

## Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in the School District of Philadelphia, Analysis of 2018-19 Data

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### Summary of Key Findings:

- ECYEH identified a similar proportion of homeless students in 2018-19 as compared to 2017-18
- Most students identified as homeless are living “doubled up”
- Similar to 2017-18, enrollment assistance, uniform vouchers, and transportation assistance are still critical services for students identified as homeless
- Homeless students fare worse on outcomes of attendance, standardized test scores, and grade promotion compared to all SDP students

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides grant funding to school districts in Pennsylvania that have a significant homeless student population through the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program. In collaboration with other city agencies such as Philadelphia’s Office of Homeless Services, ECYEH priorities include tracking the number of homeless students and providing support such as school enrollment assistance, vouchers for uniforms, transportation passes, and additional funding for school supplies.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this research brief is to provide information about progress toward the goals of the ECYEH grant program and priorities of SDP staff.

### Research Questions

The five research questions guiding this project address both the services provided by ECYEH (questions 1-3) as well as student outcomes including attendance and academic achievement (questions 4 and 5). The questions and sub-questions are as follows:

1. Are ECYEH approaches resulting in:
  - a. The identification of school-age students as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2018-19 school year?
  - b. The identification of unaccompanied youth identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2018-19 school year?

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about programming for students experiencing homelessness, see <https://www.philasd.org/homeless/>.

2. Students: How many students did EGYEH serve in the 2018-19 school year?
  - a. How many students received the following support: enrollment assistance, uniforms, school supplies, transportation assistance, and tutoring?
  - b. In the 2018-19 school year, how many students participated in the TEEN program?
3. School/Shelter staff: In the 2018-19 school year, was EGYEH able to implement the following?
  - a. Professional development, training, or awareness opportunities for educators/school personnel
  - b. Professional development, training, or awareness opportunities for social service agencies and shelters
4. How does the percentage of school age children and youth identified as chronically truant in the 2018-19 school year compare to the percentage of other District students identified as truant?
5. To what extent do students who are identified as homeless improve on the following indicators aligned with academic success?
  - a. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the PSSA-Reading and Math assessments
  - b. The percentage of high school students who are promoted to the next grade

## Data Sources and Methods

The EGYEH office provided the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) with two primary sources of information:

- Information about students identified as homeless at any point during the 2018-19 school year.
- Responses from electronic satisfaction surveys including a satisfaction survey linked in the EGYEH program staff email signatures, which received 23 responses in 2018-19 (mostly from school staff and agency staff). The survey assessed the level of satisfaction experienced by the respondent, what they liked most about the supports/services offered by the EGYEH office, and if there were any additional supports/services they would like to see offered.

Finally, ORE retrieved data on student attendance and achievement from Total Student Enrollment Yearly report and PSSA warehouse table to generate descriptive information about student outcomes.

## What We Found

### **A similar proportion of students were identified as homeless in the 2018-19 school year compared to the 2017-18 school year**

Homeless students were identified to the EGYEH office by several different methods. Some students were identified by parents or guardians directly requesting services from the EGYEH office.

Students may also have been identified by their SDP teachers, counselors, and administrators. Additional sources of identification included The City of Philadelphia’s Office of Supportive Housing, SDP’s Office of Early Childhood Education, and area shelters who provided information to the ECYEH office identifying homeless students. Although there are many ways in which students were identified, and more than 4,200 students identified, we suspect that the actual number of homeless students is still higher than presented due to the challenging nature of identifying this particular population (Table 1).

Table 1. Students identified as homeless at any point during 2018-19

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Identified Students</b>
SDP Students <sup>a</sup>	2,714
Charter Students	556
Not yet school-aged (0-5 year olds)	750
Other Students Identified <sup>b</sup>	241
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,261<sup>c</sup></b>

**Source:** Data file provided by ECYEH office merged with information from the SDP’s Student Information System (SIS).

<sup>a</sup>The total number of SDP students includes students in alternative and special education schools. These students are excluded from attendance and achievement analyses.

<sup>b</sup>Other students identified includes students without IDs, students that could not be located in the SIS, or students enrolled in cyber charter schools. These students may be in private school, awaiting enrollment, or unenrolled. All “other students identified” were excluded from analyses that used SDP data.

<sup>c</sup>This number does not include certain charter schools that did not report to ECYEH and who were not included in below analyses but were identified by the ECYEH Region 1 office. The total number reported to the state for Philadelphia County is 7,847.

The ECYEH office identified a similar proportion of students as homeless during the 2018-19 school year compared to the 2017-18 school year (Table 2).

