the other categories (88 annually), for a total of 192 young adults eligible per annual cohort. See below for a brief data breakdown.

A systematic review of recent national research (Okpytch et al., 2025; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2025) estimates that approximately 29–64% of youth with foster care backgrounds enroll in post-secondary education by their mid- to late-20s. Excluding estimates of older respondents and high support states (i.e., California), this range is reduced to 29-45%, with completion rates ranging from 8-12%.

Sources

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Foster care education outcomes: New report challenges the 3% myth. Baltimore, MD. Retrieved from [www.aecf.org](https://www.aecf.org/blog/foster-care-education-outcomes-new-research-challenges-the-3-myth?) <https://www.aecf.org/blog/foster-care-education-outcomes-new-research-challenges-the-3-myth?>

Okpytch, N. J., Whitman, K., Lee, J., Neria-Piña, L., Jackson, L. A., & Day, M. (2025). Secondary and Postsecondary Education Outcomes of Students with Experience in Foster Care: Systematic Review of the Literature From 2000–2023. *AERA Open*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584251331454>

Data Estimates Breakdown and Connection to Bill

Section 59-111-910. Free tuition for certain current and former foster youth.

(A) All state-supported colleges and universities shall waive the payment of tuition and fees for certain current and former foster youth who are enrolled in a program of study for an undergraduate certificate, diploma, or first bachelor's degree.

(B) For purposes of this section, "certain current and former foster youth" means an individual who:

(1) is not older than twenty-five years of age; and:

Population 2 and 3 combined: 33 eligible annually

(2) was in the legal custody of the South Carolina Department of Social Services on the day of the individual's eighteenth birthday before exiting foster care; or

(3) is currently in the legal custody of the South Carolina Department of Social Services under extended foster care; or

Youth aging out of care/in extended care: Population 2 (youth aging out of care) and Population 3 (youth in extended foster care) were combined because all youth in extended foster care also aged out of foster care.

Exits to emancipation (aging out) in South Carolina by year (according to AFCARS) <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/south-carolina/> :

Average: 267 annually

- According to Chafee data provided by DSS, 52% (138 young adults) of this population report graduating from high school or GED completion by age 21.
- However, only 22% (about **58** young adults) report currently attending secondary or post-secondary schooling. Of these, only 57% (about **33** young adults) received Chafee ETV funding, which is used to pay for post-secondary tuition.
- This means that roughly **33** young adults per year would qualify for this college tuition waiver from population 2 and 3 combined.

Population 4: 71 eligible annually

(4) was adopted from South Carolina Department of Social Services foster care at age 13 or later; or

According to AFCARS and DSS Dashboard data, how many are adopted between the ages of 13-17 from DSS foster care?

Average last 3 years: 95 annually

National longitudinal research consistently finds that youth adopted from foster care experience better high school completion outcomes than those who are reunified with their biological families, who aged out, or who exited without permanency, though graduation rates still lag behind the general population.

Synthesizing national longitudinal foster care studies suggests that youth adopted from foster care graduate high school at roughly 70–75%, higher than other foster care exit groups but still below the national average.

Of the 95 children who are adopted from DSS foster care between the ages of 13-17, if 75% graduate from high school, 71 total young adults would be eligible annually for the tuition waiver.

<https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/south-carolina/>

<https://reports.dss.sc.gov/ReportServer/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?%2fPermanent+Exits>

Berger L, Cancian M, Noyes J. Permanency and the Educational and Economic Attainment of Former Foster Children in Early Adulthood. *Am Sociol Rev.* 2018 Aug;83(4):716-743. doi: 10.1177/0003122418781791. Epub 2018 Jul 3. PMID: 32523160; PMCID: PMC7286604. (this research shows that kids who are adopted achieve higher levels of high school graduation)

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Population 5: 88 eligible annually

(5) was in the legal custody of South Carolina Department of Social Services foster care for three or more cumulative years.

(This describes young adults who spent 3 or more cumulative years in foster care, but who were not adopted after 12, did not age out, did not go into extended care, and who also graduated from high school.)

According to the DSS dashboard, the number of kids who permanently exited care with **24** or more consecutive months in foster care:

Average: 592

Of these, 21% exit to adoption (124), and of these 25% were ages 13-17 (31).

$592 - 31 = 561$

Exits to emancipation (aging out) in South Carolina (according to AFCARS)

<https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/south-carolina/> :

Average: 267 annually

$561 - 267 = 294$

National research shows that the amount of children with 36 months in care is about half of the amount with 24 plus months.

$294 / 2 = 147$

National longitudinal research consistently shows that youth with long-term foster care exposure experience substantially lower high school completion rates than the foster-care population overall. Synthesizing findings on foster care duration, aging out, and educational attainment suggests that fewer than half to just over half of youth with three or more cumulative years in care complete high school.

60% of 147 is 88 young adults (who did not age out or get adopted).

<https://reports.dss.sc.gov/ReportServer/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?%2fPermanent+Exits>

<https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/south-carolina/>

<https://dss.sc.gov/about/data-and-resources/child-welfare-data/foster-carelicensing-data/2024-2025>

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