



Tips for Advocates on Using the CHAMPS/Child Trends State Data Sheets: What Data Can Tell Us About Foster Placements for Children and Youth

This tip sheet offers guiding tips and questions for advocates to consider as they leverage the state fact sheets on foster placements for children and youth in their states. It presents general considerations as well as key questions relating to the different types of data presented in the fact sheets. There are many ways to use your state's data to advance policy improvements, and we encourage advocates to carefully review and consider the different ways that data can help them and decision makers work together to achieve better outcomes for children in foster care.

General Considerations

Data quality

This data is not complete. We know that child welfare data has many gaps. If you have questions or concerns, ask your state what other data they have or advocate for additional information. ([See the CHAMPS recommendation on a foster parent census.](#))

Diving deeper

Remember that these fact sheets report statewide data. You may want to request additional data from your state to look at whether the data is different in certain counties or regions. Questions to ask might include:

- Does one county or region have a higher or lower rate of kinship or congregate care placement than the state as a whole? If so, what could be driving those differences?
- Are there strategies being used in one part of your state that could be implemented in another area to improve their outcomes?
- Are there existing strategies that could be expanded to create even more success?

You may also need to request additional data from your state to further break down specific metrics. For example, understanding why children are moving between placements or why there are not enough foster homes for teens could be important for your advocacy efforts.

Look at other states' data sheets and see who is doing well in the areas where you see your state could improve. Consider contacting advocates in those states to see what they're doing well and whether your state could replicate their strategies.

Partnering with others

As you work on your policy goals, consider groups you may be able to partner with in your advocacy efforts. Groups to consider may include:

- Your state or county child welfare agency
- Private child-placing agencies
- Managed care organization working with youth involved in child welfare if your state has one
- Foster care ombudsman or Office of Child Advocate if your state has one
- Disability Rights organizations such as your state's [Protection & Advocacy](#) agency
- Your state chapter of [Prevent Child Abuse America](#) if you have one
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) organizations
- Kinship navigator programs
- Your state's Court Improvement Program
- Your state's foster parent association if there is one
- Other child welfare advocacy organization

You may be interested in this resource: [Data-Driven Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention: A CHAMPS Guide for State Legislators and Other Policymakers](#)

Specific Data Points

Percentage of children in various types of foster care settings

If your state has a low percentage of youth in kinship placements, questions to ask may include:

- Are children in relative care being diverted from care? If so, are they getting the support they need?
- What are the barriers to kinship placements in the state?
- What steps could be taken to increase kinship placements? [Consider policy changes](#) such as:
 - Policies that require searching for kin before placing in foster care
 - Flexible licensing standards for kin
 - Increased support for kinship families
 - Kinship navigator programs
 - Family finding policies and programs

If your state has a high percentage of youth in congregate care, questions to ask may include:

- What is driving congregate care placements? Consider factors such as:
 - Inadequate community-based mental health services
 - Inadequate number of foster families for older children or children with mental health needs
 - Judicial trends and preferences
 - Inadequate mental health crisis response services
 - Inadequate support for foster families caring for children with higher needs — Consider conducting a survey or focus group to ask caregivers what they need to care for various populations of children who are more likely to end up in group care
 - Not enough family finding or other targeted or child-specific recruitment efforts
- What supports are in place for caregivers and what could be added to help more foster families care for children and teens with higher needs and thus prevent congregate care placements? For example:
 - [Peer support](#)
 - Wraparound services
 - [Mental and physical health services](#)
 - Family therapy
 - Respite care
 - Advocacy
 - [Information-sharing policies](#) that enable parents to fully understand the child's history and background and better understand what supports they will need
- What could have prevented congregate placements and kept children with their first families? Consider policy changes that implement or increase the following:
 - Disability services
 - Mental health/wraparound services
 - Family financial support
 - Childcare for older youth
 - Caregiver training
 - Peer support for youth and/or caregiver
 - Respite care

Children in family-based foster care—especially if they live with relatives—are more likely than those in congregate care to have experienced only one foster care placement.

Examine this data carefully. Questions to ask may include:

- What is driving the number of moves?
 - Are youth moving to reunify, to live in a kinship or pre-adoptive home, to better meet complex needs, or for other reasons?
 - Are caregivers disrupting due to lack of support?
 - Does a lack of foster families, especially for some children, mean they enter shelter or emergency care? Could family finding or better recruitment and support help prevent this?

Does your state have a percentage of youth in congregate care who have only had one placement after being in care for 13 months or longer? This means that some youth were placed in a congregate setting immediately and have not been returned to family-based care, sometimes even after one to two years.

- How many youth have been living in congregate care for a year or more? What are their characteristics?
- Are they entering foster care due to their mental health or other needs and a lack of support to their first family to meet those needs? Could entry be prevented with enhanced family supports?
- What are barriers to discharging these youth into family-based care?
- What supports are needed for the youth and for families (birth, kin, foster, or adopted) who could care for them?

Race and Hispanic origin of children and youth in foster care compared to the total child population.

If children of certain races are overrepresented in foster care in your state, questions to ask may include:

- Which races are overrepresented in foster care? Which are underrepresented?
- What is driving overrepresentation of certain races?
 - Examine child abuse and neglect referrals by race and consider whether more referrals are received for specific races.
 - Examine foster care exit rates to see whether youth of a particular race are staying in care longer than others.
- What policy changes could address these issues? Addressing disproportionality in child welfare is critically important and requires systemic reform. Resources on addressing disproportionality can be found at:

- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- [National Council of State Legislatures](#)
- [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#)

Foster placement type, shown by child's race and Hispanic origin — Percentage in different types of foster care settings.

If data shows that children of certain races are placed in specific placement types more than others, questions to ask may include:

- Do the percentages of children in each placement type align with the percentages of all children in those placement types or are youth of a certain race more likely to be in a particular type of placement? If so, has the state examined why?
- Is availability of foster families for children of a particular race or ethnic background an issue? Would diligent recruitment help?

Percentage of children living with at least one foster parent who shares their race or Hispanic origin

If the data shows some races have very low percentages of non-relative placements who share their race with at least one foster parent, questions to ask may include:

- Are foster parents of that race diligently recruited as required by the Multiethnic Placement Act?
 - You may want to review [your state's Diligent Recruitment Plan](#) for information on whether or how they are addressing this. [CHAMPS analysis of Diligent Recruitment Plans](#) may also be helpful.
- Has the state examined barriers to licensing and approval for families of color?
- Do foster parents of that race have a lower retention rate than other races?
- Is the state offering all foster and adoptive families training on transracial parenting?
- What policy changes are needed. Consider policy changes such as:
 - Diligent recruitment plans that include specific plans to recruit families of particular races so that the pool of families reflects the children and youth in care
 - Research and other studies to examine barriers to recruiting, engaging, licensing, and retaining families who reflect the racial and ethnic background of children in care
 - Data collection on the pool of available foster parents, by race and ethnic background, and the children they are licensed to care for