



RESEARCH
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A PACER Policy Brief

Students Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania: Under-Identification and Inequitable Enrollment

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Housing instability and homelessness are highly detrimental to children and youth, and the effects often linger long after the experience itself. Students who have experienced homelessness are 87% more likely to drop out of school and, in turn, adults without a high school degree or GED are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness themselves.¹

Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, public schools are mandated to identify students experiencing homelessness and provide them services to alleviate the negative impacts. Because homelessness and poverty are so closely related, this is a particularly salient issue for Pennsylvania, home to Philadelphia—the poorest large city in America—and multiple other communities with poverty rates well above the national average.

New national data released in September shows that in 2016-17 the Pennsylvania Department of Education identified 30,264 children and youth experiencing homelessness, including close to 25,000 students in grades K through 12. These numbers reflect a significant increase over the past ten years, yet there remains wide recognition, both in Pennsylvania and across the nation, that *under-identification* of students experiencing homelessness is a persistent problem.² In this brief, to analyze the degree to which Pennsylvania is accurately identifying student homelessness, Research for Action replicates a known rate of identification,³ shown in Figure 1, that **compares the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness in each state to that state's overall number of school-aged children in poverty**, as reported by the U.S. Census.

Figure 1: Calculating the Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness (SY 2016-17)

	Students Experiencing Homelessness	÷	School-Aged Children in Poverty	=	Rate of Identification
PA	24,786 (1.5%)	÷	325,061 (18%)	=	8%
US	1,365,059 (2.8%)	÷	9,800,583 (20%)	=	14%

These rates of identification provide an indicator of whether Pennsylvania schools are meeting their McKinney-Vento mandate. **The results indicate a strong likelihood that, in many Pennsylvania schools, students experiencing homelessness are being undercounted.** These data also allow us to examine enrollment disparities for students experiencing homelessness between charter schools and their school districts of residence. Below, we discuss our detailed findings and recommendations for Pennsylvania policymakers.

¹ Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, "Findings from the Youth Count, Brief Youth Survey, and Provider Survey," September 2017, accessed from <http://philadelphiaofficeofhomelesservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/voices-of-youth-count-philadelphia-9-2017.pdf> on 4 December 2018.

² National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, "Homeless Students Count: How States and School Districts Can Comply with the New McKinney-Vento Education Law Post-ESSA," accessed from <https://www.nlchp.org/documents/Homeless-Students-Count> on 28 November 2018.

³ See page 5 for further discussion of this rate of identification.

Key Findings:

Pennsylvania likely under-identifies students experiencing homelessness.

- Pennsylvania public schools (district and charter) reported educating 24,786 K-12th grade students experiencing homelessness in SY 2016-17, representing 1.5% of the student body. This is significantly below the national average of 2.8%.
- Pennsylvania identified only eight students experiencing homelessness per 100 school-aged children in poverty in SY 2016-17, a rate of identification (8%) that is just over half the national average (14%) and places Pennsylvania 44th out of 50 states nationwide.
- Philadelphia and the northeast region of Pennsylvania reported the lowest identification rates, with just five students identified as experiencing homelessness out of every 100 school-aged children in poverty (5%). By contrast, the area located between Harrisburg and Philadelphia and as far north as Reading identified more than twice that rate (11%).

Identification of students experiencing homelessness varies widely across school districts. In the 412 Pennsylvania school district communities (out of 499) for which we were able to obtain reliable data, the rate of identification for students experiencing homelessness ranged widely. In SY 2016-17:

- In Pittsburgh, public and charter schools identified 16 students experiencing homelessness per 100 school-aged children in poverty (16%)—double the state average of 8%.
- In Philadelphia, public and charter schools identified five students experiencing homelessness per 100 school-aged children in poverty (5%)—below the state average of 8%.
- In the 30 school districts that identified the fewest students experiencing homelessness (mostly rural and suburban school districts), the combined rate of identification was less than 1% of school-aged children in poverty.

Charter schools under-serve students experiencing homelessness compared to districts of residence.

- Charter schools statewide (brick-and-mortar and cyber combined) serve a smaller share of students experiencing homelessness than would be expected based on their students' school districts of residence, even with likely district under-identification. Statewide in 2016-17, the school districts in which charter school students reside reported serving a weighted average of 2.4% students experiencing homelessness. In contrast, charter schools reported serving only 1.3% students experiencing homelessness.
- Cyber charter schools served 1.4% students experiencing homelessness in SY 2016-17, roughly three-fourths the percentage that would be expected (1.8%) based on students' districts of residence. However, just four years prior, only 0.4% of cyber charter school students were reported as homeless.

These findings suggest that Pennsylvania and its public schools must do a better job of identifying and serving students who experience homelessness. They also point to several strategies for achieving this goal.

Below, we outline the legal obligations that states and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have to students experiencing homelessness. In the remainder of this brief, we provide a more detailed analysis of homelessness in Pennsylvania and how it is tracked. We conclude with a set of recommendations for policymakers to consider as they strive to better serve this vulnerable student population.

Who Is McKinney-Vento Eligible?

Students are considered to be experiencing homelessness if they “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”

This includes those who are living:

- in a **shelter**;
- in a **hotel or motel**;
- in a **place not meant for human habitation**, such as a car or abandoned building; and
- **doubled-up**, temporarily sharing another person's housing due to a lack of housing or economic hardship. This is the **most common** living situation for students experiencing homelessness.

Source: McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2).

Federal and State Law Regarding Students Experiencing Homelessness

The Educational Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness

The rights of students experiencing homelessness and the obligations of school districts are governed by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Children and youth identified as homeless have several rights, including:

- The right to either remain in their “school of origin” or to enroll in the school/district in which they are currently residing, whichever is in the student’s best interest.*
- The right to immediate school enrollment, even if they do not have any enrollment documents and even if the school challenges whether or not they qualify as homeless.
- The right to receive transportation to and from school.
- The right to receive extra supports to overcome barriers to academic success. This last item may include, but is not limited to, school supplies, uniforms, supports such as tutoring or supplemental instruction, referrals for physical or mental health services, payment of fees associated with obtaining records needed for enrollment, and other assistance that families may need to enable their student to attend and participate fully in school.
- Federal guidance also directs schools to provide expedited evaluations for students suspected to have a disability.

