



Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in the School District of Philadelphia, Analysis of 2020-21 Data

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Key Findings

- ECYEH identified a smaller percentage of homeless students in 2020-21 as compared to 2019-20.
- Most students identified as homeless are living “doubled up.”
- Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, the ECYEH office was able to take part in a number of initiatives such as coat distribution and an awareness campaign to help support students identified as homeless.
- Students experiencing homelessness were absent more often than other SDP students.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides grant funding to 8 regions in Pennsylvania to serve students experiencing homelessness through the Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program. ECYEH’s priorities include identifying and tracking the number of students experiencing homelessness and providing support such as school enrollment assistance, uniforms, transportation passes, backpacks/school supplies and other needs, and referrals.¹

The purpose of this research brief is to provide information about progress toward the goals of the ECYEH program and priorities of School District of Philadelphia (SDP) staff.

Research Questions

The four research questions guiding this project address both the services provided by ECYEH (questions 1-3) as well as the student outcome of attendance (question 4). The questions and sub-questions are as follows:

1. During the 2020-21 school year, did ECYEH approaches result in:
 - a. The identification of school-age students as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2020-21 school year?
 - b. The identification of unaccompanied youth² identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2020-21 school year?

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

² An “unaccompanied youth” is defined as a child who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

2. How many students did ECYEH serve in the 2020-21 school year?
 - a. How many students received the following supports: enrollment assistance, uniforms, school supplies, and transportation assistance?
 - b. In the 2020-21 school year, how many students participated in the Teen Evolution Experience Network (TEEN) program?
3. In the 2020-21 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 2020-21 school year compare to the percentage of other District students identified as chronically truant?

Data Sources and Methods

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

- **ECYEH list of identified students.** This brief reflects information about students identified as homeless at any point during the 2020-21 school year. Students experiencing homelessness were identified to the ECYEH office by several different methods. Schools were virtual for most of the 2020-21 school year due to COVID-19. As such, ECYEH worked with the Office of Student Enrollment and Placement to create an online system to answer questions about housing and flag students and families who needed supports. 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 Homeless Services, SDP's Office of Early Childhood Education, and area shelters who provided information to the ECYEH office identifying students experiencing homelessness.

Note: The number of students that ECYEH identifies and is presented here differs from the total number reported by the state for Philadelphia (Region 1) because other reporting agencies (e.g., the City of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services (OHS) and charter schools) provide numbers directly to the state which are then combined with the numbers provided by ECYEH. For example, there may be a child living in a shelter who ECYEH never works with so they are not on the ECYEH list but they are on the list that the Office of Homeless Services submits so the state counts them as Region 1. While the Office of Homeless Services and charter schools report their numbers directly to the state, ECYEH does service some of these students directly, and those students are therefore included in this report. ECYEH serves all of these children indirectly through their work with shelter and charter school staff.

- **Satisfaction survey responses.** Responses from electronic satisfaction surveys, including a satisfaction survey linked in the ECYEH program staff email signatures, which received 25 responses in 2020-21 (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 ECYEH office, and if there were any additional supports/services they would like to see offered.

Finally, ORE retrieved data on student attendance from the Total Student Enrollment Yearly report to generate descriptive information about student attendance.

What We Found

A smaller percentage of students were identified as homeless in the 2020-21 school year compared to the 2019-20 school year.

There are many ways that students were identified as homeless, resulting in 2,251 students being identified in the 2020-21 school year (Table 1). However, we suspect that the actual number of students experiencing homelessness is still higher than presented due to the challenging nature of identifying this particular population. Additionally, school closures due to COVID-19 resulted in online learning for students for most of the 2020-21 school year. This contributed to a lower number of identified students as many are typically identified through uniform and transportation requests. Although effects of COVID-19 may have impacted the ability to identify more students, the ECYEH office was still doing enrollment over the phone and online.

Table 1. Students identified as homeless at any point during 2020-21

Category	Number of Identified Students
SDP Students ^a	1,487
Charter Students	205 ^b
Not yet school-aged (0-5 year olds)	408
Other Students Identified ^c	151
Total	2,251

Source: Data file provided by ECYEH office merged with information from the SDP's Student Information System (SIS), accessed November, 2021.

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

^bThis number does not include certain charter schools that did not report to ECYEH and who were not included in the below analyses but were identified by the ECYEH Region 1 office.

^cOther 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.

The ECYEH office identified a smaller percentage of students as homeless during the 2020-21 school year compared to the 2019-20 school year (Table 2).

Table 2. A smaller percentage of students were identified as homeless during the 2020-21 school year

Population	N (2019-20)	N (2020-21)
Identified SDP & charter homeless enrollment	3,194	1,692
Total SDP & charter enrollment ^a	205,576	202,944
Percent of total enrollment represented by homeless students	1.6%	0.8%

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 (1,216 out of 1,692 students; Table 3). About an equal proportion were male and female, and more students were identified in grades K-5 (Tables 4 and 5). The highest number reported was in kindergarten.

