

Executive Summary

Children need stability to thrive. But across the United States, more and more children are facing the most extreme form of instability and poverty—homelessness. In no place is this more evident than in New York City, where one out of every eight children attending public school in SY 2014–15 had experienced homelessness within the past five school years.

Together, these over 127,000 children would form a school district larger than that of Boston and Seattle combined, and comparable in size to the Unified District of San Diego, CA, the 20th largest school district in the country.¹ Given the scope and direction of homelessness among school-age students, it is imperative for policymakers and educators to know more about homeless students' experiences in school.



The *2016 On The Map: Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City* builds from where last year's *2015 Atlas of Student Homelessness* left off. It provides a detailed picture of homelessness within the City's educational system: where homeless students go to school, what kinds of supports they may need, what their academic outcomes look like, what differences exist by the type of homelessness a student experiences, and what the lasting impacts of homelessness are educationally—even after a student's housing instability has ended. This picture dispels the notions that homeless students are the same as other poor students and that the experience of homelessness is the same across all school districts.

Student homelessness affects the entire city, but the dynamics of homelessness differ locally. Homelessness is experienced one neighborhood, school, or shelter at a time, and each child has a different story. While citywide findings can illuminate the larger context of student homelessness in New York City, they do not provide local texture or opportunity for comparisons between districts and schools. To get closer to the lived experience of homeless school-age children, the *2016 Atlas of Student Homelessness* profiles each of the City's 32 geographic school districts as well as its two citywide special districts.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 215.30, Enrollment, poverty, and federal funds for the 120 largest school districts, by enrollment size in 2013: Selected years, 2012–13 through 2015," http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_215.30.asp?current=yes (accessed June 29, 2016).

Housing instability can leave lasting scars on a child's development. Psychologically, chronic stress can traumatize children, overloading the stress response center in their brains and weakening executive function skills, limiting their ability to effectively plan, juggle multiple tasks and remember instructions.² Without needed supports, this can have long-term social consequences, making the normal challenges of navigating daily life even more difficult and carrying over into friendships and school. Children who experience housing instability struggle more academically, not because they have less potential than other children, but because they must constantly deal with the stress of uncertainty—will they have food, clean clothes, a safe place to sleep? Education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring homeless children have access to a better future. With more and more children experiencing homelessness, it is vitally important to understand the unique challenges that homeless students face and the interventions and opportunities available to meet their needs.

Key Citywide Findings

One out of every eight students in NYC public schools in SY 2014–15 experienced homelessness within the past five school years.

In one-quarter of New York City school districts, at least one out of every five students had experienced homelessness within the past five school years.

Over two-thirds of students who were homeless in SY 2014–15 had been homeless during a previous school year.

If all of the students who experienced homelessness in NYC had their own school district, it would be comparable in size to the Unified District of San Diego, California, the 20th largest school district in the country.

Homeless elementary students living in shelter had the highest rates of mid-year transfers and chronic absenteeism. Forty percent transferred during the school year and over half missed 20 or more days of school.

² Robert F. Anda et al, "The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood: A convergence of evidence from neurobiology and epidemiology," *European archives of psychiatry and clinical neuroscience*, 256, 3, (2006): 174-86.

Homelessness has a lasting impact on grade-level proficiency and retention rates. Students who were housed but had experienced homelessness had lower rates of grade-level proficiency and higher rates of grade retention than their low-income peers who had never experienced homelessness.

Only one-third of homeless students with special education needs received their IEP by the end of Kindergarten, a much lower rate than that of their housed peers.

While overall, homeless students dropped out at twice the citywide average, homeless students living in shelter during all four years of high school dropped out at rates that were statistically no different than their housed peers.

Key District-Level Findings

Almost 20% of homeless students, or over 15,000 children, attended just two school districts in the Bronx (Districts 9 and 10). These two districts serve the Highbridge and Fordham areas of the Bronx.

The Highbridge neighborhood of the Bronx (District 9) had the highest proportion of students who were homeless in SY 2014–15.

District 10, including the Fordham neighborhood of the Bronx, had the largest number of homeless students with more than 8,500 students enrolled in SY 2014–15.

The top five school districts for the number of homeless students transferring mid-year were all in the Bronx.

One out of every three students who transferred into District 9 (Highbridge) mid-year was homeless.

District 9 (Highbridge) was home to 48 shelters with capacity for over 1,700 families with children. This was more than two times the family shelter capacity of the next-highest school district (District 19 serving East New York), which had 730 units located in 9 different shelters.

In eight out of NYC's 32 school districts, homeless students were suspended at rates that were below the citywide average of 2.8%.

In seven school districts more than 62% of students who experienced homelessness during high school graduated. In the year prior, only three school districts had graduation rates for homeless students that were above 60%.