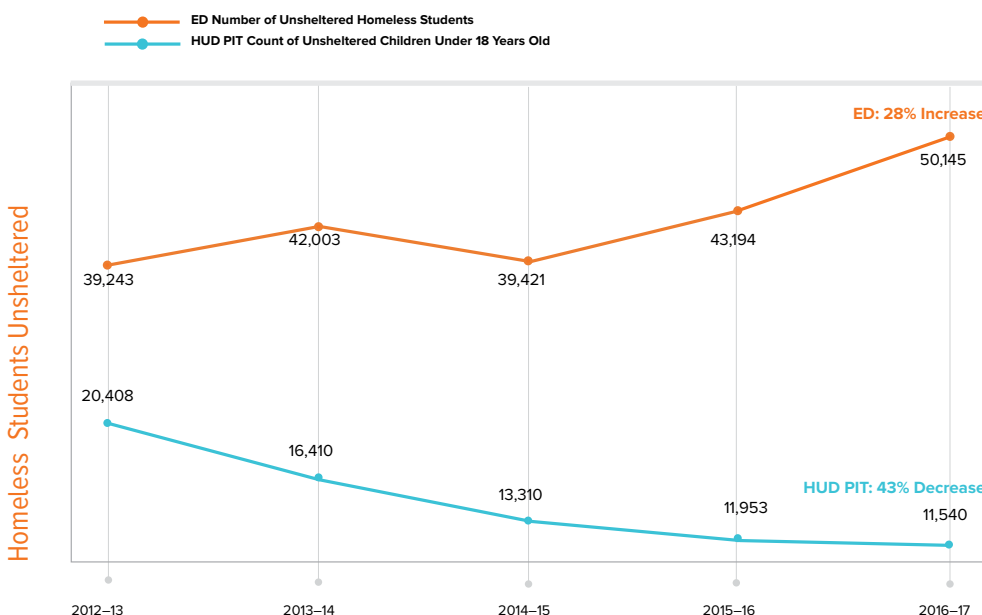
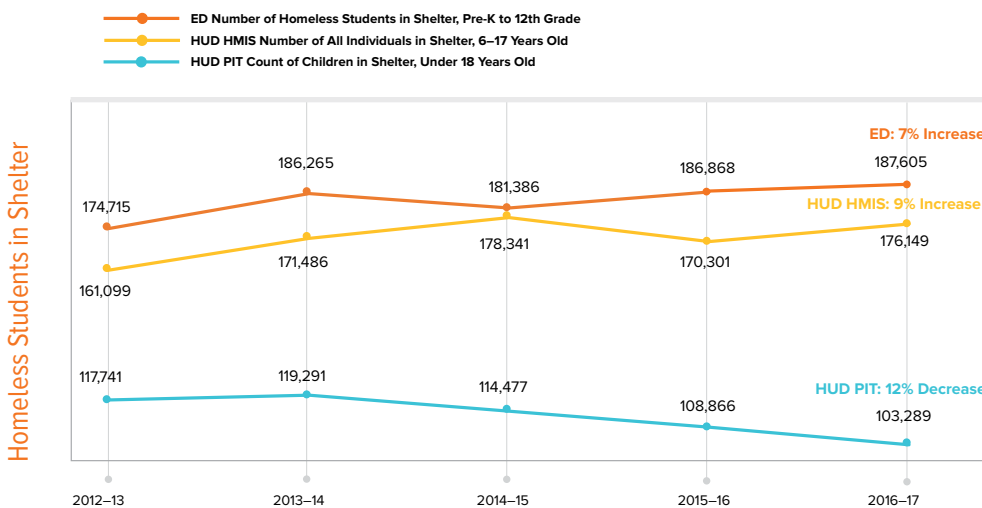
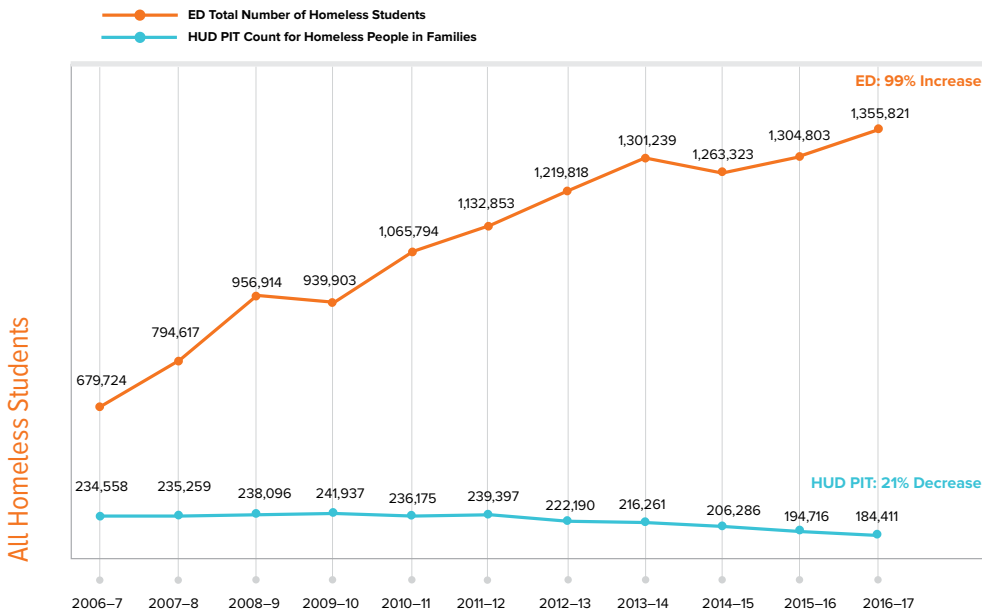


# One Issue, Three Counts, One Reality

Homeless families with children often hide in plain sight. While many stay in shelters, many more stay night-to-night in someone's living room or in a car. No one knows precisely how many children experience homelessness in America.



Every year the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) counts homelessness in two different ways. HUD's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) count includes all people staying in shelter over the course of one year. HUD's Point-in-Time (PIT) count, taking place over the course of a single night, estimates the number of people living in shelters or in places not meant for habitation. The most recent HUD PIT count indicated a 21% decrease in the number of children and parents experiencing homelessness over the last decade.

But ask anyone who works in America's schools, shelters, or libraries and they will describe a different reality. And they have mounting proof.

In contrast to HUD, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) requires schools to identify students who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This record shows an astounding 99% growth in child homelessness over the same decade, highlighting the limitations of HUD's Point-in-Time count. Even a limited count focused solely on children in homeless shelters shows a discrepancy of more than 70,000 children between HUD's two counts. More alarming, while ED reported an increase of 28% in students living in unsheltered locations, HUD's PIT count reported a 43% decrease.

Our federal policy tasks HUD—an agency responsible solely for housing—to both define and count who is homeless and allocate resources to “end” homelessness. HUD's exclusionary counts include only those living in shelter and a limited number of those without shelter, ignoring the majority of the more than 1.3 million homeless public school children.

Homeless children deserve to be seen. An inclusive count is a step in the right direction.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Resource Library", <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources>. National Center for Homeless Education, "Federal Data Summary", <https://nche.ed.gov/data-and-stats/>.