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

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Identified Students
Black/African American	1,216
Hispanic/Latinx	300
White	81
Multi-Racial/Other	58
Asian	30
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1
Total	1,692

Table 4. Gender of identified SDP and charter students

Gender	Number of Identified Students
Male	819
Female	873
Total	1,692

Table 5. Grade of identified SDP and charter students

Grade	Number of Identified Students
K	250
1	173
2	165
3	135
4	143
5	116
6	103
7	111
8	88
9	133
10	91
11	72
12	112
Total	1,692

Most of the students identified as homeless in 2020-21 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.³ 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 one or more families). The ECYEH office also identifies whether a student is an unaccompanied youth, which McKinney-Vento defines as “a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.” A majority of K-12 students identified as homeless during the 2020-21 school year were doubled up (Table 6).

³ For detailed information about the McKinney-Vento Act, see <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>.

Table 6. Students experiencing homelessness by living arrangement

Living Arrangement	Total K-12 Students Experiencing Homelessness	Total Children Experiencing Homelessness, Ages 0-5
	Number of students (% of identified students experiencing homelessness) ^a	Number of children (% of identified students experiencing homelessness) ^b
Doubled up	1,067 (57.9%)	218 (53.4%)
Shelter/transitional	674 (36.6%)	183 (44.8%)
Unaccompanied	207 (11.2%)	3 (0.7%)
Other/hotel	73 (4.0%)	7 (1.7%)
Unsheltered	18 (.98%)	0

Source: Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

^aPercentages are out of the 1,843 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 408 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 2020-21 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 enroll by providing a homeless verification form to the school. In 2020-21, ECYEH staff continued to work with family members and students to assist with enrollment paperwork, either in person or via phone. ECYEH staff 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 2020-21 school year, 471 students (28% of K-12 students identified as homeless) received assistance with enrollment.

Less than one-quarter (15%) of students identified as homeless required assistance in purchasing a uniform, and a smaller percentage (1%) required transportation assistance.

In addition to enrollment assistance, the ECYEH office provides uniforms and transportation assistance. The uniforms 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 2020-21, 15% of K-12 students who were identified as homeless received uniform vouchers (Table 7). This is a substantial decrease from 54% in the 2019-20 school year. However, while schools remained

virtual during the 2020-21 school year, students did not need uniforms and therefore there was less demand for them.

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 travel to and from school. The percentage of homeless students receiving transportation assistance was lower in 2020-21 at 1%, compared to 2019-20 at 22% (Table 7). However, while schools remained virtual during the 2020-21 school year, students did not necessarily need transportation passes and therefore there was less demand for them.

Table 7. Services provided by the ECYEH program in 2019-20 and 2020-21

Service	2019-20		2020-21	
	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	1,735	54%	258	15%
Transportation assistance ^a	692	22%	17	1%

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 242 events between July 2020 and June 2021.

One of the main functions of the ECYEH office is conducting community outreach to families experiencing homelessness to inform them of their rights, 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 high school students experiencing homelessness with an interest in learning about career readiness and post-secondary education options.

- Events and Workshops.** During the 2020-21 school year, the ECYEH office led, supported, or participated in 242 events: 111 meetings with schools for training, technical assistance, or monitoring, and 131 workshops with families, provider staff, SDP staff, and community members. At events where parents were present, ECYEH staff discussed services available to parents of children experiencing homelessness and rights of 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 students experiencing homelessness. Switching to virtual training due to COVID-19, allowed the ECYEH office to reach more people at each session.

- **TEEN Program.** The TEEN program took place virtually in the evenings in small groups or one-on-one sessions from December to June. Programming focused on professional development for students, such as college preparation or life/business skills. Students completed an intake form at the beginning of the program that asked for their interests, and the results from these forms helped to inform programming. In 2020-21, 115 students between the ages of 14-18 participated in at least one meeting.

Additional Initiatives

The ECYEH office was also involved in a number of initiatives designed to support students. The following are highlights from the 2020-21 school year:

Grant from the Christopher Ludwick Foundation. This grant was used for students experiencing homelessness or any type of financial hardship. School staff requested funds on behalf of students which came in the form of electronic gift cards. In 2020-21, approximately 400 students received aid from this grant.

Coat distribution. ECYEH was able to distribute 8,000 coats, donated by the Auto Dealers Association of Greater Philadelphia, to 148 different area schools, shelters, and community partners.

Tutoring program. Planning took place for a tutoring program set to begin in the 2021-22 school year, through a partnership with the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND). Students will be able to receive one-on-one tutoring in several subjects. Tutors are volunteers from the University of Pennsylvania.

Awareness campaign. The ECYEH team ran ads through SEPTA specifically targeting students and families experiencing homelessness so that they would know how to get support.

Support around school selection. There was an initiative to prepare seventh grade students to participate in high school selection at the start of eighth grade. A staff person from ECYEH met with students, assessed their interests, and explored school options and criteria. While the goal was to prepare students for school selection, the initiative was also successful in exposing students to school selection who did not know anything about the process.

