



Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in the School District of Philadelphia, Analysis of 2021-22 Data

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Key Findings

- ECYEH identified a larger percentage of homeless students in 2021-22 as compared to 2020-21, but comparable to numbers identified prior to the pandemic.
- The most frequent living arrangement for students identified as homeless is “doubled up.”
- Students experiencing homelessness were absent more often, and scored lower on standardized assessments, than other SDP students.
- ECYEH supported other programs to help students, including the Teen Evolution Experience Network (TEEN) and a new tutoring initiative.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides grant funding to eight 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 supports such as school enrollment assistance, uniforms, transportation, backpacks/school supplies and other needs, and referrals.¹

Research Questions

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

1. During the 2021-22 school year, did ECYEH approaches result in:
 - a. The identification of school-age students as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2021-22 school year?
 - b. The identification of unaccompanied youth² as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2021-22 school year?

¹ See <https://www.philasd.org/homeless> for additional information about programming for students experiencing homelessness.

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 EGYEH serve in the 2021-22 school year?
 - a. How many students received the following supports: enrollment assistance, uniforms, school supplies, and transportation assistance?
 - b. In the 2021-22 school year, how many students participated in the TEEN program?
3. In the 2021-22 school year, to what extent 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 and homeless in the 2021-22 school year compare to the percentage of other District students identified as chronically truant?
5. How does the percentage of school-age children identified as homeless scoring advanced/proficient on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) for Math and English Language Arts (ELA) compare to other District students scoring advanced or proficient on these same assessments?

Data Sources and Methods

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

- **EGYEH list of identified students.** This brief reflects information about students identified as homeless at any point during the 2021-22 school year.³ Students experiencing homelessness were identified to the EGYEH office by several different methods. The District's online enrollment system asks about housing and will flag a student who is experiencing homelessness. Students may also have been identified by their SDP teachers, counselors, and administrators. The City of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services (OHS), SDP offices (including the Office of Early Childhood Education, The Office of Family and Community Engagement, The Office of Student Enrollment and Placement, The Re-Engagement Center, ELECT, and the Transportation Office), and area shelters also provided information to the EGYEH office identifying students experiencing homelessness.

³ The number of students that EGYEH 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 EGYEH. For example, there may be a child living in a shelter who EGYEH never works with so they are not on the EGYEH 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, EGYEH does service some of these students directly, and those students are therefore included in this report. EGYEH serves all of these children indirectly through their work with shelter and charter school staff.

Finally, ORE used District enrollment, PSSA, and Keystone results data to generate descriptive information about student attendance and achievement.

What We Found

A larger percentage of students were identified as homeless in the 2021-22 school year compared to the 2020-21 school year.

There are many ways that students were identified as homeless, resulting in 4,675 students being identified in the 2021-22 school year (Table 1). While a higher percentage of students experiencing homelessness was identified in 2021-22 (Table 2), part of this increase is due to students being online for most of the 2020-21 school year, making identification more challenging. The number of students experiencing homelessness identified in 2021-22 is more in line with the number identified in 2018-19 (4,261),⁴ prior to the pandemic. 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.

Table 1. Students identified as homeless at any point during 2021-22

Category ^a	Number of Identified Students
SDP Students ^b	3,444
Charter Students ^c	261
Not yet school-aged (0-5 year olds)	786
Other Students Identified ^d	184
Total	4,675

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

^a Categories are based on final day of enrollment recorded.

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

^c 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.

^d Other 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.

Table 2. A larger percentage of students were identified as homeless during the 2021-22 school year compared to the 2020-21 school year that was primarily virtual learning

Population	N (2020-21)	N (2021-22)
Students experiencing homelessness enrolled in SDP or charter	1,692	3,705
Total SDP & charter enrollment ^a	202,944	198,645
Percent of total enrollment represented by homeless students	0.8%	1.9%

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

^a Includes alternative and special education schools and charter schools that may not have reported directly to ECYEH.

⁴ See <https://www.philasd.org/research/2020/07/14/education-of-children-and-youth-experiencing-homelessness-analysis-of-2018-19-data/> for detailed 2018-19 report.

The majority of students in District and charter schools identified as homeless were Black/African American (2,052 out of 3,705 students; Table 3). About an equal proportion were male and female (Table 4), and the highest number of students identified as homeless was in grade 9 (Table 5).

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

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Students Identified as Homeless
Black/African American	2,052
Hispanic/Latinx	1,114
White	237
Multi-Racial/Other	71
Asian	220
American Indian/Alaskan Native	5
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5
Unknown	1
Total	3,705

Table 4. Gender of identified SDP and charter students

Gender	Number of Students Identified as Homeless
Male	1,853
Female	1,852
Total	3,705

Table 5. Grade of identified SDP and charter students

Grade	Number of Students Identified as Homeless
K	355
1	339
2	326
3	326
4	290
5	261
6	282
7	237
8	234
9	451
10	220
11	204
12	180
Total	3,705

“Doubled up” was the living arrangement for a majority of students identified as homeless in 2021-2022.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) guarantees a free public education that is appropriate for all homeless-identified children and youth.⁵ 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 2021-22 school year were doubled up (Table 6).

