



Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in the School District of Philadelphia, Analysis of 2019-20 Data

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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

Key Findings

- ECYEH identified a similar percentage of homeless students in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19.
- Most students identified as homeless are living “doubled up.”
- Similar to 2018-19, enrollment assistance, uniform vouchers, and transportation assistance are still critical services for students identified as homeless.
- Homeless students fare worse on outcomes of attendance and grade promotion compared to all SDP students.

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.¹

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 2019-20 school year?

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

- b. The identification of unaccompanied youth identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2019-20 school year?
2. Students: How many students did ECYEH serve in the 2019-20 school year?
 - a. How many students received the following support: enrollment assistance, uniforms, school supplies, and transportation assistance?
 - b. In the 2019-20 school year, how many students participated in the TEEN program?
3. School/Shelter staff: In the 2019-20 school year, was ECYEH 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 and homeless in the 2019-20 school year compare to the percentage of other District students identified as chronically truant?
5. To what extent are students who are identified as homeless promoted to the next grade compared to students who are not identified as homeless?

Data Sources and Methods

The ECYEH 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 2019-20 school year. Homeless students were identified to the ECYEH office by several different methods. Some students were identified by parents or guardians directly requesting services from the ECYEH 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 that provided information to the ECYEH office identifying homeless students. The number of students that ECYEH identifies and is presented here differs from the number reported by the state for the School District of Philadelphia because other reporting agencies (e.g., the City of Philadelphia, homeless shelters, and charter schools) provide numbers directly to the state, which are then combined with the lists provided by ECYEH. (While some charter schools report their numbers directly to the state, ECYEH does serve other charter students directly, and those students are therefore included in this report.)
- Responses from electronic satisfaction surveys, including a satisfaction survey linked in the ECYEH program staff email signatures, which received 20 responses in 2019-20 (mostly from school 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 ECYEH 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 the Total Student Enrollment Yearly report to generate descriptive information about student outcomes.

What We Found

A similar percentage of students was identified as homeless in 2019-20 compared to in 2018-19.

There are many ways in which students were identified as homeless, resulting in 3,800 students being identified in the 2019-20 school year (Table 1). However, we suspect that the actual number of homeless students is still higher than presented due to the challenging nature of identifying this particular population. Additionally, school closures that happened in March 2020 due to COVID-19 may have impacted the ability to identify more students, although the ECYEH office was still doing enrollment over the phone.

Table 1. Students identified as homeless at any point during 2019-20

Category	Number of Identified Students
SDP Students ^a	2,910
Charter Students	284
Not yet school-aged (0-5 year olds)	448
Other Students Identified ^b	158
Total	3,800^c

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

^aThe total number of SDP students includes students in alternative and special education schools. These students are excluded from attendance and achievement analyses.

^bOther students identified includes students without IDs, students who 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.

^cThis 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 ECYEH office identified a similar percentage of students as homeless during the 2019-20 school year compared to the 2018-19 school year (Table 2).

Table 2. A similar percentage of students were identified as homeless during the 2019-20 school year

Population	N (2018-19)	N (2019-20)
Identified SDP & charter homeless enrollment	3,270	3,194
Total SDP & charter enrollment ^a	205,713	205,576
Percent of total enrollment represented by homeless students	1.6%	1.6%

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

^aIncludes 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 (2,017 out of 3,194 students; Table 3). About an equal proportion were male and female, and more students were identified in grades K-5. The highest number reported was in grade 9 (Tables 4 and 5).

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

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Identified Students
Black/African American	2,017
Hispanic/Latino	755
White	203
Multi-Racial/Other	116
Asian	94
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3
Total	3,194

Table 4. Gender of identified SDP and charter students

Gender	Number of Identified Students
Male	1,638
Female	1,556
Total	3,194

Table 5. Grade of identified SDP and charter students

Grade	Number of Identified Students
K	292
1	303
2	254
3	305
4	293
5	292
6	254
7	246
8	174
9	341
10	182
11	137
12	121
Total	3,194

Most of the students identified as homeless in 2019-20 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.² McKinney-Vento defines homelessness as a lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and as such 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 2019-20 school year were doubled up (Table 6).

