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1.37 Million and Rising:

Understanding the National 25% Spike in Student Homelessness

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**Center for the Transformation
of Schools**



INTRODUCTION

UCLA’s Center for the Transformation of Schools recently released a national report examining the characteristics of highly mobile youth (HMY) in the U.S., the first of its kind (Cazares-Minero, Huang & Bishop, 2025). The report uses publicly available data from national sources and existing literature to: 1) highlight the key characteristics of HMY; 2) examine the overlapping characteristics of HMY populations; and 3) outline the limitations of national data sources.

Youth experiencing homelessness, youth in the child welfare system, migratory youth, and youth in the juvenile legal system experience disproportionate rates of high mobility (Aykanian, 2018; Berger Cardoso et al., 2019; Clemens, Lalonde, & Sheesley, 2016; Julianelle & Foscarnis, 2003). There is extensive research pointing to the negative effects of high mobility on the academic (Cutuli et al., 2016; Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2007), health (Braverman & Morris, 2011; Edidin et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2016), and economic outcomes (Baetz, 2015; Font et al., 2018; Nadon et al., 2024; Sandman, 2022; Skobba, Meyers, & Tiller, 2018) of these youth. Young people experiencing high mobility in their residential placements and schools are not able to engage in typical activities such as attending school regularly, making friends, or forming stable attachments with caregivers or other supportive adults (Sulkowski & Michael, 2020).

In school year (SY) 2021-22, there were nearly 2 million HMY in the U.S., constituting 2.6%, or 72.5 million, of the 2022 national youth population aged 0-17 (Children’s Bureau, 2022; Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2023; Puzzanchera et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023a, 2023b). However, due to limitations in state and local data, this figure is likely an underestimate. We also identified significant racial and ethnic disparities among highly mobile youth, with Black and brown



youth being disproportionately affected by foster care, the juvenile justice system, and homelessness. One limitation of our study was the inability to include the most recent SY 2022-2023 data for students experiencing homelessness, which would have resulted in a larger total count of HMY. We were unable to analyze the SY 2022-2023 data for students experiencing homelessness because the same year’s data for youth in foster care, migrant students, and youth in the juvenile legal system were also unavailable. The goal of our national report was to compare the characteristics of all HMY using the data from the same year that was available for all HMY groups.

The goal of this report is to elevate the experiences and highlight the key characteristics of students experiencing homelessness with the most recent SY 2022-2023 data. Recent research demonstrates that students experiencing homelessness in California and across the nation are less likely to graduate from high school and to be prepared for college, and are more likely to be suspended and to miss significant school time compared to their peers (Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Bishop, Camargo Gonzalez, & Rivera, 2020; Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2019). In a recent study by Bishop, director at CTS, and colleagues (2021), they conducted interviews with students experiencing homelessness in California and those who serve them. They found that several obstacles prevent these communities from receiving the help they need, including differing definitions of homelessness, limited funding, and lack of training among educators who could help identify and support students. These challenges impact the quality of data for this population.

FINDINGS

1. There was a 25% surge in student homelessness between SY 2020-21 and SY 2022-23. This reflects one of the highest numbers of students experiencing homelessness in the U.S. in the last decade.



In SY 2022–2023, approximately 1.37 million students nationwide experienced homelessness—marking a significant increase from the previous year and one of the highest totals in the past decade (See Figure 1; NCES, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This number represents an estimated 2.8% of the overall student population, based on national enrollment figures. This also represents a 14% overall increase since SY 2012–2013 and a 25% surge between SY 2020–21 and SY 2022–23, based on cumulative enrollment data of students experiencing homelessness. While these cumulative trends highlight a growing crisis, Figure 2 illustrates the year-to-year percentage changes in the number of students experiencing homelessness. The sharpest increase occurred between SY 2020–21 and SY 2021–22, highlighting a steep post-pandemic rise. The rate of increase slowed slightly in SY 2022–23 but remained elevated compared to pre-pandemic years.