State, School District, and Charter School Obligations to Students Experiencing Homelessness

Under federal law, each state is required to have a coordinator for homeless education that oversees the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in districts throughout their state. Each Local Education Agency (LEA)—school districts and charter schools alike—is required to appoint a local Homeless Education Liaison to oversee the implementation of McKinney-Vento in their schools. Critical aspects of Liaisons’ responsibilities include identifying students experiencing homelessness and ensuring that all school staff engage in professional development training to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.

LEAs may apply for and receive McKinney-Vento grant funds to support these obligations, but regardless of the receipt of a grant, the requirements of LEAs are the same. Under Title 1, Part A, LEAs must set aside sufficient Title 1 funds to provide services to students experiencing homelessness.

Pennsylvania Laws Regarding Students Experiencing Homelessness

Unlike many other states, Pennsylvania has not adopted any state laws implementing the protections for students experiencing homelessness. Rather, it has issued guidance in the form of Basic Education Circulars (BECs) defining the procedures that LEAs must follow to comply with McKinney-Vento regulations and ensure that the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness are fulfilled. As in many other states, Pennsylvania’s guidance also articulates a federally mandated grievance process to allow a student experiencing homelessness to dispute a decision about eligibility for McKinney-Vento services, school enrollment, or school selection.

State Policy Gaps

Pennsylvania does not require training for school districts or charter schools. State guidelines only require nine administrators in the state of Pennsylvania to be trained annually—the state coordinator and eight regional coordinators, who are then tasked with providing technical assistance to 499 school districts and 175 charter schools throughout the state. PDE offers an optional annual training for LEA liaisons across the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania does not have an interagency council on homelessness, a step that 38 other states have taken to provide a multi-sector approach to prevent and end homelessness. In addition, as of 2018, PDE has failed to comply with ESSA’s new requirement to describe how students experiencing homelessness will receive full or partial credit for school work completed in other schools, a recommendation that the state’s Task Force on Homeless Children’s Education also suggested in 2014.

*Under federal law, “school of origin” is defined as the school the child most recently attended or the school the child attended when last permanently housed. 42 U.S.C. § 11432g(3)(G).
See Appendix C for sources.

Under-Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania

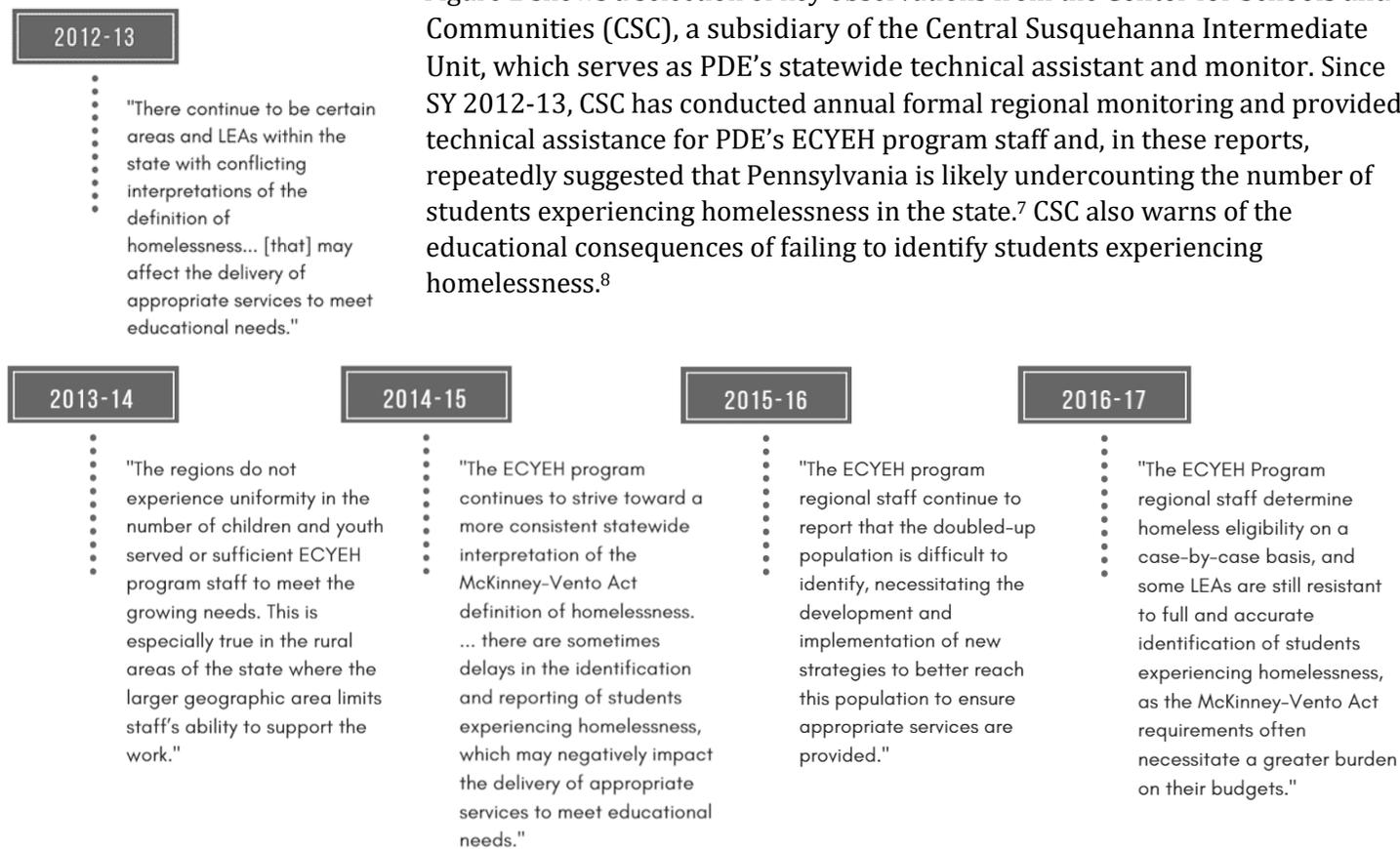
Progress Toward Identifying Students Experiencing Homelessness

Over the last ten years, the *total number* of students identified as homeless under PDE’s ECYEH program has more than doubled. This increase mirrors a national trend, though the increase has been faster in Pennsylvania than in the nation overall (115% to 77%).⁴ In recent years, state and local agencies have partnered to share data systems to improve identification of pre-school children living in shelters or receiving childcare. PDE has also trained Homeless Education Liaisons on the specific challenges to identifying unaccompanied homeless youth.⁵ Over time, identification of each of these two subgroups has increased.⁶ Importantly, this critical outreach focuses on just two subsets of the homeless children and youth population, leaving out school-aged children and youth who remain connected with their families.

