

HOME *works*

STABLE HOME
+ STABLE SCHOOL
BRIGHT FUTURES



A REPORT BY
**CHICAGO COALITION
FOR THE HOMELESS**

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BACKGROUND ON HOMELESSNESS AND EDUCATION

According to the United States Department of Education 1 in every 45 children was homeless in 2010. In 2013, there were 2,483,539 homeless children, which means that 1 in 30 children were homeless. This figure represents a historic high for the number of homeless children.ⁱ Chicago Public Schools identified 20,205 homeless children in the 2014-2015 school year.

Homeless families often move frequently (termed “residential mobility”), and as a result often change schools (termed “school mobility”). Research shows that children who move frequently face many barriers to success in school, including:

- Disruptions of peer networks and personal relationshipsⁱⁱ
- A three to four month learning disadvantage in reading and mathⁱⁱⁱ
- A four to six month delay in learning overall^{iv}
- The heightening of behavioral and emotional problems to three times the rate of other children^v
- Nutritional and health deficiencies that impact students’ abilities to perform well academically^{vi}
- Lower math scores and a harder time managing their behavior and attention in the classroom^{vii}
- Limited and curtailed access to early learning services and preschool^{viii}
- Declines in school success and graduation due to missed school days^{ix}
- Unaddressed special education needs
- Loss of many normative life experiences (such as team sports, clubs, church groups and other community-based opportunities)

SURVEY OF HOMELESS FAMILIES

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless surveyed **118 homeless families** with school-aged children and found that the experiences of Chicago’s homeless students closely mirrored what the national research showed. Surveys were conducted at public schools, shelters, and parks during the summer of 2015. More than **80%** of the families interviewed have **between 1 and 3** school-aged children and less than **20%** have more than three children attending school.

HOW FAMILIES EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

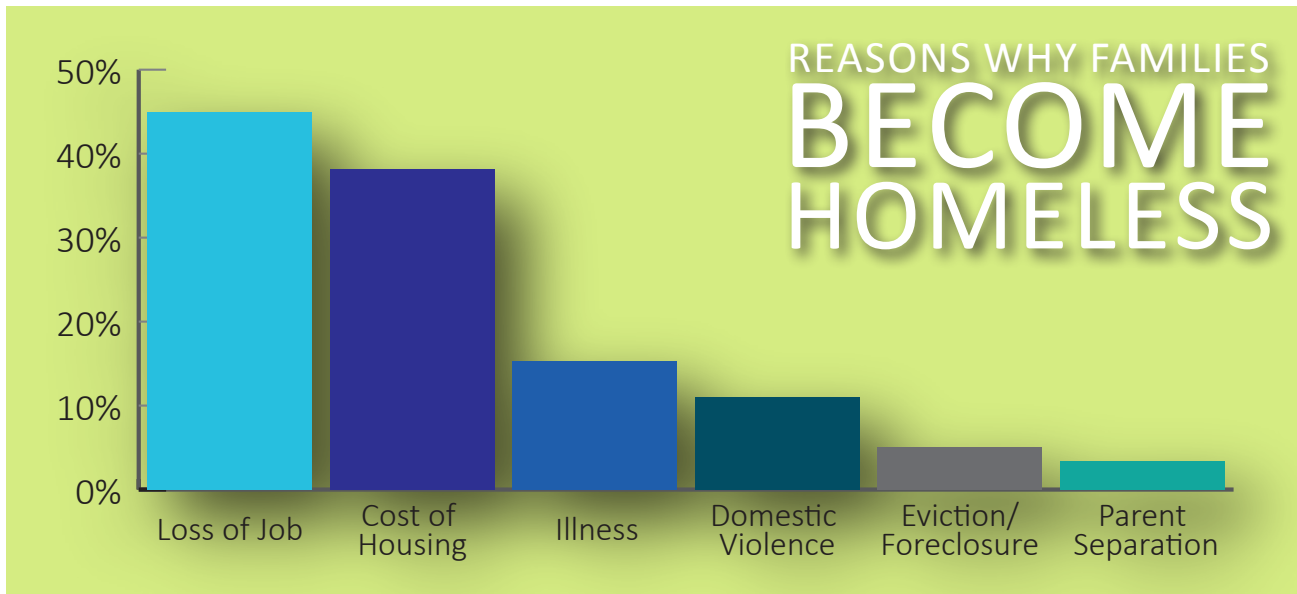
Parents report losing their jobs as the most common reason for becoming homeless. High cost of housing is a close second, resulting in unstable housing situations for families.