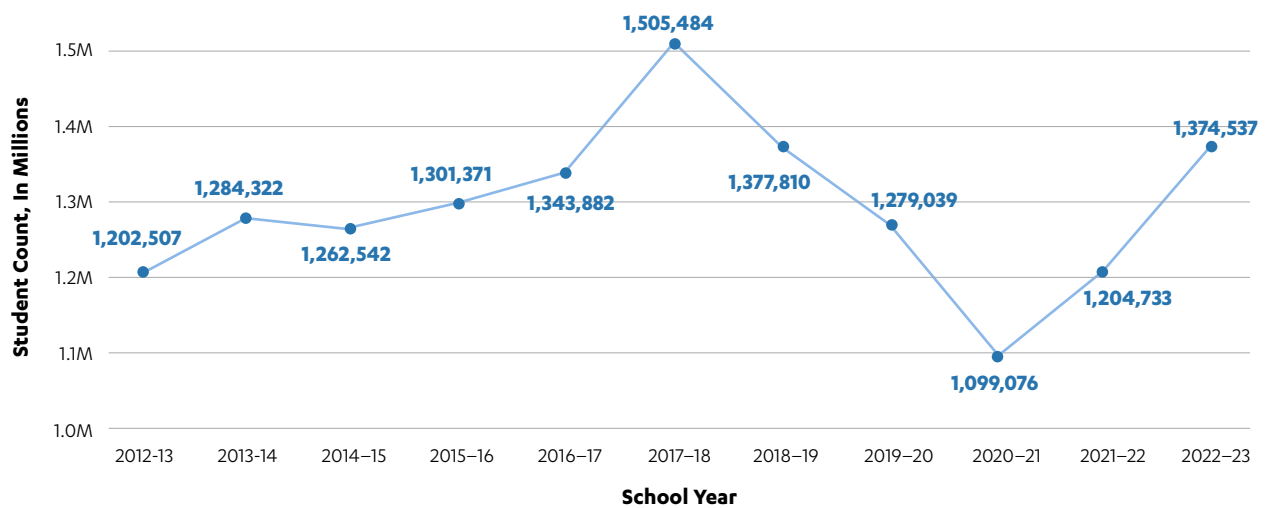
According to SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions, the higher count of students experiencing homelessness can also be linked to the boost in emergency pandemic federal funds (K-12 Dive, 2025). About \$800 million in school recovery funds was dedicated to students experiencing homelessness in SY 2022–23, and an estimated 62% of school districts received recovery funds to support students experiencing homelessness (K-12 Dive, 2025). The increased identification of students experiencing homelessness underscores the importance of reviewing trends in the data to better direct supports and funding for this population, including reviewing locations where student homelessness is under-identified, they say. Unfortunately, the identification of students experiencing homelessness, outreach efforts, and access to services is currently under threat as federal dollars allocated to this population have been put on pause.

Statistics from SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions also show state and school district student homelessness trends. For instance, student homelessness in California increased by 8% between SY 2020–21 and SY 2022–23. Florida’s Miami-Dade County Public Schools saw a 96% increase over the same period (K-12 Dive, 2025). Jennifer Erb-Downward, director of housing stability programs and policy initiatives at Poverty Solutions, noted that while the surge in homelessness among students appears concerning, it can be viewed as a positive trend because it indicates a greater level of identification of these individuals (K-12 Dive, 2025). Moreover, increased identification allows for more access to resources.