Figure 2: Observations from the State Monitor of PDE’s ECYEH Program

Prior Evidence of Under-Identification: The Center for Schools & Communities

Figure 2 shows a selection of key observations from the Center for Schools and Communities (CSC), a subsidiary of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, which serves as PDE’s statewide technical assistant and monitor. Since SY 2012-13, CSC has conducted annual formal regional monitoring and provided technical assistance for PDE’s ECYEH program staff and, in these reports, repeatedly suggested that Pennsylvania is likely undercounting the number of students experiencing homelessness in the state.⁷ CSC also warns of the educational consequences of failing to identify students experiencing homelessness.⁸



⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express, Homeless Students Enrolled in LEAs with or without McKinney-Vento Subgrants (Data Element Report 2478), 2016-17, accessed from <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm> on 6 September 2018; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.researchforaction.org/pa-school-data-project/> on 6 September 2018.

⁵ An unaccompanied homeless youth is a child or young person who is "not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian." 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6). Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Report, February 2018, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Pennsylvania ESSA Consolidated State Plan," 12 January 2018, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018.

⁶ From SY 2012-13 to 2016-17 there was a 148% increase in identification of 0-2-year old children and a 93% increase in unaccompanied homeless youth. Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Reports, SY 2012-13 to SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 6 September 2018.

⁷ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Task Force on Homeless Children’s Education, "Meeting the Educational Needs of Pennsylvania’s Homeless Children and Youth," 2014; accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018.

⁸ Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Report, SY 2016-17; accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018.

Comparing Pennsylvania’s Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness to States Across the Nation

Pennsylvania public schools (district and charter) reported educating 24,786 K-12th grade students experiencing homelessness in SY 2016-17, representing 1.5% of the student body. This is significantly below the national average of 2.8%. More importantly, as shown in Figure 3, **Pennsylvania ranks 44th out of 50 states in the homeless rate of identification**—the number of students experiencing homelessness out of the number in poverty. Because homelessness is strongly associated with poverty, multiple researchers have compared homelessness to poverty to understand where potential under-identification of students experiencing homelessness may be occurring.⁹ See Appendix B for each state’s raw data.

This low rate of identification is inconsistent with other indicators that are closely associated with homelessness. For example, out of 50 states, Pennsylvania ranks:

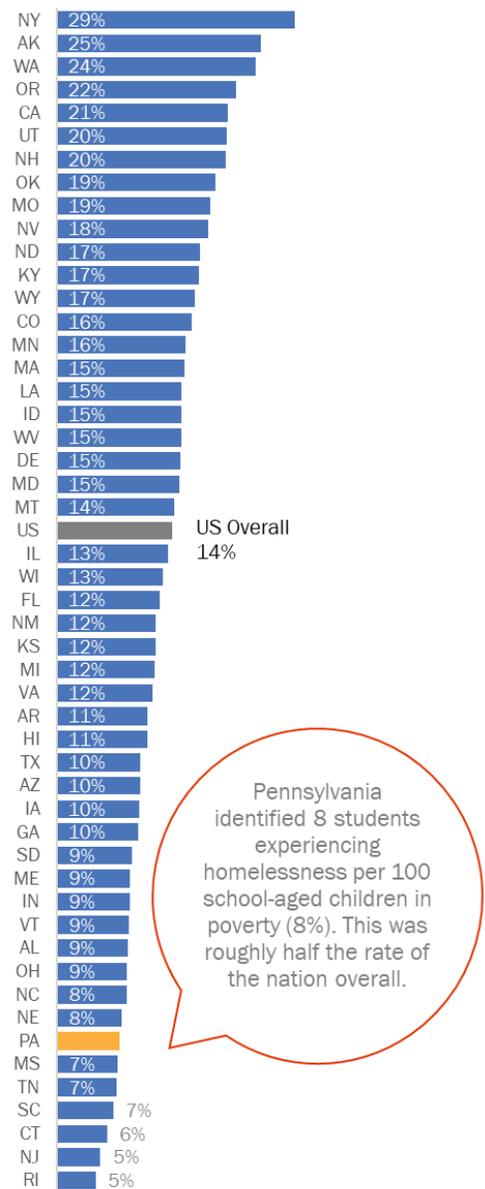
- 11th for the percentage of severely rent-burdened households,
- 24th for unemployment rate,
- 19th for households filing for eviction, and
- 26th for the percentage of households receiving SNAP public assistance.¹⁰

When considered in the context of Pennsylvania’s rankings on these related metrics, the fact that Pennsylvania reports such a low rate of homelessness strongly suggests that the state is under-identifying this population.¹¹

Regional Variation in Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness

PDE’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program is run through a regional structure which largely places the burden of McKinney-Vento compliance on LEAs (school districts and charter schools). PDE provides training to State and Regional Coordinators—a minimum of nine individuals statewide. These Coordinators are then charged with providing technical assistance on identifying and supporting students experiencing

Figure 3: Homelessness Rate of Identification: 50 State Comparison, SY 2016-17



⁹ This method for measuring homeless student identification has been used by the New York Technical Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, which publishes this measure online as a resource for LEAs, advising that “poverty data can be a useful tool for districts in estimating the approximate number of students who may experience homelessness [and] to determine whether your school district may be under-identifying students experiencing homelessness.” In a past state ranking by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, a similar calculation comparing the number of students identified as homeless to school-aged children in extreme poverty found that Pennsylvania ranked 46th out of 50 states in identification of students experiencing homelessness in 2014-15. Urban Institute, “What Will it Take to End Homelessness?”, 2001, accessed from https://www.urban.org/research/publication/what-will-it-take-end-homelessness/view/full_report on 4 December 2018; Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness, “Out of the Shadows: A State-by-State Ranking of Accountability for Homeless Students,” 2017, accessed from <https://www.icphusa.org/reports/shadows-state-state-ranking-accountability-homeless-students/> on 4 December 2018; New York Technical Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, “Local Poverty Rates & Student Homelessness,” January 2018, accessed from <https://nysteachs.org/resources/local-poverty-rates-student-homelessness> on 4 December 2018.