- **56% of those surveyed report moving their families between two or three places within the span of three years.**
- **Nearly 20% report staying at between four and six residences.**
- **47% of parents surveyed report being homeless for over a year.**
- **26% of parents report that they had to stay at a separate shelter or house from their children at some point.**

Some define homelessness as living at a shelter or on the street. In actuality, a majority of homeless families in Chicago are “doubling up” and staying with relatives or friends. **Seven out of ten families surveyed report staying with relatives during the past 3 years.** Families indicated that they had slept together in the front room of a friend’s house, for instance, or entire families shared the same bedroom.

DOUBLING-UP IS HOMELESSNESS

Homeless families are more likely to be “doubled-up” with relatives or friends than to be in a shelter or on the street. Since this is a frequent outcome for families that lose housing, CCH includes those families in our definition.



HOW CHILDREN EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

When asked how having their own place would change their child’s life, one respondent replied, “stability changes all things for the better when it comes to children.” Parents expressed that one of the things their child(ren) need most is the “peace of mind” that comes with stable housing. Parents reinforced common assumptions that children need private space to focus on school work and a quiet place to sleep. **Thirty-nine percent of those surveyed report that their child didn’t have a quiet place to sleep while homeless.**

“STABILITY CHANGES ALL THINGS FOR THE BETTER WHEN IT COMES TO CHILDREN.”

The survey also indicated more nuanced problems with child homelessness. Homelessness robs families of the opportunity for quality time to “enjoy each other” and be a family as a result of their living situation. Parents found it difficult to set a routine for their families and had little autonomy to raise their children. Parents are frequently unable to make their own decisions about when their children are allowed to eat or sleep. They can’t offer a sense of ownership of their home or their things, and they expressed concern about their children’s self-esteem and pride. Without personal space to parent their family, parents indicated difficulty controlling for the influence of other children in the shelter or doubled-up home.

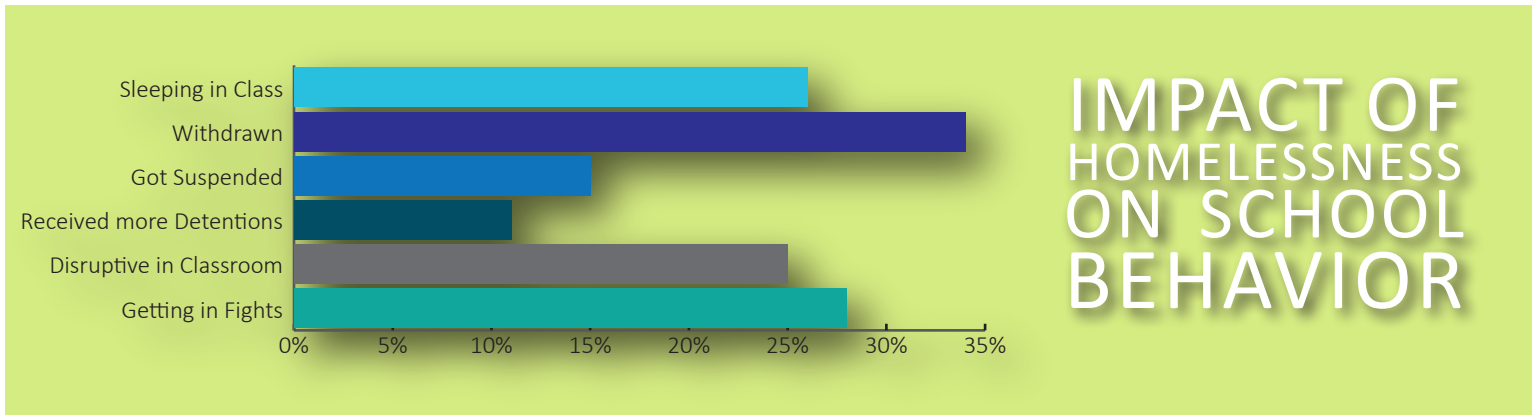
IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON SCHOOL

- **57% of parents report that their child didn’t have an adequate study area when they were homeless.**
- **Nearly 33% of homeless children missed more than 6 days of school last year.**
- **17% missed more than 10 days of school last year.**
- **19% of children were tardy more than 10 days last year.**
- **24% of families report that their children’s grades have gone down since losing housing.**