Table 6. Homeless students by living arrangement

Living Arrangement	Total K-12 Homeless Students	Total Homeless Children, Ages 0-5
	Number of students (% of identified homeless students) ^a	Number of children (% of identified homeless students) ^b
Doubled up	2,942 (88%)	389 (87%)
Shelter/transitional	804 (24%)	58 (13%)
Unaccompanied	338 (10%)	N/A
Other/hotel	43 (1%)	1 (<1%)
Unsheltered	11 (<1%)	0

Source: Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

^aPercentages are out of the 3,352 students identified in Table 1 as SDP, Charter, and ‘Other’. Students may fall into more than one category of living arrangement.

^bPercentages are out of the 448 students identified in Table 1 as children ages 0-5. In this group, ECYEH generally provides referrals to other services such as Early Intervention and housing support.

More than one-quarter of K-12 students identified as homeless in 2019-20 required enrollment assistance.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students’ enrollment cannot be denied or delayed due to lacking 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 2019-20, 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 2019-20 school year, 1,414 (44% of K-12 students identified as homeless) received assistance with enrollment.

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

Over half (52%) of students identified as homeless required assistance in purchasing a uniform, and a smaller percentage (21%) 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 2019-20, 52% of K-12 students who were identified as homeless received uniform vouchers (Table 7). This is an increase from 50% in the 2018-19 school year.

Because transportation can also be a major obstacle in homeless students' school attendance, 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 higher in 2019-20, at 21% compared to 13% in 2018-19 (Table 7).

Table 7. Services provided by the ECYEH program in 2018-19 and 2019-20

Service	2018-19		2019-20	
	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	1,752	50%	1,735	54%
Transportation assistance ^a	466	13%	692	22%

Source: Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

^aTransportation 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 89 events between July 2019 and February 2020.

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.

- **Summer Programs.** In the summer of 2019, Temple University hosted a program for older youth. The purpose of this program was to expose students to what college could be like. During this week-long experience, students stayed overnight in dorms and ate in cafeterias. Youth attended classes with college professors and went on campus tours. Somerset Academy Early Learning Center hosted a six-week, Monday through Friday reading enrichment camp for younger children that was free for families.
- **Events and Workshops.** During the 2019-20 school year, the ECYEH office led, supported, or participated in 89 events: 55 visits to schools for training, technical assistance, or monitoring, and 34 workshops with parents, provider staff, SDP staff, and community members. For the first time, school nurses and Support Team for Education Partnership (STEP) staff were a part of workshops. At events where parents were present, ECYEH staff discussed 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 provided professional development to school staff, central office staff, and providers around the McKinney-Vento Act, emphasizing the prevalence of homelessness in Philadelphia and outlining the types of assistance available to homeless students.
- **TEEN Program.** The TEEN program took place on Wednesday evenings from 4-6 at the District central office from November to March. Programming focused on professional development for students, such as college prep or life/business skills. Students completed an intake form at the beginning of the program that asked for their interests and GPA, and the results from these forms helped to inform programming. In 2019-20, 44 students between the ages of 14-18 participated in at least one meeting.

Most people who interacted with the ECYEH Office were satisfied.