¹⁰ See Methodology in Appendix A.

¹¹ United States Government Accountability Office, “Education of Homeless Students: Improved Program Oversight Needed,” July 2014, accessed at <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-14-465> on 28 November 2018; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, “Homeless Students Count: How States and School Districts Can Comply with the New McKinney-Vento Education Law Post-ESSA,” accessed from <https://www.nlchp.org/documents/Homeless-Students-Count> on 28 November 2018.

homelessness to all relevant persons in their area, including Homeless Education Liaisons in LEAs, school staff, administrators, and community organization staff.¹² Each region’s ECYEH program is administered differently.

Figure 4 shows the share of Pennsylvania LEAs that received McKinney-Vento training through the ECYEH program, including presentations, workshops, and other professional development aimed at equipping LEAs to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. Shares ranged from just 9% of LEAs in Region 5 to almost every LEA in three regions (99%-100% in Regions 2, 4, and 6). In addition to differences in training, regions also report very different strategies for supporting LEAs to identify students experiencing homelessness. For example:¹³

- **Region 1** cross-checks student homelessness data with Philadelphia’s Office of Homeless Services to ensure that all children living in the shelter system are identified as homeless. While this almost certainly improves their count of students living in homeless shelters and temporary supportive housing, the region did not report specific activities for identifying doubled-up students, who are temporarily sharing another person’s housing due to a lack of housing or economic hardship. Doubled-up students represent three-fourths of all students experiencing homelessness nationwide.¹⁴
- In **Region 2**, ECYEH program staff hold a Homeless Youth Conference addressing the protections of McKinney-Vento attended by school personnel and community agency professionals. This is in addition to the region’s annual training and county-specific technical assistance to LEAs on financing McKinney-Vento obligations.
- **Region 5** flags LEAs identifying ten or fewer students experiencing homelessness for onsite technical assistance in identifying these students and conducting outreach with families.
- Beyond trainings highlighted in Figure 4, **Region 7** does not report any specific activities for identifying school-aged students experiencing homelessness, aside from an annual presentation to the Lackawanna County Continuum of Care, whose public and charter schools educate less than 8% of the region’s students experiencing homelessness.¹⁵

Figure 4: Percent of LEAs Receiving ECYEH Program’s McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Trainings in PA’s Eight ECYEH Program Regions, SY 2016-17

ECYEH Region	PA Counties	Percent of LEAs received PA ECYEH trainings
Region 6	Armstrong, Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Indiana, Jefferson, Potter	100%
Region 4	Allegheny, Beaver, Bedford, Fayette, Fulton, Greene, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland	99%
Region 2	Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Schuylkill	99%
Region 3	Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, Mifflin, Huntingdon, Juniata, Perry, York	85%
Region 8	Bucks, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton	54%
Region 1	Philadelphia	30%
Region 7	Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Pike, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, Wyoming	19%
Region 5	Butler, Crawford, Clarion, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango, Warren	9%

Note: LEAs include both school districts and charter schools.

¹² Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Report, SY 2016-17; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Pennsylvania ESSA Consolidated State Plan," 12 January 2018, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program – State Plan (Amended)", October 2013, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018.

¹³ Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Report, SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express, "Homeless Students Enrolled," 2016-17, accessed from <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm> on 6 September 2018.

¹⁵ Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Report, SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018; U.S. Department of Education, EdFacts Initiative, Homeless Students Enrolled (Data File C118), SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/data-files/school-status-data.html> on 6 September 2018; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.researchforaction.org/pa-school-data-project/> on 6 September 2018.

The map in Figure 5 shows how the eight regions under the Pennsylvania ECYEH program vary in their rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness. The lowest identification rates were found in Region 1 (encompassing Philadelphia) and in Region 7 (spanning northeast Pennsylvania), with just five students identified as experiencing homelessness out of every 100 school-aged children in poverty (5%). By contrast, Region 2, located between Harrisburg and Philadelphia and as far north as Reading, identified more than twice that rate (11%). None of the regions approach the national average of 14%.

Under a more local analysis, the chart in Figure 6 shows even greater inconsistency in identification rates of students experiencing homelessness among Pennsylvania school districts. Because U.S. Census data are reported by geographic boundaries rather than by school district enrollment, this rate of identification was calculated for each school district *community*. That is, we combined all school district students experiencing homelessness with an estimate of the number of charter school students experiencing homelessness who were from that school district. We then compared that to the number of school-aged children in poverty within the school district boundary, as reported by the U.S. Census.¹⁶

This analysis and the accompanying chart are limited to the 412 (out of 499 total) Pennsylvania school district communities with reliable census data on the number of school-aged children in poverty.¹⁷ The identification rate of students experiencing homelessness in these districts ranged between zero (0%) to one-third (32%) of school-aged children in poverty.

The Philadelphia school district community, including both district and charter schools, identified the largest total number of students experiencing homelessness (3,847) out of all school district communities in the state.¹⁸ Yet its rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness is low. Philadelphia has 78,500 school-aged children in poverty—more than any other city in the state. This indicates an identification rate of just 5% in Philadelphia public schools—five students experiencing homelessness per 100 school-aged children in poverty—lower than the state’s overall rate (8%). By contrast, Pittsburgh’s school district community, with 1,500 students experiencing

Homelessness Rate of Identification: Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness Out of All School-Aged Children in Poverty, SY 2016-17