Table 2. A similar proportion of students were identified as homeless during the 2018-19 school year

<b>Population</b>	<b>N (2017-18)</b>	<b>N (2018-19)</b>
Identified SDP & charter homeless enrollment	3,042	3,270
Total SDP & charter enrollment <sup>a</sup>	202,538	205,713
Percent of total enrollment represented by homeless students	1.5%	1.6%

**Source:** ECYEH data files for identified students and Qlik Enrollment Overview sheet (which uses official October 1 enrollment counts) for total enrollment.

<sup>a</sup>Includes Alternative and Special Education Schools and charter schools that may not have reported directly to ECYEH.

The majority of students in District and charter schools identified as homeless were Black/African American (2,088 out of 3,270 students; Table 3). About an equal proportion were male and female, and more students were identified in grades K-5 (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 3. Race/ethnicity of identified SDP and charter students

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Identified Students</b>
Black/African American	2,088
Hispanic/Latino	852
White	151
Multi-Racial/Other	128
Asian	45
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,270</b>

Table 4. Gender of identified SDP and charter students

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Identified Students</b>
Male	1,582
Female	1,688
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,270</b>

Table 5. Grade of identified SDP and charter students

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Number of Identified Students</b>
K	315
1	313
2	337
3	325
4	297
5	299
6	281
7	220
8	193
9	276
10	156
11	147
12	111
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,270</b>

### **Most of the students identified as homeless in 2018-19 were “doubled up”**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) guarantees a free public education that is appropriate for all homeless-identified children and youth.<sup>2</sup> McKinney-Vento defines homelessness as a lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and as such

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information about the McKinney-Vento Act see <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>

may include youth who are “doubled up” (i.e., sharing housing with another family). A majority of K-12 students identified as homeless during the 2018-19 school year were doubled up (Table 6).

Table 6. Homeless students by living arrangement

<b>Living Arrangement</b>	<b>Total K-12 Homeless Students</b>	<b>Total 0-5 Homeless Children</b>
	Number of students (% of identified homeless students) <sup>a</sup>	Number of students (% of identified homeless students) <sup>b</sup>
Doubled up	2,275 (65%)	648 (86%)
Shelter/transitional	1,072 (31%)	100 (13%)
Unaccompanied	284 (8%)	N/A
Other/hotel	41 (1%)	0
Unsheltered	22 (<1%)	0
Unknown	101 (3%)	2 (<1%)

**Source:** Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

<sup>a</sup>Percentages are out of the 3,511 students identified in Table 1 as SDP, Charter, and ‘Other’. Students may fall into more than one category of living arrangement.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages are out of the 750 students identified in Table 1 as 0-5 students.

## **Twenty-two percent of K-12 students identified as homeless in 2018-19 required enrollment assistance**

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students’ enrollment cannot be denied or delayed due to a lack in proof of residency. When a school insists on a verified address for enrollment, ECYEH works to ensure that these children can still be enrolled by providing a homeless verification form to the school. In 2018-19, ECYEH coordinators continued to work with parents and students to assist with enrollment paperwork, either in person or via phone. Coordinators also contacted schools to verify the status of the student, with shelters assisting in this process by providing a letter of residency for families. In the 2018-19 school year, 768 (22% of K-12 students identified as homeless) received assistance with enrollment.

## **Half (50%) of students identified as homeless required assistance in purchasing a uniform, and a smaller percentage (13%) required transportation assistance**

In addition to enrollment assistance, the ECYEH office provides vouchers for uniforms and transportation assistance. The uniform vouchers allow students to comply with the SDP school dress code, which may be difficult for the student if the family lacks income to purchase a uniform. In 2018-19, 50% of K-12 students who were identified as homeless received uniform vouchers (Table 7). This is a decrease from 60% in the 2017-18 school year.

Because transportation can also be a major obstacle in homeless students' school attendance (Tobin, 2011), the ECYEH office provides SEPTA transit passes as a means for students to get to and from school. The percentage of homeless students receiving transportation assistance was slightly lower in 2018-19 at 13%, compared to 2017-18 at 17% (Table 7).

Table 7. Services provided by the ECYEH program in 2017-18 and 2018-19

Service	2017-18		2018-19	
	Number of Identified K-12 Students who Received Service	Percentage of Identified K-12 Students who Received Service	Number of Identified K-12 Students who Received Service	Percentage of Identified K-12 Students who Received Service
Uniform vouchers	1,987	60%	1,752	50%
Transportation assistance <sup>a</sup>	556	17%	466	13%

**Source:** Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

<sup>a</sup>Transportation assistance usually takes the form of SEPTA passes for students who qualify. ECYEH assists in this process along with the Office of Transportation and the school counselor.

