



HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT HOMELESS STUDENTS IN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Student homelessness is a growing problem in our nation's schools. In the 2013-14 school year, there were more than 1.3 million homeless students, a 7% increase from the previous year and more than double the number in 2006-07. This study examines the growing problem of student homelessness by interviewing and surveying students who have been or are homeless and the state coordinators and local liaisons assigned to help them.

This is a critical and timely topic: ESSA amendments to the McKinney-Vento Act provide many new and stronger provisions for homeless students, effective Oct. 1, 2016. And, for the first time, federal law (ESSA) will require districts and states to report graduation rates for homeless youth, beginning with the 2016-17 school year.

Key Findings

- 78% of young people surveyed say homelessness was something they experienced more than once.
- 47% say they were homeless both with a parent or guardian and alone.
- 94% stayed with other people rather than in one consistent place; 50% slept in a car, park, abandoned building, bus station or other public place.
- 42% say they dropped out of school at least once.
- 67% say they were uncomfortable talking with people at their school about their housing situation and related challenges.
- 54% say concrete supports (housing, food, transportation) and emotional supports are equally important.
- 61% say they were never connected with any outside organization while homeless; 87% of those who were connected found the help valuable.

Key Facts

- Homelessness is detrimental to a student's ability to stay in school. A Center for Promise study found that students experiencing homelessness were 87 percent more likely than stably housed students to drop out.

- Only five states – CO, KS, VA, WA, WY – now report high school graduation rates for homeless students. In all five, rates lag well behind grad rates for all students, even other low-income students.¹
- A Child Trends study found that African Americans, American Indians, Pacific Islanders and those with multiple races are overrepresented in the homeless population.² A Center for American Progress study found that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the unaccompanied youth population.³

Impact

Homelessness takes a significant toll on young people's lives, health, relationships and education. In our survey of formerly homeless students:

- 82% say being homeless had a big impact on their life overall, 72% on their ability to feel safe and secure, 71% on their mental and emotional health, 62% on their physical health, and 69% on their self-confidence.
- 60% say it was hard to stay in school while they were homeless.
- Half say they had to change schools during their homelessness, and many did so multiple times. 62% of them say the process was difficult to navigate.

For the full report, visit GradNation.org/homeless

Supports and Services

Homeless students need both concrete supports (housing, food, transportation) and emotional supports to stay in and succeed in school.

- 58% say their schools did only a fair or poor job or should have done more to help them stay in and succeed in school.
- Just 25% say their schools did a good job helping them find them housing.
- What's very or fairly important: Having someone to talk to or check in with for emotional support (86%), connecting with peers or maintaining friendships (86%), participating in school activities including sports, music, art, and clubs (82%).

While student homelessness has intensified, liaisons say resources haven't kept up.

- 89% say they spend just half of their time or less on their responsibilities as liaisons.
- They cite key challenges, including lack of funding (78%), lack of time, staff and resources (57%), lack of community awareness (36%), and inability to find safe spaces for homeless students before and after school (30%).

Cause for Optimism

Despite the challenges, liaisons and youth remain optimistic.

- 88% of liaisons say they believe the young people they work with can graduate from high school college- and career-ready if given the right supports.
- 73% of young adults interviewed say they feel motivated to take the next steps in their lives, whether that is completing their education or pursuing a career.

Recommendations

- Work to ensure that the ESSA amendments on identifying and serving homeless students in the McKinney-Vento Act and Title I part A are fully implemented in states, schools, and districts.
- Focus on outreach efforts to inform homeless students and families of their rights and to raise community awareness.
- Ensure that schools have the resources to actively engage with homeless students to help them stay in school.
- Build connections between community organizations and schools, and connect homeless students to those outside supports.
- Set community and national goals around outcomes and graduation rates for homeless students, and use data to drive progress.
- Increase efforts to provide more affordable housing.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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1 Colorado Department of Education, 2013–14 State Policy Report: Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement; Kansas State Department of Education, State Level 2013–14 Graduation and Dropout Data—State-level Four- and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates by Subgroup (Public Schools Only); Kansas State Department of Education, Four-year and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates 2014–15 Fact Sheet; Virginia Department of Education, State-level Cohort Report, Four Year Rate—Class of 2014; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report, April 2015; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bulletin No. 072–11 Assessment and Student Information—Attachment 2 Class of 2011 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculations; Wyoming Department of Education, “Wyoming State Graduation Rates: Federally Adjusted Graduation Rates for the 2013-14 Cohort,” <http://edu.wyoming.gov/data/graduation-rates>.

2 Child Trends Data Bank (2015). Homeless Children and Youth: Indicators on Children and Youth. Accessed at <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=homeless-children-and-youth>.

3 Cray, Andrew; Katie Miller & Laura E. Durso (2013). Seeking Shelter: The Experiences and Unmet Needs of LGBT Homeless Youth. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Accessed at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/LGBTHomelessYouth.pdf>.