Figure 5: By Pennsylvania ECYEH Program Region

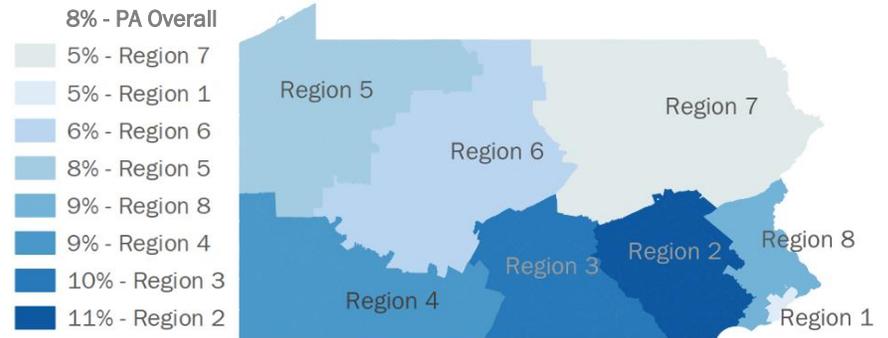
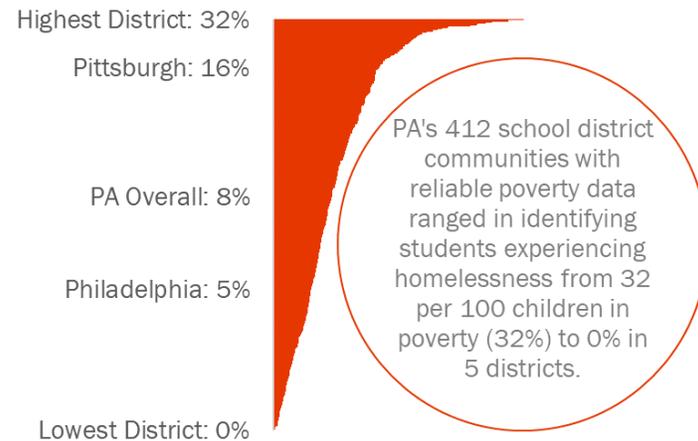


Figure 6: By PA School District Community



¹⁶ See Methodology in Appendix A.

¹⁷ See Methodology in Appendix A.

¹⁸ This included 3,091 students attending Philadelphia City SD public schools and an estimated 756 Philadelphia students attending charter schools. See Methodology in Appendix A.

homelessness and 9,315 school-aged children in poverty,¹⁹ identified students experiencing homelessness at twice the rate of the state overall (16% to 8%).

Meanwhile, 30 school districts identified fewer than two students experiencing homelessness. Those districts, mostly rural and suburban communities, had a combined identification rate of less than 1%.²⁰ With a national identification rate of 14%, and more than 5,300 school-aged children living in poverty in those 30 districts, an identification rate lower than 1% is highly unlikely.

Multiple factors may contribute to regional variations, such as differences in McKinney-Vento implementation and local supports for families living in poverty. In addition, PA is widely recognized as having one of the widest school funding disparities in the nation. For example, per-pupil spending in the School District of Philadelphia is 20% less than in Pittsburgh Public Schools.²¹ However, compliance with McKinney-Vento is required regardless of local conditions.

Pennsylvania's Charter Schools Under-Serving Students Experiencing Homelessness

The percentage of students identified as experiencing homelessness appears to be similar in charter schools and school districts in the state overall (1.3% to 1.5% in SY 2016-17). However, this overall comparison does not tell the full story, because charter schools are largely concentrated in the state's higher-poverty urban centers. To better understand how charter schools are serving Pennsylvania's students experiencing homelessness, Research for Action compared the actual percent homeless reported by charter school to the **expected percent homeless**, a weighted average of the percent homeless in the sending school districts, i.e., the districts in which the charter school's students reside. This weighted average is a closer estimate of the percent homeless that would be expected to be enrolled in each Pennsylvania charter school.²²

Expected percent homeless in charter schools:

The weighted average of the percent homeless in charter students' sending school districts.

See Methodology in Appendix A.

As shown in Figure 7, this analysis reveals that charter schools statewide (brick-and-mortar and cyber combined) are under-serving students experiencing homelessness, with just three-fifths the percentage that would be expected based on their sending school districts (1.3% to 2.4%). There are multiple factors that could drive these disparities between school districts and charter schools. It could be that school districts *over-identify* students experiencing homelessness.

However, our above analysis indicates this is unlikely. Rather, the uniformity of gaps between charter sectors and their respective districts across the state suggests that disparities are likely a combination of (1) charter schools *under-identifying* students experiencing homelessness at even worse rates than school districts, and (2) the existence of barriers that prevent students experiencing homelessness from enrolling in charter schools to begin with.

Philadelphia

Analysis of the brick-and-mortar charter sector in Philadelphia provides additional insight about possible reasons for the differences in enrollment between city charter schools and the School District of Philadelphia (SDP). Philadelphia, home to nearly half of all brick-and-mortar charter schools statewide, is host to 60 **traditional charter schools** and 22 **Renaissance charter schools**. Traditional charter schools are required to give equal

¹⁹ This included 1,383 students attending Pittsburgh SD public schools and an estimated 117 Pittsburgh students attending charter schools. See Methodology in Appendix A.

²⁰ See Methodology in Appendix A.

²¹ Future Ready PA Index, Per-Pupil Expenditures Based on Total, 2016-17, accessed from <https://futurereadypa.org/> on 14 December 2018.

²² See Methodology in Appendix A. Charter school enrollment by school district was made available by Public Citizens for Children + Youth.

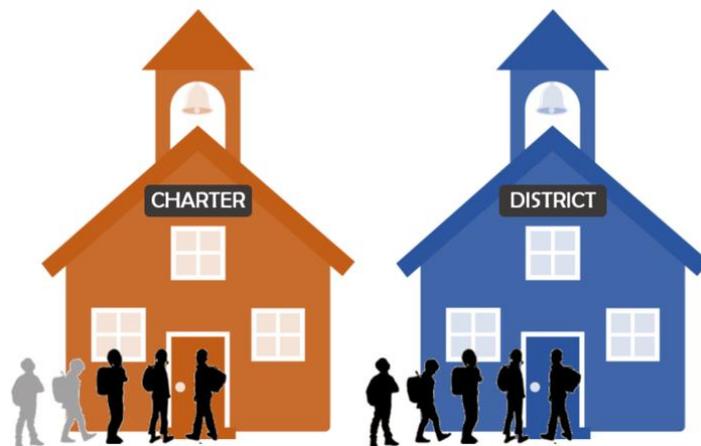
enrollment preference to all students within the city. Typically, when more students apply than the number of available seats, these charter schools hold an enrollment lottery many months before the school year begins.²³

In contrast, Renaissance charter schools are former district neighborhood schools that were converted to operation by a charter management organization. Unlike traditional charter schools, Renaissance charters in Philadelphia must continue to give enrollment preference to students residing in their neighborhood catchment, similar to the school district's own neighborhood schools.²⁴

As shown in Figure 7, Philadelphia's traditional brick-and-mortar charter sector serves a smaller percentage of Philadelphia's students experiencing homelessness than does SDP. Compared to the weighted school district average of 2.3% of students experiencing homelessness, traditional brick-and-mortar charter schools in Philadelphia reported only 0.7%.