Chromebook and hotspot assistance. Students experiencing homelessness had challenges with virtual learning which included access to technology and consistent internet. ECYEH ensured that

students who needed Chromebooks and hotspots were able to receive them. They also set up “pick up days” for shelter staff to access these items for all students living in their shelters.

Summer outreach. The ECYEH team reached out to over 600 families who had been identified during the school year to determine if they were still experiencing homelessness and if so what assistance they needed.

Outreach to School Counselors. The ECYEH team sent a feedback form to all counselors in order to find out how the ECYEH office can support them, challenges they were experiencing in the role as a Homeless Liaison, areas they would like additional training, and any other feedback they would like to provide. The ECYEH team received responses from thirteen counselors.

Most people who interacted with the ECYEH Office were satisfied.

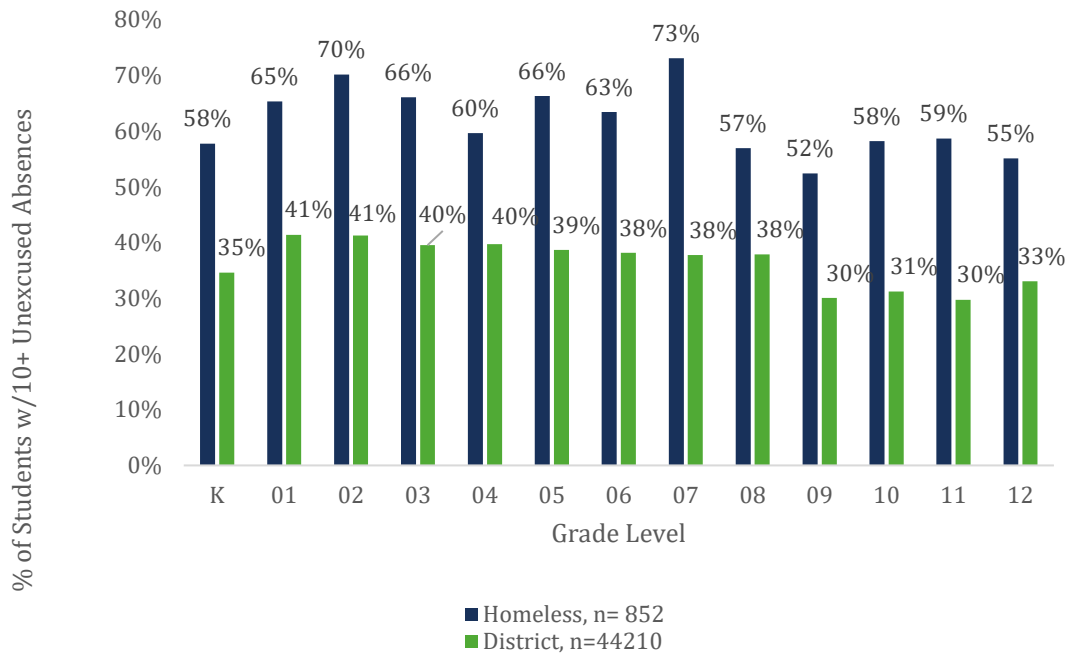
Most respondents to the office satisfaction survey (92%, n=25) reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with the supports/services they received from the ECYEH office. When asked what they liked best about the supports/services offered by the ECYEH office, responses fell into four common themes: about 36% of responses mentioned that the provided resources were informative and useful, 36% mentioned receiving supports such as uniforms and transportation, 32% mentioned the helpfulness of the staff, and 32% mentioned the timeliness of the response. Respondents’ suggestions for future services or supports provided by the ECYEH office included links to more resources in Northeast Philadelphia, continued communication (especially as information changes), increasing the frequency of training times, more housing options, attendance resources/services, and more help dealing with charter schools.

In addition to examining services provided by ECYEH, this brief also addressed student attendance. The following results report on truancy of students identified as homeless in comparison to non-homeless students in the District. Unlike previous reports, due to circumstances surrounding COVID-19, grade promotion and standardized test results are not reported in the current 2020-21 brief.

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 2020-21 school year, the percentage of students experiencing homelessness in the District with ten or more unexcused absences was 62%, compared to 36% for all District students. Similar to District students, among homeless-identified students, the lowest percentages of chronic truancy were found in the high school grades (Figure 1). This differs from the 2019-20 school year in which the lowest percentages of chronic truancy were found in the middle grades.

Figure 1. Chronic Truancy: Homeless Students Compared to District Rate by Grade, 2020-21



Source: Total Student Enrollment Yearly for homeless students and Qlik Climate Matters app for District rates, accessed November, 2021.

Note: The ‘n’ refers to the total number of children experiencing homelessness or the number of District students who are chronically truant.

Conclusions

ECYEH identified a smaller proportion of students experiencing homelessness in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. The District continues to offer services such as enrollment, uniform, and transportation assistance, although uniforms and transportation assistance were needed less in 2020-21 due to schools being virtual. In addition, the TEEN program continues to be a source of support for a small number of these students. However, even with these supports in place, SDP students identified as homeless continue to lag behind other District students in chronic truancy rates.