



## THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR FEDERAL POLICY RESEARCH

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# SPECIAL REPORT

## ***California's Homeless Student and Youth Population Profile***

California has the largest homeless youth population in the country, affecting almost 270,000 students in the state during the 2012-2013 school year.[1] California's students experience a homelessness rate of 4%, a rate double the national average.[2] Additionally, over one fifth of the nation's homeless students attend California schools. In comparison, the states with the next highest incidents of student homelessness during the 2011-2012 school year, New York and Texas, had less than half of California's percentage of the nation's homeless students at 8.3% and 8.1% respectively.[3] The causes and consequences of student homelessness often include experiences of physical abuse and sexual victimization, jeopardized health, and low educational attainment. In addition to this profile of student and youth homelessness in California, The California Institute for Federal Policy Research will release a series of briefs to further understand the impact of related federal and state policies and programs.

Children and youth may become homeless due to a variety of circumstances, including poverty, abandonment, to escape violence and abuse, or release from the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Some experience homelessness with their families, while unaccompanied youth experience homelessness while outside of the physical custody of their parents or guardians. Additionally, migrant youth may also face homelessness but suffer additional barriers to accessing services, even though they are afforded the same educational rights as citizens. Addressing the unparalleled level of student homelessness in California requires coordination between various governmental agencies across a diverse range of policy areas, including affordable housing, economic development, education, healthcare, and public safety.

A single definition of homelessness does not exist in the state of California. Various federal and state governmental agencies track data on the homeless population according to their own definitions and specifications. Additionally, the terms child and youth are variably defined by actors, but typically a child is classified as younger than fourteen and a youth is between fourteen and twenty four years old.

The McKinney-Vento Act is the primary federal legislation that addresses homelessness by providing emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training,

healthcare, and education. To address the needs of the homeless student population, the McKinney-Vento Act, Subtitle VII-B authorizes the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY) and establishes rights for homeless students, defined as those who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." [4] Students living in shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care, and in unsheltered settings qualify for assistance under McKinney-Vento. However, homeless youth that have dropped out of school or remain undetected by administrators are not captured in the reporting. Additionally, homeless students are 87% more likely to leave school than their stably housed peers, which could cause student homelessness rates to underestimate the severity of childhood and youth homelessness. [5] Furthermore, the Department of Education (ED) and The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) define homelessness such that on a national level, 81% of the children included in the ED data are not recognized as homeless by HUD and therefore not eligible for HUD services such as shelter, short-term housing, and assistance with obtaining permanent housing. [6]

According to the National Center for Homeless Youth in 2011-2012, 85.5% of California's homeless students live doubled-up, sharing housing resources with others. 7.5% live in shelters and 4.3% live in hotels and motels. The smallest percentage of homeless students, 2.7%, live without shelter. [7]

Many unaccompanied youth flee home to escape violence: 20-40% report sexual abuse and 40-60% report physical abuse while in the home. [8] Another 20-40% of unaccompanied homeless youth had been forced to leave home because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or pregnant. [9]

The realities of homelessness compromise the health of children and youth, exacerbating mental health issues and chronic illnesses, such as asthma and diabetes. [10] Also, children and youth, especially those without shelter, are at greater risk of sexual exploitation, inclusive of domestic human trafficking and the trade of sex for basic needs, with 60% of victimized children identified as homeless. [11] As a consequence, homeless youth are more vulnerable to contracting preventable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. [12]

Educational outcomes for homeless students are also grim: California's homeless students have consistently performed below the national average on state educational assessments in recent years. [13] In the 2009-2010 academic year, 36%, of California's homeless students served by McKinney-Vento sub grants in grades 3-8 scored proficient or above on state reading assessments, compared to 52% nationally. Meanwhile, 41% of California's homeless youth in grades 3-8 scored proficient or above in state math assessments, compared to the national average of 50%. [14]

Additionally, a number of homeless youth have interactions with the foster care system or the juvenile justice system. "It's sad that our approach until now has focused on two paths that don't really help these kids," California State Assemblymember, Tom Ammiano (D - San Francisco), stated in a press release on a proposed measure to give homeless students more housing options, "Many are sent into a foster care system that doesn't understand the needs of teens who are homeless because they have been abused or rejected by their families... Teens on the street often fall into a different system: juvenile justice. Once they get in there, it is difficult to escape being branded as criminals." [15] According to a

study conducted by the California Senate Office of Research on the state prison population, surveys showed that 14% of adult prisoners were former foster children. Furthermore, 36% of these individuals were essentially homeless at some point within their first year of leaving foster care.[16]

Student homelessness affects urban, suburban and rural areas throughout the state. The California Homeless Youth Project states, "While Los Angeles Unified School District identified the highest overall numbers of homeless students (14,323), rural Trinity County had the highest percentage of homeless students (13.3%)."[17] The five California counties with the greatest percentage of homeless students are Trinity (13.3%), Santa Barbara (10.9%), Sierra (9.4%), Lake (8.4%), and San Bernardino (8.1%).[18] The following map provides homelessness data by county: [www.kidsdata.org/topic/230/homeless-students/map](http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/230/homeless-students/map).

Even though California schools include 21% of the nation's homeless students, they only received 11% of available McKinney-Vento funds.[19] At the local level, the Trinity County Department of Education received a grant amount for the 2014-2015 year of \$24,390 for homeless children and youth. Each of Los Angeles County's six LEAs received between \$149,000 - 216,000.[20]

The future briefs will include a more in-depth discussion of the issues raised in this profile, including a closer look at the McKinney-Vento Act, interagency data collection, and the allocation of federal funding.

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[1]

[http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/CaliforniasHomelessStudents\\_AGrowingPopulation.pdf](http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/CaliforniasHomelessStudents_AGrowingPopulation.pdf)

[2] Ibid

[3] <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/data-comp-0910-1112.pdf>

[4]

<http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/HomelessYouthPopEstimateReport.pdf>

[5] <http://firstfocus.net/news/press-release/record-number-homeless-students-u-s-schools-leading-homeless-childrens-advocates-comment/>

[6] Ibid

[7] <http://nchespp.serve.org/profile/CA>

[8] <http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/youth>

[9] Ibid

[10] <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/A-QuickOverview-of-HY-inCA.pdf>

[11]

<http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/HIV&YouthHomelessnessFINAL.pdf>  
<http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/SexualExploitedHomelessYouthIssueBrief.pdf>

[12]

<http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/HIV&YouthHomelessnessFINAL.pdf>

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[13] <http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/youth>

[14] Ibid

[15] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/20/california-homeless-youth-bill\\_n\\_4827214.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/20/california-homeless-youth-bill_n_4827214.html)

[16] [http://www.sor.govoffice3.com/vertical/Sites/%7B3BDD1595-792B-4D20-8D44-626EF05648C7%7D/uploads/Foster\\_Care\\_PDF\\_12-8-11.pdf](http://www.sor.govoffice3.com/vertical/Sites/%7B3BDD1595-792B-4D20-8D44-626EF05648C7%7D/uploads/Foster_Care_PDF_12-8-11.pdf)

[17]

[http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/CaliforniasHomelessStudents\\_AGrowingPopulation.pdf](http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/CaliforniasHomelessStudents_AGrowingPopulation.pdf)

[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid

[20] <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/fo/r16/homeless14results.asp>