Table 6. Homeless students by living arrangement

Living Arrangement	K-12 Students Experiencing Homelessness	Children Experiencing Homelessness, Ages 0-5
	Number of students (% of identified students experiencing homelessness) ^a	Number of students (% of identified students experiencing homelessness) ^b
Doubled up	2,920 (75%)	688 (88%)
Shelter/transitional	779 (20%)	87 (11%)
Unaccompanied	457 (12%)	14 (2%)
Other/hotel	153 (4%)	7 (1%)
Unsheltered	36 (1%)	4 (0.5%)

Source: Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

^a Percentages are out of the 3,705 students identified in Table 1 as SDP, Charter, and ‘Other.’ Students may fall into more than one category of living arrangement.

^b Percentages are out of the 786 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-third of K-12 students identified as homeless in 2021-22 received enrollment assistance.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students’ enrollment cannot be denied or delayed due to lacking proof of residency. When a school requests a verified address for enrollment, ECYEH provides a homeless verification form to the school, ensuring the enrollment of these children. In 2021-22, ECYEH staff continued to work with parents 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 2021-22 school year, 1,491 students (40% of K-12 students identified as homeless) received assistance with enrollment.

⁵ See <https://www.icphusa.org/mkv/> for detailed information about the McKinney-Vento Act.

More than a third (36%) of students identified as homeless required assistance in purchasing a uniform, and a smaller percentage (12%) required transportation assistance.

In addition to other supports, the ECYEH office provides uniforms and transportation assistance. It is sometimes difficult for a student to comply with the SDP school dress code if their family lacks income to purchase a uniform. In 2021-22, 36% of K-12 and 0-5 year old students who were identified as homeless received uniform vouchers (Table 7). This is an increase from 15% in the 2020-21 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.

The ECYEH office provides transportation in the form of either a SEPTA key card, a school bus, or a cab as a means for students to get to and from school as transportation can be a major obstacle to attendance at school for a student experiencing homelessness. The percentage of students experiencing homelessness receiving transportation assistance was higher in 2021-22 at 12%, compared to 2020-21 at 1% (Table 7). However, similar to school uniforms, while schools remained virtual during the 2020-21 school year, students did not need transportation passes and therefore there was less demand for them.

Table 7. Services provided by the ECYEH program in 2020-21 and 2021-22

Service	2020-21		2021-22	
	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	258	15%	1,614	36% ^a
Transportation assistance ^b	17	1%	461	12%

Source: Data file provided by the ECYEH office.

^a As there were younger students who received uniform assistance, this percentage is out of the 3,705 K-12 students and 786 0-5 year old students.

^b 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 93 events between July 2021 and June 2022.

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, 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.

- **Events and Workshops.** During the 2021-22 school year, the ECYEH office led, supported, or participated in 93 events: 77 meetings with schools for training, technical assistance, or monitoring, and 16 workshops with parents, 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. Additionally, ECYEH recorded an asynchronous training for the District's professional development series and 9,022 school staff took the training. This was the first time ECYEH was able to train such a large number of teachers.

Additional Initiatives

The ECYEH office was also involved in other initiatives designed to support students:

- **TEEN Program.** 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. The TEEN program took place virtually in the evenings from November to June. In 2021-22, most sessions were one-on-one due to COVID-19 precautions. 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 2021-22, 35 students between the ages of 14-18 participated in at least one meeting.
- **Tutoring program.** A tutoring program was piloted during the 2021-22 school year, using University of Pennsylvania students through a partnership with PHENND. Tutors were trained by the ECYEH office about the population of students experiencing homelessness. After students were matched with a tutor, the tutor and student scheduled times based on their schedules and the student's needs. The program began in November 2021 and went through April 2022. There were 21 students who participated in tutoring.

