



Student Homelessness: Quick Facts and Resources for Governors

- **In 2019-2020, public schools identified and enrolled 1.2 million homeless students.** This represents 2.5% of the total K-12 student population. State-specific numbers of identified and enrolled preK-12 homeless students may be found [here](#). This prevalence rate is [approximately half](#) what students themselves report through the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, indicating challenges with school-based identification efforts — challenges that have been exacerbated by virtual learning. [National survey data](#) indicate a 28% decrease in the number of identified homeless students in the fall of 2020 compared to the fall of 2019.
- **More than 75% of identified K-12 students experiencing homelessness were staying with other people when they were first identified as homeless in 2019-2020,** largely due to lack of shelter and fear of shelter. This contributes to their invisibility, especially in rural and suburban areas. Eleven percent were in shelter, 7% were in motels, and 4% were unsheltered. State-specific percentages may be found [here](#).
- **In addition, an estimated 1.2 million children under the age of six** experienced homelessness, but only 10% were enrolled in federally-funded early childhood programs. State-by-state numbers may be found [here](#).
- **Students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness.** Black high school students are 2.25 times [more likely to experience homelessness](#), and Hispanic high school students are 2 times more likely to experience homelessness, than white high school students. [Students with disabilities](#) represent 19% of all homeless students, compared to 14% of the overall student population. And while English learners comprise 17% of the students experiencing homelessness, they make up only 10% of the total student population. Addressing the experiencing of homelessness must be a central component of efforts to advance educational equity and pandemic recovery.
- **Homelessness creates unique barriers to educational access that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.** Barriers caused by homelessness include lack of documentation/being unable to meet enrollment requirements; high mobility resulting in lack of continuity and absenteeism; lack of transportation; lack of supplies; poor health, fatigue, and hunger; and emotional crisis/mental health issues.
- **Homelessness has a negative impact on attendance, achievement, and graduation that is over and above the impact of poverty – it must therefore be addressed specifically and intentionally.** The [2018-2019 national average graduation rate for homeless students was 67.8%](#). This is 12% below other low-income students (80%) and nearly 18% below all students (85.8%). Nearly 37% of students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent in 2018-2019 – a percentage that is likely much higher in light of pandemic-related barriers.

- **Research shows that youth without a high school diploma are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness later in life.** [Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago](#) found that the single greatest risk factor for experiencing homelessness as a young adult is lack of a high school diploma or GED. Education plays a key role in early intervention and prevention of future homelessness.

State Strategies for Addressing Child and Youth Homelessness

- 1. Prioritize and target COVID relief and state funds to help identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness.** As mentioned above, public schools are under-identifying students experiencing homelessness, [420,000 of whom have gone missing](#) during the pandemic. When students are not identified, they miss out on critical educational protections and services that can stabilize their education and their lives. Identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness is critical to student re-engagement and closing achievement gaps, and should be a priority for use of COVID relief dollars. While Congress targeted [\\$800 million for students experiencing homelessness in the American Rescue Plan Act](#), it also made clear that these students are a priority for the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund](#) (ESSER). COVID relief funds across all agencies should be layered and leveraged to prioritize outreach and wraparound supports for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. In addition, only a handful of states target some state funding specifically for students experiencing homelessness. Governors could target state funding or explore modifying school funding systems to better support these students.
- 2. Increase access to housing and services through school-early childhood-housing partnerships.** More than 80% of children and youth who are identified as homeless by public schools are ineligible for federal homelessness assistance because they do not meet the restrictive definition of homeless used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Governors can ensure that these vulnerable children, youth, and families access housing by brokering relationships between housing agencies, schools, and early childhood programs; distributing emergency rental assistance through schools and early childhood programs; and targeting state housing and service dollars toward school-housing partnerships.
- 3. Support state policy changes that remove barriers to education and economic independence for youth experiencing homelessness.** Governors can play a key role in identifying and supporting changes in state laws that facilitate access to child care, preK-12 education, postsecondary education (such as liaisons to help students successfully navigate higher education), vital documents, housing, and health care, particularly for youth who experience homelessness on their own. Examples of state policy change to support youth experiencing homelessness may be found [here](#).

Resources

- [SchoolHouse Connection](#)
- [Common Questions on Child and Youth Homelessness](#)
- [Directory of State Homeless Education Coordinators and Local Liaisons](#)
- [How to Use American Rescue Plan Act K-12 Education Funds to Identify and Support Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [State Policy and Youth Homelessness: Summaries of State Laws and Current Legislation](#)