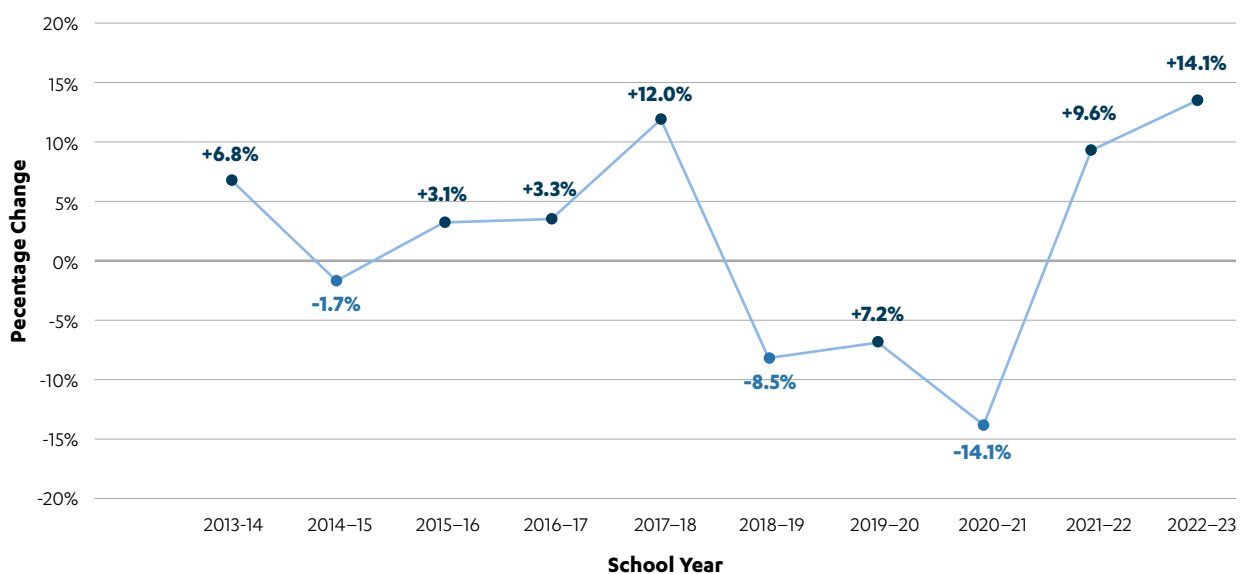


Figure 1. Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness, from SY 2012-2013 to SY 2022-2023



Note. Data derived from NCES, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023.

Figure 2. Year-to-Year Percentage Change of Enrolled U.S. Students Experiencing Homelessness, from SY 2013-2014 to SY 2022-2023



Note. Data derived from NCES, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023.

2. Black and Latine students experience disproportionate rates of homelessness.

Racial/ethnic disparities among students experiencing homelessness persist (see Figure 3; Figure 4). In SY 2022-2023, one in four (25%) of all students experiencing homelessness were Black, although they only comprised 15% of all students enrolled. Similarly, nearly 40% of all students experiencing homelessness were Latine, but they only comprised 29% of all students enrolled.



Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity of Enrolled U.S. Students, SY 2022-2023

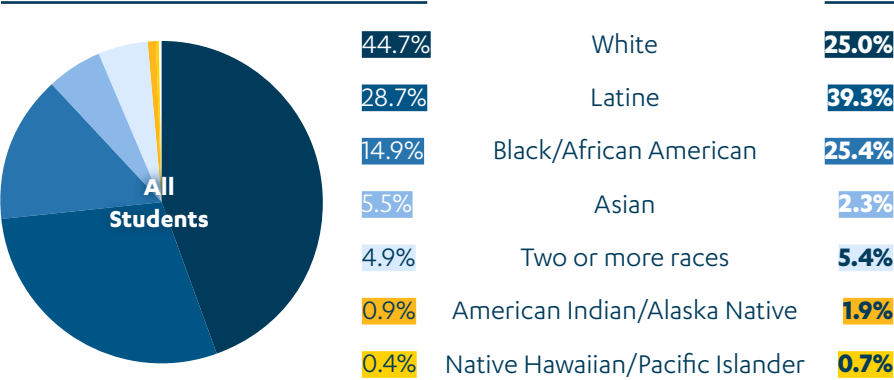
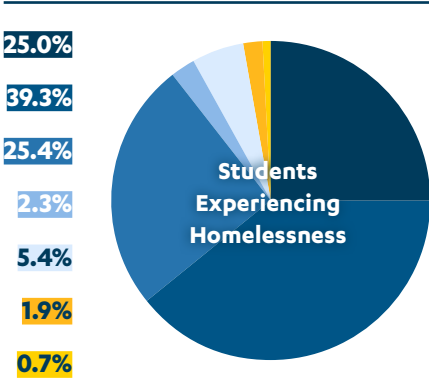


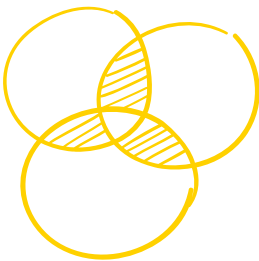
Figure 4. Race/Ethnicity of Enrolled U.S. Students Experiencing Homelessness, SY 2022-2023



Note. Data derived from NCES, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023



3. Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to have a **disability**, to be an **English Learner**, to be a **migratory student**, or to be an **unaccompanied youth**.