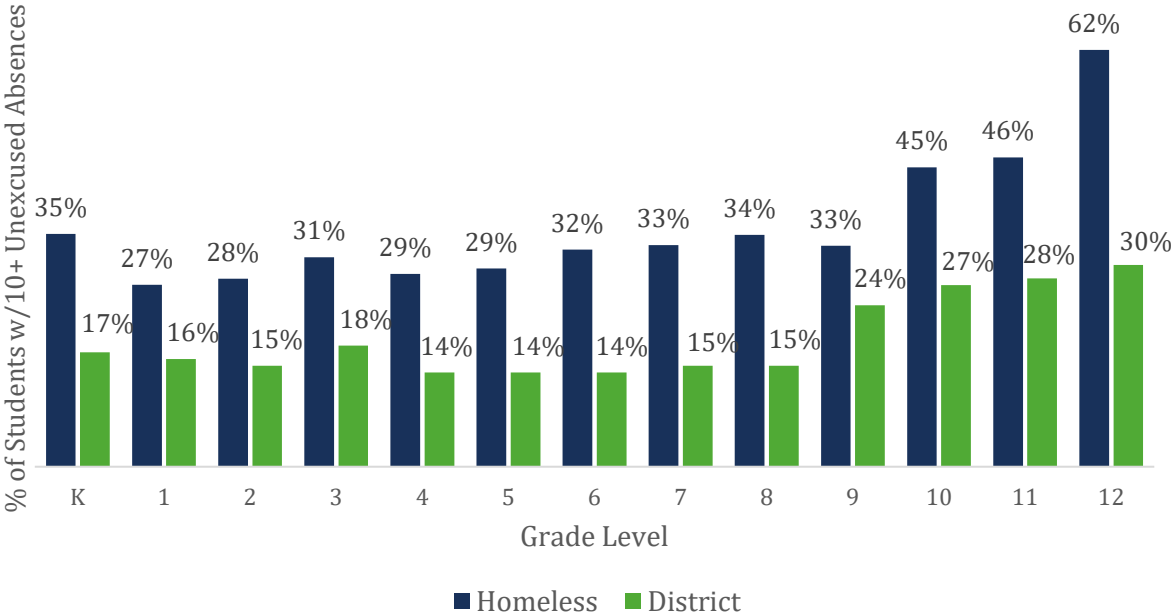
All respondents to the office satisfaction survey (100%, n=20) reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with the supports/services they received from the ECYEH office. When asked what they liked best about the supports/services offered by the ECYEH office, responses fell into three common themes: about 42% of responses mentioned the helpfulness of the staff, 42% mentioned the timeliness of the response, and 32% mentioned that the provided resources were informative and useful. Respondents' suggestions for future services or supports provided by the ECYEH office included tickets to museums or sporting events, more services for the families of students, information on obtaining new employment for families, a workshop for students on completing college financial aid applications, and providing students financial assistance to cover college enrollment fees.

In addition to examining services provided by ECYEH, research questions also addressed student academic outcomes. The following results address truancy of students identified as homeless and grade promotion in comparison to non-homeless students in the 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 ten or more unexcused absences. In the 2019-20 school year, the percentage of homeless students in the District with ten or more unexcused absences was 34%, compared to 18% for all District students. Similar to District students, among homeless-identified students, the lowest percentages of chronic truancy were found in the middle grades (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Chronic Truancy: Homeless Students Compared to District Rate by Grade, 2019-20



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

Homeless students had lower rates of high school grade promotion from 2019-20 to 2020-21 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 2019-20 to 2020-21) was compared for homeless students who received services to all students in the District (Table 8). At the high school level, students experiencing homelessness were promoted at lower rates than their peers across all high school grades.

Table 8. Homeless students advancing to next grade compared to SDP students^a

Grade	Number of Homeless Students	Percent of Homeless Students Promoted to the Next Grade	Percent of SDP Students Promoted to the Next Grade
9	288	92.4%	95.1%
10	133	81.2%	95.1%
11	83	88.0%	96.9%

Source: Total Student Enrollment Yearly

^aStudents were included in this analysis if they had an SDP enrollment record in both the 2019-20 school year and the 2020-21 school year. Grade refers to the student's grade in 2019-20. 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 2019-20 compared to 2018-19. The 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 grade promotion). ORE will continue to monitor these outcomes and update results for the 2020-21 school year.