In contrast, Philadelphia's Renaissance charter schools serve the same percentage of these students (2.3%) as the weighted district average. Over half of the charter students experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia attended one of the 22 Renaissance charter schools. Importantly, Renaissance charter schools are generally located in the city's most impoverished neighborhoods.²⁵ Based on available data, we are not able to assess whether Renaissance schools are serving a higher or lower percentage of students experiencing homelessness than the district's neighborhood schools located in similarly high-poverty communities. Answering this question would shed light on whether Renaissance charter schools are equitably serving students experiencing homelessness.

Figure 7: PA Charter Schools: Actual to Expected Percent Homelessness, SY 2016-17



Pennsylvania's charter schools served **3/5** the number of students experiencing homelessness that would be expected based on school districts of residence. (1.3% to 2.4%)

	Ratio	Actual Percent Homeless	Expected Percent Homeless
Pennsylvania Overall	3/5	1.3%	2.4%
Brick-and-Mortar Charter Schools Only	Philadelphia Traditional	0.7%	2.3%
	Philadelphia Renaissance	2.3%	2.3%
Cyber Charters Statewide	Pittsburgh	3.4%	5.8%
	Allegheny County Excluding Pittsburgh	3.3%	4.5%

²³ The School District of Philadelphia Charter Schools Office, "Enrollment Process," accessed from <https://www.philasd.org/charterschools/portal/process/> on 19 November 2018.

²⁴ The School District of Philadelphia Charter Schools Office, "Renaissance Charter Schools," accessed from <https://www.philasd.org/charterschools/portal/renaissance/> on 19 November 2018.

²⁵ Herold, Benjamin, "Where charters run the neighborhood schools," The Notebook, 17 October 2018, accessed from <https://thenotebook.org/articles/2012/10/17/where-charters-run-the-neighborhood-schools/> on 19 November 2018.

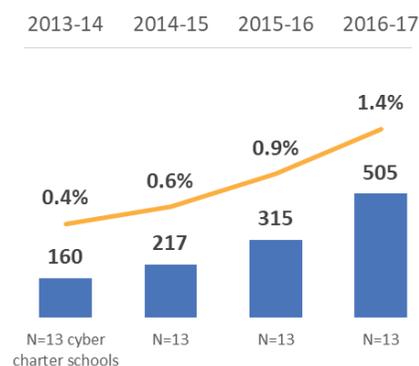
Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

Pittsburgh does not convert traditional public schools to charter schools; however, Pittsburgh’s brick-and-mortar charter schools enrolled a much higher percentage of students experiencing homelessness than traditional charters in Philadelphia (3.4% to 0.7%). Still, when compared to their school districts of residence, Pittsburgh’s charter sector still served only three-fifths the percentage of students experiencing homelessness that would be expected based on the weighted district average (3.4% to 5.8%). Charter schools in the rest of Allegheny County served closer to the expected proportion of students experiencing homelessness (ratio of 3/4). Understanding what strategies are used by public schools in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, both district and charter, to enroll and identify students experiencing homelessness could help improve identification statewide.

Cyber Charter Schools Statewide

More than 30,000 students and over 500 students experiencing homelessness attended Pennsylvania’s cyber charter schools in 2016-17, for an overall student homelessness percent of 1.4%. This was roughly three-fourths the percentage that would be expected (1.8%) based on where students were from. Enrollment of students experiencing homelessness in these schools has grown over time: Figure 8 shows that just four years prior, only 0.4% of cyber charter school students were identified as homeless. Given the poor student outcomes in cyber charter schools and ongoing questions about their efficacy,²⁶ the factors contributing to why students experiencing homelessness enroll in cyber charters or other forms of online learning should be explored further.

Figure 8: Number and Percent Homeless in PA Cyber Charter Schools



²⁶ Mann, B., S. Kotok, E. Franenberg, E. Fuller, and K. Schafft, “Choice, Cyber Charter Schools, and the Educational Marketplace for Rural School Districts,” *The Rural Educator*, Fall 2016, accessed from <http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraleducator/article/view/368> on 4 December 2018.

Next Steps to Identify and Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

PDE's new education data dashboard, the Future Ready Pennsylvania Index, will soon include annual enrollment numbers for students experiencing homelessness at the individual school level (as well as for students in foster care and students from military-connected families).²⁷ This is an important step, as existing data are only available at the LEA level and are generally less current. Meanwhile, there are other promising practices that can help understand and improve how students experiencing homelessness are being identified and served.

- **Survey and train regional coordinators to standardize identification best practices.** PDE currently places the lion's share of the burden of McKinney-Vento compliance on regional offices and the Homeless Education Liaisons in each LEA (i.e., school districts and charter schools). To prevent noncompliance and reduce variation in implementation, PDE could require an annual training for LEAs and conduct site visits to districts with low numbers and rates of students experiencing homelessness. Through an annual survey of regional coordinators, PDE could also tap their wealth of knowledge on what is and is not working well with regard to identifying students experiencing homelessness across the Commonwealth.
- **Require LEAs to use more effective student identification tools.** For example, a non-stigmatizing housing questionnaire could be administered upon enrollment. When families are unable to provide documentation of residency, schools should consider whether the student may be eligible for protections and services under McKinney-Vento. Many families will not self-identify as experiencing homelessness.
- **Use disaggregated data to prioritize school districts for additional training and monitoring.** PDE's ECYEH program staff can do more than simply target LEAs with low overall *numbers* of students experiencing homelessness identified for additional technical assistance, which is already a stated policy in one ECYEH region. ECYEH program staff should also prioritize districts in which the *rate of identification* of students experiencing homelessness to school-aged children in poverty is low, as this likely indicates under-identification. In addition, ECYEH program staff should review disaggregated data both by housing situation and unaccompanied student status, including whether districts are identifying students living in shelter as well as doubled-up or in other temporary settings.
- **Consider charter school applicants' plans for McKinney-Vento compliance before approval and renewal.** When deciding on new charter approvals, school district charter authorizers should consider a charter applicant's plans to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness, including the capacity and commitment of the school to assign a dedicated Homeless Education Liaison and ensure staff training on McKinney-Vento obligations. Similarly, authorizers should consider compliance with McKinney-Vento, including the rate of enrollment and quality of service of students experiencing homelessness, when considering renewal or revocation of existing charters.
- **Investigate why students experiencing homelessness enroll in cyber charter schools.** Given their well-documented poor academic outcomes, cyber charter schools and other online programs may be particularly unsuitable for students experiencing homelessness who are already at risk of dropping out. PDE should investigate why the rates of students experiencing homelessness enrolled in cyber charter schools are growing and whether this increase may be attributable to a lack of adequate services for these students among school districts and brick-and-mortar charter schools.

