



Students Experiencing Homelessness

The Conditions and Outcomes of Homelessness Among California Students

Dion Burns, Danny Espinoza, Naomi Ondrasek, and Man Yang

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	v
Introduction	1
Background and Context: Students Experiencing Homelessness	2
Who Are Students Experiencing Homelessness?	2
How Do Districts Receive Resources to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness?.....	3
Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness Is Challenging.....	4
Homelessness, Student Well-Being, and Educational Achievement	6
School, District, and Community Roles in Supporting Learning for Students Experiencing Homelessness	6
About This Study	9
A Note on Language.....	10
Students Experiencing Homelessness in 2018–19 (K–12)	11
Demographics and Student Characteristics.....	11
School Enrollment and Chronic Absenteeism.....	14
Graduation and College-Going Rates	16
Schooling Characteristics for Students Experiencing Homelessness (2015–16, Grades 3–8 and 11)	18
Living Arrangements.....	18
School Mobility.....	20
Discipline	22
School Environments	24
Student Achievement on CAASPP Assessments (2015–16, Grades 3–8 and 11)	26
Predictors of Student Achievement (2015–16, Grades 3–8 and 11)	33
Regression Analysis: Data, Method, and Models.....	33
Student-Level Factors Associated With Student Academic Outcomes.....	33
School Context and Student Achievement.....	35
Findings and Policy Considerations	37
Conclusion	45
Appendix: Methods and Data Tables	46
Endnotes	65
About the Authors	77

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1	Students Experiencing Homelessness in California.....	11
Figure 2	Distribution of Students Experiencing Homelessness.....	12
Figure 3	Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race/Ethnicity.....	13
Figure 4	Students Experiencing Homelessness, by English Learner and Special Education Status.....	14
Figure 5	Enrollment of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Charter Schools.....	15
Figure 6	Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Experiencing Homelessness.....	16
Figure 7	Four-Year Cohort Graduation and College-Going Rates	17
Figure 8	Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Living Arrangement	19
Figure 9	Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Living Arrangement and Race/Ethnicity....	20
Figure 10	School Mobility Among Students Experiencing Homelessness	21
Figure 11	High Mobility Among Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race/Ethnicity.....	22
Figure 12	Exclusionary School Discipline Among Students Experiencing Homelessness	23
Figure 13	Out-of-School Suspensions Among Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race/Ethnicity.....	24
Figure 14	Distribution of Students Experiencing Homelessness, by School Poverty Level	25
Figure 15	Percentage of Students With CAASPP Mathematics Scores	27
Figure 16	CAASPP Achievement Levels in English Language Arts and Mathematics	28
Figure 17	Achievement on CAASPP, by English Learner and Special Education Status.....	30
Figure 18	Achievement on CAASPP, by Living Arrangement.....	31
Figure 19	Achievement on CAASPP Among Students Experiencing Homelessness, by School Mobility	32
Table 1	Achievement on CAASPP English Language Arts and Mathematics	29
Table 2	Student-Level Predictors of Student Achievement in English Language Arts and Mathematics.....	35
Table 3	School-Level Predictors of Student Achievement in English Language Arts and Mathematics.....	36

Executive Summary

California is in the midst of a crisis of homelessness, with more than 1 in 5 of the nation's students identified as experiencing homelessness residing in the state. The incidence of student poverty and homelessness in California has been rising steadily both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total student population. In 2018–19, nearly 270,000 students—or approximately 1 in 23 (more than 4%)—were identified as experiencing homelessness, and these figures likely represent an undercount. The increasing number of students in California identified as experiencing homelessness mirrors a pattern seen in most U.S. states. Although the number of students experiencing homelessness is likely being exacerbated by the COVID-19-related economic downturn, emerging evidence suggests that identification has declined since the pandemic began. It is likely this decrease reflects challenges that districts have had identifying and engaging these students, rather than an actual decline in homelessness.

The greater incidence of homelessness among communities of color is particularly alarming. In California, more than 7% of African American students, 6% of Native American or Alaskan students, and 6% of Pacific Islander students were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2018–19. Students experiencing homelessness in the state are also more likely to be English learners and eligible for special education services.

Yet students experiencing homelessness hold educational aspirations like those of their peers—to graduate from high school and go on to college. What separates students experiencing homelessness from their peers are the challenges of their circumstances, often due to the cumulative effects of poverty and the instability and disruption of social relationships associated with high mobility.