In SY 2022-2023, nearly 20% of students experiencing homelessness had one or more disabilities compared to 15% of all students enrolled. The proportion of English Learners among students experiencing homelessness in SY 2022-23 was more than double that of all English Learners enrolled in Fall 2021, at 21.9% and 10.6%, respectively.

Students experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to also be migrant students compared to their housed peers. Data demonstrates 9% of all students experiencing homelessness are unaccompanied youth. The numbers of both migratory students and migratory students experiencing homelessness are likely larger in reality, but the current political climate prevents migrant students and their families from identifying themselves and seeking government assistance. Migrant students confront various challenges upon settling in the U.S., including family separation, limited or interrupted schooling, and unauthorized legal status (Berger Cardoso et al., 2019). The seasonal migration work that their families participate in requires frequent moves, resulting in educational disruptions for migrant students. The experience and actual extent of homelessness among migrant youth and their families are not fully understood, yet the negative impact of seasonal migration work on these youths’ educational and socioemotional outcomes is evident.



Table 4. Unique Characteristics of Students Experiencing Homelessness

	Children with one or more disabilities (IDEA)	English Learners	Migratory Students	Unaccompanied Youth
Percent of students experiencing homelessness	19.9%	21.9%	1.3%	9.0%
Percent of all students enrolled in K-12 public schools	15%	10.6%*	0.5%	Not available

Note. Data derived from U.S. Department of Education, 2023; NCES, 2024a (Fall 2021 data*); NCES, 2024b; MEP, 2023

CONCLUSION



Students experiencing homelessness are among the most mobile student populations in the nation.

Various family-level factors and systemic barriers contribute to student homelessness, including:

- **economic instability** (Kang, 2019; McKinnon et al., 2023),
- **job insecurity** (Kang, 2023; Lenhoff et al., 2023),
- **substance abuse** (Richards & Kuhn, 2023),
- **mental health challenges** (Richards & Kuhn, 2023),
- **lack of affordable housing** (Aurand et al., 2023),
- **social isolation** (Lachaud et al., 2024),
- **immigration status and policies** (Kaur et al., 2021),
- **underfunded education systems** (Bishop, Gonzalez, & Rivera, 2021; Cazares-Minero, Huang, Bishop, 2025), and
- **stigmatization and discrimination** (Reilly, Ho, & Williamson, 2022).

Another barrier is the existence of differing definitions of homelessness—specifically between the McKinney-Vento (MKV) Homeless Assistance Act definition and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition—which results in inadequate federal and state financial support for these students (Bishop, Gonzalez, & Rivera, 2021). The current and unsettling pause on federal funding for students experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable student populations can have several significant consequences, including reduced access to essential services such as shelters, transportation, counseling, food assistance, and academic support; increased disruption in education such as maintaining regular school attendance; worsening mental health outcomes; and strained local

resources where local schools and districts may be forced to divert already limited resources to address the needs of their most vulnerable students.

Although education is largely a state and local responsibility, the federal government plays an essential role in helping states support students affected by homelessness by providing funding and grants for programs like the MKV Homeless Assistance Act; establishing clear guidelines for how schools must identify and support students experiencing homelessness; coordinating resources across different agencies from multiple sectors (e.g., education, housing, health services); and supporting data collection and research efforts to better understand the scope of homelessness among the student population. The nation's most vulnerable and mobile student populations are resilient, but eliminating federal education programs would lead to a loss of crucial funding for disadvantaged students, exacerbate educational inequalities, and place a heavier administrative burden on local and state agencies.

The scale of student homelessness in SY 2022-23 ranks among the most severe we've seen in ten years and the number is expected to increase. Black and Latine youth experience disproportionate rates of homelessness; and students experiencing homelessness are more likely to have a disability, to be an English Learner, to be a migratory student, or to be an accompanied youth. The cross-cutting needs of students experiencing homelessness cannot be ignored. Addressing the complex and overlapping challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness, particularly those from marginalized communities, is essential to ensuring their right to an equitable and supportive education.

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