Student homelessness is a pervasive issue receiving increasing attention across the country. Under the 2015 reauthorization of ESSA, districts must increase services for these students by expanding enrollment protections and reporting cohort graduation rate data. By codifying and providing robust training on best practices in identification and investing in more resources and training for all LEAs, Pennsylvania can both ensure students experiencing homelessness are accurately counted and improve their educational status by delivering the supports they need to succeed.

²⁷ Future Ready PA Index, <https://futurereadypa.org/>.

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Appendix A: Methodology

Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness by State

The rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness was calculated using the ECYEH program's homeless student enrollment data. Due to state variation in pre-Kindergarten programs, students experiencing homelessness aged 3 to 5 were excluded from the rate of identification. These data were divided by U.S. Census estimates for school-aged children in poverty across states. Children in poverty are limited to those aged 6-18. This created the rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness by state.²⁸

A series of correlations were run to determine whether the state-level rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness is likely to reflect other trends than identification practices. At the state level, correlations were run between the rate of identification and a host of nine census variables, including unemployment, rent burden and severe rent burden among low-income families and the population overall, SNAP recipients, recent immigrants who entered the US in 2010 or later and are living in poverty, families in poverty, and household median income. Rent burden refers to households spending at least 30% of income on rent, and severe rent burden refers to households spending at least 50% of income on rent. Finally, the 2016 statewide eviction and eviction filing rates were correlated with the rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness. Only weak-to-negligible correlations were found across all ten indicators.²⁹

Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Regions

The rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness by ECYEH region was calculated using the ECYEH program's homeless student enrollment data. These data were divided by U.S. Census estimates for school-aged children in poverty by school district, aggregated to each ECYEH region by county as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, to create the rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness by ECYEH region. Children in poverty are limited to those aged 6-18.³⁰

Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania School District Communities

To get the rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania school district communities, the estimated number of charter school students experiencing homelessness from each Pennsylvania school district was first calculated as a weighted average of the district's share of students in each charter school statewide, made available by Public Citizens for Children + Youth. To calculate the total number of students

²⁸ Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age (Table B17001), 2012-16, accessed from <https://factfinder.census.gov/> on 6 September 2018; U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express Data Element Report 2478, 2016-17, accessed from <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm> on 6 September 2018.

²⁹ Sources: Eviction Lab Data Downloads, 2012-2016, accessed from <https://data-downloads.evictionlab.org/> on 28 November 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Tables B25070, B25074, S0502, S1702, S1903, S2201, and S2301, 2012-16, accessed from <https://factfinder.census.gov/> on 28 November 2018.

³⁰ Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age (Table B17001), 2012-16, accessed from <https://factfinder.census.gov/> on 6 September 2018; U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express Data Element Report 2478, 2016-17, accessed from <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm> on 6 September 2018; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Homeless Education, Locations and Projects," accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 6 September 2018.

experiencing homelessness in school district communities, the estimated number attending charter schools was added to the number identified by each school district itself.³¹

This district total was then divided by the number of school-aged children in poverty identified by the U.S. Census in the geographic area of the school district. Children in poverty are limited to those aged 6-18. Four hundred and twelve of Pennsylvania's 499 school districts had reliable census estimates for school-aged children in poverty using a 90% confidence interval and were used in this district-level analysis. An estimate was considered reliable if the relative standard error was 30% or less, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This created the rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness in 412 Pennsylvania school district communities.³²

A series of correlations were run to determine whether the local rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness within Pennsylvania is likely to reflect trends other than identification practices. At the school district level, correlations were run between the rate of identification and a host of nine Census variables including unemployment, rent burden and severe rent burden among low-income families and the population overall, SNAP recipients, recent immigrants who entered the US in 2010 or later and are living in poverty, families in poverty, and household median income. Rent burden refers to households spending at least 30% of income on rent and severe rent burden refers to households spending at least 50% of income on rent. Only weak-to-negligible correlations were found. Additionally, correlations were run between the average rate of identification of students experiencing homelessness by Pennsylvania city and the five-year average eviction and eviction filing rates by city. Eviction data were made available by EvictionLab.org. Only negligible correlations were found.³³

Expected Percentage of Student Homelessness in Pennsylvania Charter Schools

The expected percentage homeless by charter school is the weighted average of the percent homeless in charter schools' sending school districts, or the districts in which the charter school's students reside. Each district's share of students in each charter school statewide, made available by Public Citizens for Children + Youth, was used to calculate weights. This weighted average is a closer estimate of the expected percent homeless enrollment for each Pennsylvania charter school than would be achieved by simply comparing percentages based on the location of charter schools.³⁴

³¹ Sources: U.S. Department of Education, EdFacts Initiative, Homeless Students Enrolled (Data File C118), SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/data-files/school-status-data.html> on 6 September 2018; Public Citizens for Children + Youth, "Charter School Enrollment by School District: 2009-2016," accessed from <https://www.pccy.org/report/uncharted-territory-implications-rising-charter-enrollment-se-pa-suburbs/> on 6 September 2018; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.researchforaction.org/pa-school-data-project/> on 6 September 2018.

³² Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Health Statistics, "Reliability of Estimates," accessed from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/ahcd/ahcd_estimation_reliability.htm on 19 November 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age (Table B17001), 2012-16, accessed from <https://factfinder.census.gov/> on 6 September 2018.

³³ Sources: Eviction Lab Data Downloads, 2012-2016, accessed from <https://data-downloads.evictionlab.org/> on 28 November 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Tables B25070, B25074, S0502, S1702, S1903, S2201, and S2301, 2012-16, accessed from <https://factfinder.census.gov/> on 28 November 2018.