Findings

Drawing on data from the California Department of Education, this report provides a snapshot of students experiencing homelessness in California and examines important contextual factors—such as living arrangements, school mobility, and school discipline—and their association with learning outcomes. Through analyses of two discrete data sets, this report finds that:

- **The number of students identified as experiencing homelessness grew by more than 7% from 2015–16 to 2018–19.** These students are often from communities of color, are more likely to be eligible for special education services, and are significantly more likely to be English learners.
- **Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be chronically absent.** The rate of chronic absence among students experiencing homelessness in 2018–19 was 25%. That is double the state average (12%). The rates are higher among some racial and ethnic groups: More than 40% of African American students and Native American or Alaskan students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent.

- **Students experiencing homelessness are less likely to complete high school and continue in their education.** Only 69% of students experiencing homelessness graduated in 4 years in 2017–18, as compared to the statewide average of 83%. And just 50% of graduates experiencing homelessness enrolled in college the year after high school, as compared to 64% of all California graduates.
- **The majority of students experiencing homelessness are living temporarily doubled up.** Among students experiencing homelessness in state-tested grades, 84% were staying with others due to economic hardship or loss of housing, while 1 in 7 were identified as living in a hotel or motel, living in a temporary shelter, or living unsheltered.
- **Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to change schools multiple times and to be suspended—especially students of color.** One in 5 students experiencing homelessness in the tested grades changed schools at least once during the school year—triple the rate of other students—and a quarter of these changed schools twice or more. Approximately 11% of African American students experiencing homelessness changed schools two or more times, the highest rate among all racial and ethnic groups. Students experiencing homelessness in the tested grades were also twice as likely as all students to receive an out-of-school suspension.
- **Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be enrolled in high-poverty schools.** We found that approximately 57% of students experiencing homelessness were enrolled in those schools in which the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals was greater than 80%. This compares with just 34% of all students.
- **Students experiencing homelessness are less likely than their peers to meet or exceed state achievement standards.** Statewide, 48% of all students met or exceeded state standards in English language arts in 2015–16, and 37% did so in mathematics. For students experiencing homelessness, those outcomes were 29% and 19%, respectively. For English learners experiencing homelessness, fewer than 9% met or achieved state standards in mathematics; for students with disabilities experiencing homelessness, this proportion was just 4%. Highly mobile students were significantly less likely than their peers to meet or exceed state standards.
- **Schools with high teacher turnover and large proportions of underprepared teachers are associated with lower student achievement,** even after accounting for other student- and school-level factors. This negative association holds both for all students and those experiencing homelessness.

The data indicate several obstacles that hinder the academic success of students experiencing homelessness. Fortunately, they also point to possible responses that could positively impact this vulnerable group.

Recommendations

Findings in this report highlight the multilayered challenges that students experiencing homelessness face and suggest that comprehensive practice and policy strategies, implemented across multiple levels of governance, are needed to improve educational outcomes. Decision-makers working to address these challenges should consider the following strategies:

1. Federal actions to support students experiencing homelessness

Federal action is needed to address two major challenges for improving outcomes for students experiencing homelessness: inadequate federal funding and barriers to cross-system collaboration, which can impede the provision of wraparound supports. To help address these issues, federal policymakers should:

- **Increase federal funding under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and revise the formula to target funds based on the enrollment of students experiencing homelessness.** With limited funds (\$10.6 million in 2018–19) allocated to California under McKinney-Vento, most students experiencing homelessness are enrolled in districts that do not receive federal dollars for implementing the Act’s provisions. These funds are also not distributed to states based on homeless student counts; as a result, in 2018–19 California received only \$41 per student experiencing homelessness, compared to \$64 nationally. One-time funding through the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) will infuse states and districts with much needed resources to increase supports for students experiencing homelessness, but it will not provide a long-term solution to these funding challenges. Federal policymakers should increase long-term investment in McKinney-Vento and revise the formula so that funds are targeted to states based on their enrollment of students experiencing homelessness.
- **Increase federal funding for community schools and wraparound supports.** Housing insecurity, school instability, and the experience of homelessness can negatively affect multiple aspects of students’ lives, including their academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, mental health, and physical health. Access to wraparound supports across multiple sectors is vital, including education, housing, health, and social services. However, local collaboration can be complex and may require partners to overcome barriers, such as between-system differences in priorities, funding and reporting requirements, and program eligibility rules. Community schools can help bring together funding streams and resources by establishing partnerships across the education system, nonprofits, and local government agencies. Federal policymakers should build on ARPA’s one-time support for community schools by increasing funding for the federal Full-Service Community Schools Program and investing in specialized instructional support personnel, including social workers, school counselors, and psychologists.
- **Align definitions of “homeless” used by federal housing and education programs.** Different definitions of “homeless” used by federal education and housing programs can make it difficult for local agencies to provide comprehensive wraparound supports to students and their families experiencing homelessness. Federal policymakers should align the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) definition of “homeless” with that established by McKinney-Vento to ensure that students living in motels or doubled up can access housing and homeless assistance, administered under HUD.