## ECYEH staff led, supported, or participated in 152 events between August 2018 and June 2019

One of the main functions of the ECYEH office is conducting community outreach to families experiencing homelessness to inform them of their options and available supports (e.g., transportation passes, uniforms). ECYEH staff conduct workshops at shelters and often go to events hosted by the Family and Community Engagement Office or the School Advisory Councils. In addition to providing families with information, ECYEH also runs a TEEN program. The TEEN program was offered to homeless high school students with an interest in learning about career readiness and post-secondary education options.

- Events and Workshops.** During the 2018-19 school year, the ECYEH office led, supported, or participated in 152 events: 82 visits to schools for training, technical assistance, or monitoring and 70 workshops with parents, provider staff, and community members. At events where parents are present, ECYEH staff discuss services available to parents of homeless children and rights of homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Act (for example, a child can choose to remain enrolled at the same school despite having moved into a shelter that may be in a different catchment area). ECYEH also provides professional development to school staff, central office staff, and providers around the McKinney-Vento Act, emphasizes the prevalence of homelessness in Philadelphia, and outlines the types of assistance available to homeless students.
- TEEN Program.** The TEEN program took place on Wednesday evenings from 4-6 at the school district central office for most of the school year. Programming focused on professional development for students, such as college prep or life/business skills. Students

complete an intake form at the beginning of the program that asks for their interests and their GPA, and the results from these forms help to inform programming. In 2018-19, 29 students between the ages of 14-18 participated in at least one meeting.

### **Most people who interacted with the ECYEH Office were satisfied**

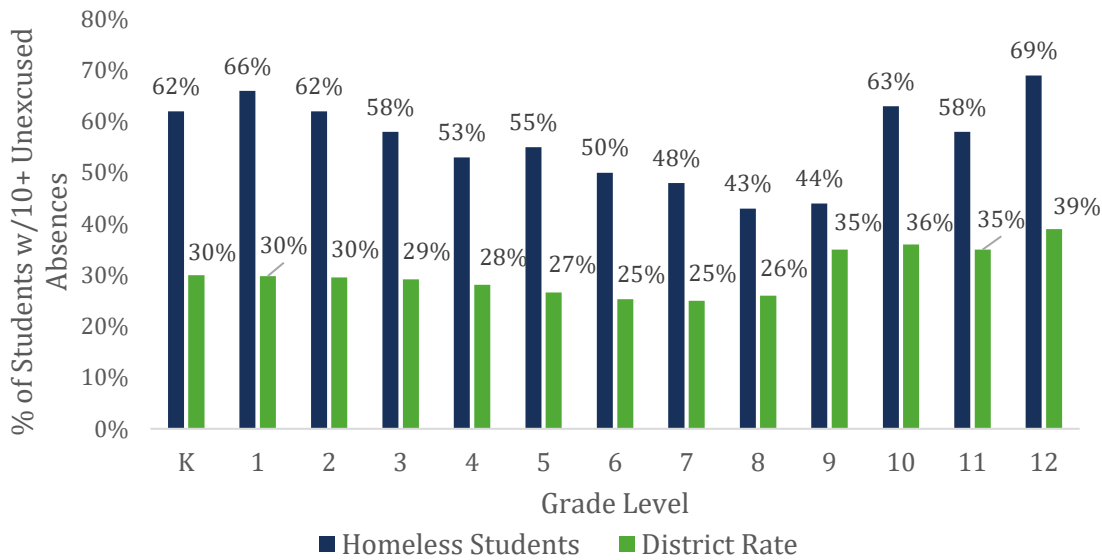
All respondents to the office satisfaction survey (100%, n=23) reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with the supports/services they received from the ECYEH office. When asked what they liked best about the supports/services offered by the ECYEH office, responses fell into two common themes: about 59% of responses mentioned the helpfulness of the staff and 41% mentioned the timeliness of the response. Respondents' suggestions for future services or supports provided by the ECYEH office included academic assistance, providing book bags, an easier way to exchange uniform sizes (instead of having to go to central office), and a presentation on the way the shelter system works in Philadelphia so that counselors can better assist families.

In addition to examining services provided by ECYEH, research questions also addressed outcomes of student attendance and achievement. The following results address truancy of students identified as homeless, achievement (as measured by scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)), as well as grade promotion in comparison to non-homeless students in the school district.

