

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

HOMELESS STUDENTS IN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Erin S. Ingram, John M. Bridgeland,
Bruce Reed, and Matthew Atwell

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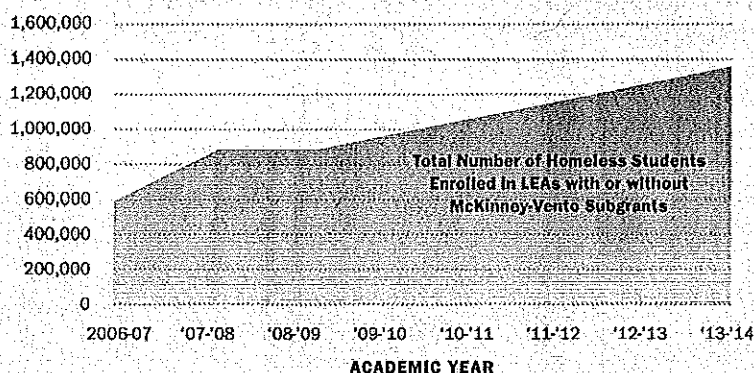
A REPORT BY CIVIC ENTERPRISES AND HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

INTRODUCTION: STUDENT HOMELESSNESS RISING ACROSS OUR NATION

The number of homeless students in American schools is rising. In the 2013-14 school year, more than 1.3 million public school students in K-12 were identified as homeless, representing a seven percent increase from the previous year, and a more than 100 percent increase¹ from 2006-07.² As high as these numbers seem, they are almost certainly undercounts. Student homelessness is difficult to track and measure for a myriad of reasons that will be discussed in this report, meaning that these estimates likely do not accurately capture the full breadth and depth of this problem.

Student homelessness is not a homogenous experience. Some students may be part of a family that has lost their home due to a lack of income, recent trauma, or unexpected tragedy. These families may be living temporarily with other people, in motels or shelters, out of their cars, or on the streets. Other youth may be “unaccompanied,” on their own with no adult supports. These unaccompanied youth may have left their homes and families to escape abuse or poverty, or have been pushed out when they identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or because they became pregnant and their families no longer accepted them. And while some young people may experience homelessness only briefly before regaining stable housing, for others, homelessness reoccurs intermittently, or becomes a chronic circumstance.

Graph 1: Rising Rates of Student Homelessness, 2006-07 to 2013-14



Source: ED Data Express. “Total Number of Homeless Students Enrolled in LEAs with or without McKinney-Vento Subgrants - Total: 2013-2014.” U.S. Department of Education. Accessed from <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer/cfm/tab/trend/deld/5353/state/US/>.

Whether these students experience homelessness with their families or alone, for a week, a month, or for years, the experience is extremely damaging to their ability to stay in school and on track. They are more likely to be held back from grade to grade, to have poor attendance or be chronically absent from school, to fail courses, to have more disciplinary issues, and to drop out of school before getting their high school diploma than their non-homeless peers.³ These negative effects are amplified the longer a student remains homeless.

¹ This sharp rise in the number of homeless students can in part be accounted for due to improved reporting and identification of homeless students on the part of schools and districts. However, researchers believe that this increase also reflects real growth in the total homeless student population.