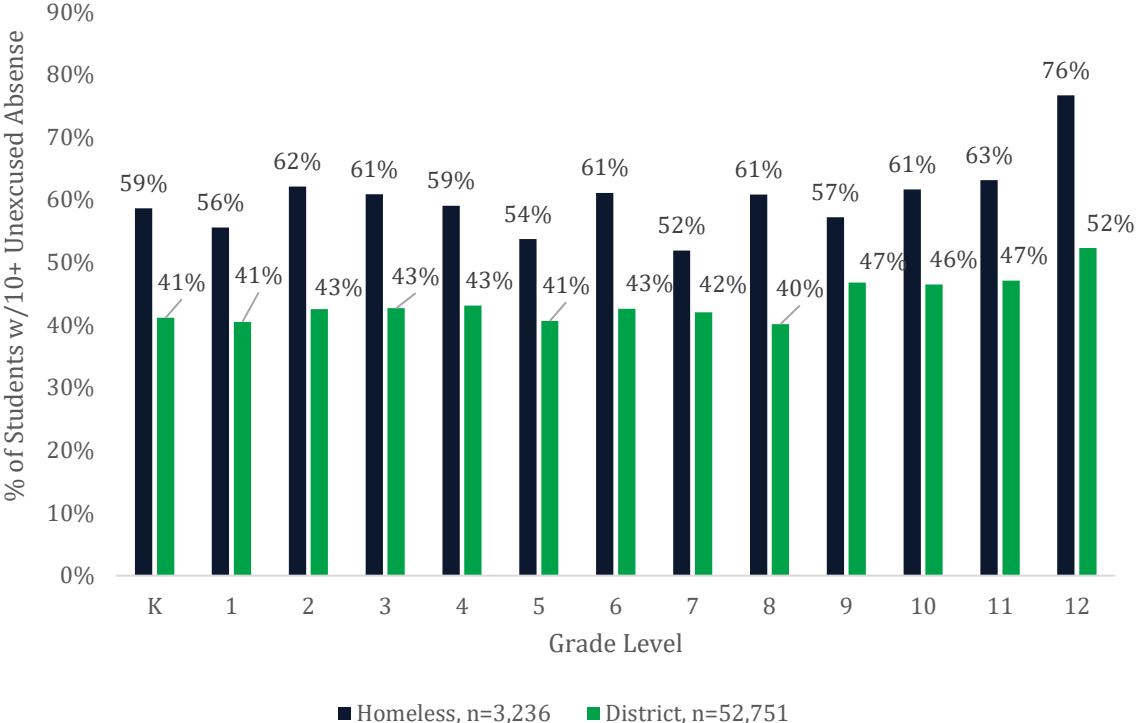
A number of initiatives have been planned for the 2022-23 school year, including additional staff, contracting and collaborating with numerous community partners, and expanding current supports. These additional initiatives will be described in a future report.

In addition to examining services provided by ECYEH, this brief also addressed student attendance as well as achievement in terms of grade promotion and standardized test results.

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

After ten or more unexcused absences, students in SDP are considered chronically truant and may receive a citation for the District’s Truancy Court. In the 2021-22 school year, the percentage of students experiencing homelessness in the District with ten or more unexcused absences was 59%, compared to 45% for all District students, an increase for both from 2018-19 (prior to the pandemic). The highest percentage of truancy for both District and students experiencing homeless was in 12th grade (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Chronic Truancy: Homeless Students Compared to District Truancy Rate by Grade, 2021-22



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

Students experiencing homelessness had lower rates of proficiency on standardized tests compared to other SDP students in 2021-22.

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.⁶

⁶ 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 8. 2021-22 PSSA ELA proficiency rates for grades 3-8 homeless and District students

Grade	Number of Homeless Students who Took PSSA ELA Test	Number/Percent of Homeless Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced N (%)	Number of SDP Students who Took PSSA ELA Test	Number/Percent of SDP Students Scoring Advanced or Proficient N (%)
3	154	20 (13%)	8,195	2,301 (28%)
4	158	20 (13%)	8,209	2,273 (28%)
5	135	24 (18%)	8,103	2,670 (33%)
6	142	16 (11%)	7,600	2,781 (37%)
7	111	27 (24%)	7,623	3,212(42%)
8	115	16 (14%)	7,661	3,054 (40%)
Total	815	123 (15%)	47,391	16,291(34%)

Source: Report Library PSSA and Keystone Dashboard for homeless students and Qlik PSSA & Keystone app for District rates. Does not include charters. Homeless students are also included in the overall District rates.

Table 9. 2021-22 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 Proficient or Advanced N (%)	Number of SDP Students who Took PSSA Math Test	Number/Percent of SDP Students Scoring Advanced or Proficient N (%)
3	171	5 (3%)	8,306	1,725(21%)
4	166	11 (7%)	8,299	1,523(18%)
5	140	4 (3%)	8,169	1,269(16%)
6	148	0	7,660	1,169(15%)
7	117	3 (3%)	7,680	1,193(16%)
8	118	3 (3%)	7,630	1,005(13%)
Total	860	26 (3%)	47,744	7,884(17%)

Source: Total Student Enrollment Yearly for homeless students and Qlik PSSA & Keystone app for District rates. Does not include charters. Homeless students are also included in the overall District rates.

Conclusions

ECYEH identified a larger proportion of students experiencing homelessness in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21, but more similar to the number identified in 2019-20. In addition, the TEEN program continues to be a source of support for some 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 as well as standardized test scores. ECYEH continues to improve systems and relationships in order to increase identification and support for these students each year.