### **A higher percentage of students identified as homeless were chronically truant compared to District students as a whole**

Students in SDP are considered chronically truant and may receive a citation for the District's Truancy Court after having ten or more unexcused absences. In the 2018-19 school year, the percentage of homeless students in the District with ten or more unexcused absences was 56%, compared to 30% of all District students. These rates are similar to the previous school year for both homeless and all District students (52% and 31%, respectively). Similar to District students, among homeless-identified students, the lowest percentages of chronic truancy are found in the middle grades (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Chronic Truancy: Homeless Students Compared to District Rate by Grade, 2018-19



**Source:** Total Student Enrollment Yearly for homeless students and Qlik Climate Matters app for District rates.

### Homeless students had lower rates of proficiency on standardized tests compared to other SDP students in 2018-19

Across all grades that take the PSSA in both math and English, fewer homeless students scored Advanced or Proficient on the PSSA exam than other SDP students (see Tables 8 and 9). This is consistent with prior research.<sup>3</sup>

Table 8. 2018-19 PSSA Math proficiency rates for grades 3-8 homeless and District students

Grade	Number of Homeless Students who took PSSA Math Test	Number/Percent of Homeless Students Scoring Advanced or Proficient N (%)	Number of SDP Students who Took PSSA Math Test	Number/Percent of SDP Students Scoring Advanced or Proficient N (%)
3	226	14 (6.2%)	14,554	4,296 (29.5%)
4	215	17 (7.9%)	14,537	2,956 (20.3%)
5	205	14 (6.8%)	14,822	3,048 (20.6%)
6	180	9 (5.0%)	14,476	2,498 (17.3%)
7	128	6 (4.7%)	13,479	2,681 (19.9%)
8	120	5 (4.2%)	13,117	2,121 (16.2%)
Total	1,074	65 (6.1%)	84,985	17,600 (20.7%)

**Source:** PSSA warehouse table for homeless students and Qlik PSSA & Keystone app for District rates (includes charters).

<sup>3</sup> Losinski, M., Katsyannis, A., Ryan, J. (2013). The McKinney-Vento education for homeless children and youth program: implications for special educators. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 49*(2), 92-98.



Table 9. 2018-19 PSSA English proficiency rates for grades 3-8 homeless and District students

Grade	Number of Homeless Students who Took PSSA English Test	Number/Percent of Homeless Students Scoring Advanced or Proficient N (%)	Number of SDP Students who Took PSSA English Test	Number/Percent of SDP Students Scoring Advanced or Proficient N (%)
3	210	29 (13.8%)	14,467	5,220 (36.1%)
4	199	43 (21.6%)	14,475	5,711 (39.5%)
5	186	27 (14.5%)	14,805	5,133 (34.7%)
6	166	31 (18.7%)	14,454	5,586 (38.7%)
7	117	15 (12.8%)	13,472	5,541 (41.1%)
8	107	15 (14.0%)	13,174	4,669 (35.4%)
Total	985	160 (16.2%)	84,847	31,860 (37.6%)

Source: PSSA warehouse table for homeless students and Qlik PSSA & Keystone app for District rates (includes charters).

## Homeless students had lower rates of high school grade promotion from 2018-19 to 2019-20 when compared to all SDP students

SDP high schools have clear policies on what students must accomplish before being promoted to the next grade (compared to “social” promotion in which students are promoted each year regardless of performance). Grade promotion for high school students (from 2018-19 to 2019-20) was compared for homeless students who received services to all students in the District (Table 10). At the high school level, students experiencing homelessness were promoted at lower rates than their peers across all high school grades.

Table 10. Homeless students advancing to next grade compared to SDP students<sup>a</sup>

Grade	Number of Homeless Students	Percent of Homeless Students Promoted to the Next Grade	Percent of SDP Students Promoted to the Next Grade
9	209	85.2%	91.5%
10	90	86.7%	93.0%
11	97	85.6%	95.9%

Source: Total Student Enrollment Yearly

<sup>a</sup>Students were included in this analysis if they had an SDP enrollment record in both the 2018-19 school year and the 2019-20 school year. Grade refers to the student’s grade in 2018-19. Grade 12 is not included in this table as these students would be considered part of a graduation rate rather than grade promotion.

## Looking Ahead

ECYEH identified a similar proportion of homeless students in 2018-19 compared to 2017-18. The school district continues to offer services such as enrollment assistance, uniform vouchers and transportation assistance. In addition, the TEEN program continues to be a source of support for a small number of these homeless students. However, even with these supports in place, SDP students identified as homeless continue to lag behind other District students in outcomes of attendance (chronic truancy) and achievement (as measured by standardized tests). ORE will continue to monitor these outcomes and update results for the 2019-20 school year.