³⁴ Sources: U.S. Department of Education, EdFacts Initiative, Homeless Students Enrolled (Data File C118), SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/data-files/school-status-data.html> on 6 September 2018; Public Citizens for Children + Youth, "Charter School Enrollment by School District: 2009-2016," accessed from <https://www.pccy.org/report/uncharted-territory-implications-rising-charter-enrollment-se-pa-suburbs/> on 6 September 2018; School District of Philadelphia Charter Schools Office, "Philadelphia Charter School Directory by Region," accessed from <https://www.philasd.org/charterschools/directory> on 21 August 2018; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," SY 2016-17, accessed from <https://www.researchforaction.org/pa-school-data-project/> on 6 September 2018.

Appendix B: State Data Table

Table B. Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness, by State

State	Students Experiencing Homelessness (Excl. Ages 3-5), 2016-17 Source: State Departments of Education	Total school-aged children in poverty, 2016 5-year Estimates Source: U.S. Census	Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness	State Rank for Rate of Identification
NY	168,434	587,731	29%	1
AK	4,004	16,303	25%	2
WA	40,089	167,402	24%	3
OR	23,422	108,620	22%	4
CA	267,036	1,297,093	21%	5
UT	15,235	74,318	20%	6
NH	3,839	18,850	20%	7
OK	25,579	133,677	19%	8
MO	33,254	179,255	19%	9
NV	16,131	88,017	18%	10
ND	2,176	12,562	17%	11
KY	27,489	160,490	17%	12
WY	1,924	11,524	17%	13
CO	20,160	123,828	16%	14
MN	17,157	110,112	16%	15
MA	20,440	132,260	15%	16
LA	29,372	194,531	15%	17
ID	7,709	51,222	15%	18
WV	8,538	56,924	15%	19
DE	3,330	22,357	15%	20
MD	16,503	111,126	15%	21
MT	3,650	25,749	14%	22
IL	50,268	374,637	13%	23
WI	17,924	139,913	13%	24
FL	74,285	597,557	12%	25
NM	11,220	93,625	12%	26
KS	9,015	75,279	12%	27
MI	37,970	322,143	12%	28
VA	20,491	177,384	12%	29
AR	12,832	117,429	11%	30
HI	2,911	26,730	11%	31
TX	107,892	1,075,912	10%	32
AZ	26,146	260,952	10%	33
IA	6,787	68,242	10%	34
GA	39,146	398,240	10%	35
SD	2,038	22,412	9%	36
ME	2,489	28,205	9%	37
IN	18,117	206,355	9%	38
VT	1,025	11,705	9%	39
AL	15,798	184,801	9%	40
OH	30,515	358,953	9%	41
NC	28,900	341,689	8%	42
NE	3,526	44,973	8%	43
PA	24,786	325,061	8%	44
MS	10,903	148,006	7%	45
TN	16,869	231,757	7%	46
SC	11,607	170,708	7%	47
CT	4,333	70,793	6%	48
NJ	10,521	198,974	5%	49
RI	1,224	26,060	5%	50
US	1,365,059	9,800,583	14%	

See Methodology in Appendix A for notes and sources.

Appendix C: Figure Notes & Sources

Federal and State Law Regarding Students Experiencing Homelessness

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Task Force on Homeless Children's Education, "Meeting the Educational Needs of Pennsylvania's Homeless Children and Youth," 2014, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018; National Center for Homeless Education, "Authorized Activities for McKinney-Vento Subgrant Funds," accessed from <https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv-auth-act.php> on 15 August 2018; National Center for Homeless Education, "Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) Program," February 2018, accessed from https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/ehcy_profile.pdf on 4 December 2018; National Center for Homeless Education, "Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Understanding Their Role," April 2018, accessed from <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/liaisons.pdf> on 4 December 2018; National Center for Homeless Education, "Serving Students Experiencing Homelessness Under Title 1, Part A," November 2017, accessed from <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/title1.pdf> on 4 December 2018; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty & True Colors Fund, "2018 State Index on Youth Homelessness," accessed from <https://truecolorsfund.org/index/> on 4 December 2018; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Education for Homeless Youth 42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.," 3 February 2010, rev. 10 December 2016, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Homeless Education," accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 15 August 2018; Pennsylvania Department of Education, "Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program – State Plan (Amended)", October 2013, accessed from <https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx> on 4 December 2018.

Figure 1: Calculating the Rate of Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Note: See Methodology in Appendix A.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age (Table B17001), 2012-16; U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express Data Element Report 2478, 2016-17.

Figure 2: Observations of State Technical Monitor for Pennsylvania Department of Education's Children & Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program

Source: Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Reports, SY 2012-13 to SY 2016-17.

Figure 3: Rate of Identification: Students Experiencing Homelessness to School-Aged Children in Poverty by State, SY 2016-17

Note: See Methodology in Appendix A.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age (Table B17001), 2012-16; U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express Data Element Report 2478, 2016-17.

Figure 4: Percent of LEAs Receiving ECYEH Program's McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Trainings in PA's Eight ECYEH Program Regions, SY 2016-17

Note: LEAs include both school districts and charter schools.

Source: Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program State Evaluation Report, SY 2016-17; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," 2016-17.

Figures 5 and 6: Rate of Identification: Students Experiencing Homelessness to School-Aged Children in Poverty, SY 2016-17, by PA ECYEH Program Region and by PA School District Community

Note: See Methodology in Appendix A.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age (Table B17001), 2012-16; U.S. Department of Education, ED Facts Initiative Homeless Students Enrolled (Data File C118), SY 2016-17.

Figure 7: Enrollment of Students Experiencing Homelessness in PA Charter Schools, SY 2016-17

Note: See Methodology in Appendix A. One cyber charter school is excluded due to lack of enrollment information.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Ed Facts Initiative, Homeless Students Enrolled (Data File C118), SY 2016-17; Public Citizens for Children + Youth, "Charter School Enrollment by School District: 2009-2016;" School District of Philadelphia Charter Schools Office, "Philadelphia Charter School Directory by Region," accessed on 21 August 2018 from <https://www.philasd.org/charterschools/directory/>; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," SY 2016-17.

Figure 8: Number and Percent Homeless in PA Cyber Charter Schools

Note: One cyber charter school is excluded due to lack of enrollment information.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Ed Facts Initiative, Homeless Students Enrolled (Data File C118), 2013-14 to 2016-17, accessed from <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm>; Research for Action, "PA Schools Data," 2013-14 to 2016-17.