Parents surveyed report that a stable housing situation would allow their children privacy and the opportunity to focus on their studies. They also reported negative behaviors at school after their children became homeless:

- **66% of those surveyed report changes in their child’s behavior at school after becoming homeless.**
- **More than 30 families (25% of those surveyed) report that at least one of their children has been penalized for disruptive behavioral issues in the classroom.**
- **34% percent of the children have been described as “withdrawn” in school.**

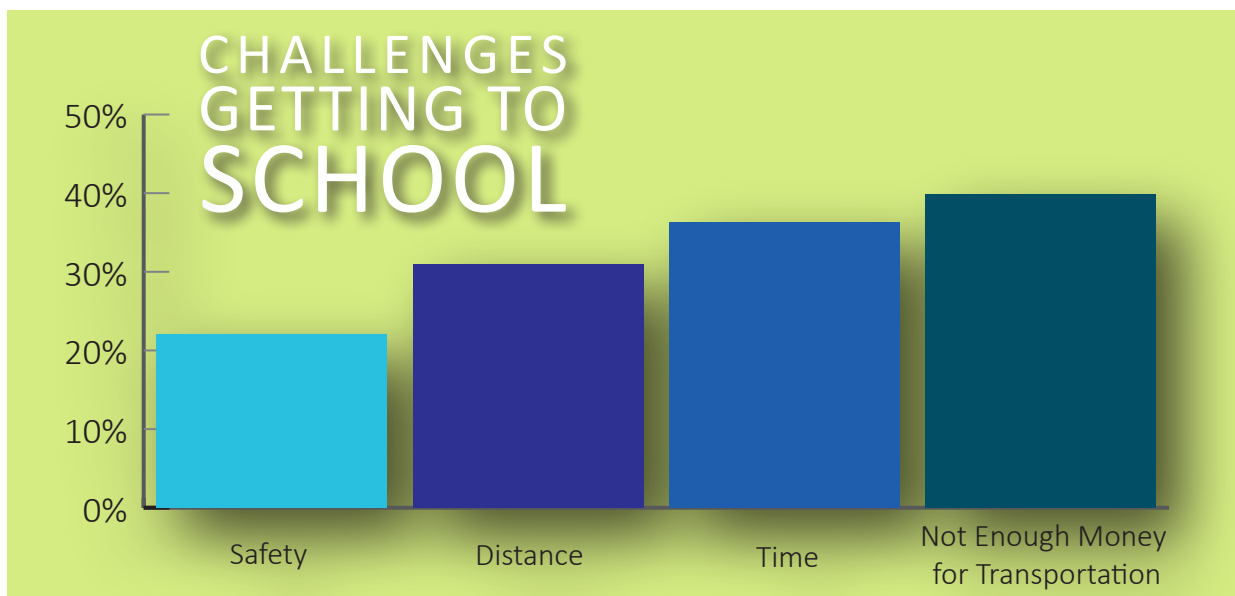
Both types of behavior threaten a student’s ability to engage in classroom activities, to form positive relationships with their classmates, and to generally succeed in the classroom setting.



CHALLENGES WITH TRANSPORTATION

- **27% of students spend 30 minutes to an hour commuting to school.**
- **19% of students spend over an hour commuting to school.**
- **40% of those surveyed report not having enough money for public transportation.**
- **Nearly 70% of families reported transportation challenges.**

Unstable housing can result in children staying doubled-up with relatives or at shelters outside of their original school’s neighborhood, which can create additional challenges for their morning commute. While homeless students are entitled to transportation assistance through Chicago Public Schools, accessing this assistance can prove difficult. In addition to the psychological strain that housing instability creates for young students, transportation to school from different locations proves to be an added barrier to receiving an education.



In summary, child homelessness and its consequences look different from what many might assume. Housing instability has proven detrimental to a child's performance in school, as well as to a family's overall relationship. Many parents expressed that stable housing would improve their child(ren)'s self-esteem, allow them to "feel they had something of their own" and "be able to be happy to come home."

ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS

Those families that are able to access affordable housing see less mobility and more stability in housing. Affordable housing programs around the country have proven to be incredibly beneficial for educational attainment. Benefits of affordable housing programs include:

- A reduction of unwanted moves which disrupt educational attainment^x
- Lower levels of housing over-crowdedness^{xi}
- The construction of healthy houses that foster healthy families and students^{xii}
- Stronger school systems with less student mobility and administration turnover^{xiii}

MODELS FOR ACHIEVING HOUSING STABILITY

Jurisdictions around the country including Chicago have begun to look at models for providing stable housing for homeless families with school-aged children and are seeing positive impacts on children's education.

Case Study: McCarver Elementary Public School Special Housing Program, Tacoma, WA

In Washington, the Tacoma Housing Authority and the Tacoma Public Schools came together to create the McCarver Elementary Public School Special Housing Program. This program provided affordable housing subsidies in conjunction with a menu of other services to homeless families. At the three year mark, McCarver Elementary Public School students documented increased literacy rates, with 61.1% of the program's students reading at grade-level. On the other hand, less than half of homeless students whose families were not involved in the program could read at their grade-level.^{xiv} Other positive outcomes of this program include:

- 20 out of the 55 parents involved successfully completed their GED certification.^{xv}
- The number of working parents increased from 7 to 29.^{xvi}
- The average monthly earned income increased from \$806 to \$1,211 for working households.^{xvii}
- The average monthly income increased from \$436 to \$836 for all participating households.^{xviii}
- McCarver Elementary Public School students increased their literacy rates, with 61.1% of the program's students reading at grade-level.^{xix}
- McCarver students enrolled in the program largely outperformed the homeless and low-income students who were not in the program.^{xx}

Case Study: Next Step Program, Grand Junction, CO

In Grand Junction, Colorado, the Mesa County School District, the Grand Junction Housing Authority, the City of Grand Junction, Mesa County, and social service organizations created the Next Step Program. The program provided transitional housing for homeless families with children attending school, as well as rental assistance, security deposits, and basic necessities for two-year periods. In three cycles, the Next Step Program enrolled 95 families. At the end of the program, 98% transferred from the transitional rental assistance to a permanent subsidy through the Housing Choice Voucher program. Within a year of students being housed, this program highlights that:

- 56% of students' grades improved.^{xxi}
- School absences decreased by 53%.^{xxii}

Case Study: Student Family Support Services Initiative, Chicago, IL

Also operating under the premise that addressing housing needs leads to higher educational attainment, Chicago's pilot program, the Student Family Support Services Initiative, provided housing assistance and social services to doubled-up families in Englewood in 2009 and 2010. Ninety percent of children were in elementary school, and ten percent of the students involved were in high school. They attended a total of 31 different public schools.^{xxiii} During the program:

- Housing services were used by 99% of households.^{xxiv}
- Mental health, financial, and employment services were used by 70-93% of households.^{xxv}
- Families successfully transitioned from temporary rental assistance into their own housing, whether subsidized or non-subsidized.^{xxvi}
- For the 2009-2010 school year, grades went up as the number of weeks in the program increased.^{xxvii}

HOMEWORKS

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless is launching a new campaign to address the need for stable housing and educational supports for homeless families. The campaign brings together parents, students, teachers, and homeless service providers to find permanent solutions to family homelessness. The campaign will work towards the following goals:



EDUCATION GOALS:

1. The Chicago Board of Education will pass an updated, improved, and detailed policy to support Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS) based on input from parents and students.
2. Chicago Coalition for the Homeless will partner with Chicago Public Schools to train CPS staff on sensitive and comprehensive identification of homeless students, including unaccompanied homeless youth.
3. Chicago Public Schools will provide students who are homeless with all the rights and services to which they are entitled including immediate enrollment, transportation, fee waivers, tutoring, uniforms, and dispute resolution.
4. Improve the attendance rate, graduation rate, and academic performance of homeless students. CPS will track this data and share it with the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.
5. Chicago Public Schools will fund a full-time STLS liaison at each school with a significant number of homeless students.

HOUSING GOALS:

1. The City of Chicago will commit to ending family homelessness in the same way the city has committed to ending veteran homelessness.
2. New housing units will be created for 500 homeless families through the Chicago Low Income Housing Trust Fund.
3. The sponsor-based voucher program at the CHA will be expanded and units will be dedicated for homeless families.
4. Adequate service funding will be available to meet needs of families in CHA and Trust Fund subsidized units.
5. A state capital budget will include \$200 million for affordable housing with a percentage dedicated for homeless families.

Report Contributors:

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WWW.CHICAGOHOMELESS.ORG/HOMEWORKS