2. State actions to support students experiencing homelessness

California policymakers can help improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness by elevating the visibility of these students in the state’s accountability system, establishing infrastructure and programs to support local collaboration, and investing in educator training. Specifically, state policymakers should:

- **Elevate the visibility of students experiencing homelessness in the state’s accountability system by adding them as a stand-alone category under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).** Underidentification and low visibility of students experiencing homelessness can prevent them from receiving much needed services and supports. Although these students are already considered part of the LCFF weightings (they are included in unduplicated pupil counts due to their categorical eligibility for free or reduced-price meals), the state’s main Local Control and Accountability Plan template does not prompt districts to specify how they spent funds on these students or how they will increase or improve services for them, as they are required to do for students who are in foster care, from low-income families, or English learners. State policymakers should consider adding students experiencing homelessness as a stand-alone category under the LCFF, which would elevate their visibility in the state’s accountability system and help ensure that resources are targeted toward this student group.
- **Expand investments in community schools to provide wraparound supports that meet students’ multiple needs.** To support local collaboration, state policymakers should expand investment in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). This program was created in 2020–21 when the state invested \$45 million from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to support and expand existing community schools. Demand for grants exceeded capacity: Out of 102 applicants requesting a total of \$168 million, only 20 received awards. The state should provide additional funding for this program as well as invest in technical assistance.
- **Create a state-level children’s cabinet to identify and address barriers to state and local cross-system collaboration.** California should also consider creating a children’s cabinet composed of key state agencies that administer programs serving children and families. The cabinet’s tasks should include (1) strengthening collaboration among state agencies to support the development and implementation of policy that is grounded in shared goals for California’s families and children; (2) identifying barriers to interagency collaboration and issuing recommendations, informed by insights from the state’s new Cradle-to-Career Data System; and (3) leveraging the expertise of state and local stakeholders engaged in cross-system initiatives, including recipients of grants from the CCSPP, to inform state efforts to support local collaboration.
- **Invest in training that prepares educators and support staff to work with and reengage students experiencing homelessness.** Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience stressors outside of school and to have suffered trauma. In addition, findings from this report and others show that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be African American or Latino/a, experience exclusionary discipline, and identify as LGBTQ. Especially as schools reopen for in-person learning, the state should invest in training so that educators and support staff are prepared to work with

and support vulnerable student groups, including students experiencing homelessness. To increase their sensitivity to the issues these students face, teachers, principals, counselors, and other specialized instructional support staff should receive training framed around social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practice. Training should also include strategies for implementing restorative practice and creating identity-safe classrooms.

3. Local actions to support students experiencing homelessness

In 2021, districts will receive an unprecedented infusion of state and federal funds. Under ARPA, California's school districts will receive a total of \$13.5 billion; of these funds, districts must use 20% to address lost learning time for students and can use the remaining 80% to meet local needs and priorities. California will also receive \$98.7 million in federal funding for students experiencing homelessness; 75% of the first allocation (\$24.7 million, issued in April 2021) must be distributed to districts. In addition, in March 2021, California appropriated \$4.6 billion in COVID-19 relief funding to districts to provide students with extended learning time; accelerated learning opportunities; and integrated student supports, including mental health services. From this fund, districts will receive \$1,000 per student experiencing homelessness.

Districts should invest these resources in capacity building to help them meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Specifically, districts should:

- **Improve identification of students experiencing homelessness by dedicating more staff time and resources to liaison responsibilities.** Large numbers of students experiencing homelessness may have become disengaged after schools closed in March 2020 due to COVID-19. Districts should include in their recovery plans resources to identify and reengage these students. Homeless liaisons—which districts are required to maintain under McKinney-Vento—should play a key part in facilitating these activities. However, in most districts, liaisons also serve other roles, which can limit their ability to execute their multiple responsibilities under McKinney-Vento. Districts should examine the demands placed on staff serving as homeless liaisons and, if needed, increase the amount of staff time and resources dedicated to liaison responsibilities. In addition, districts should consider designating school-site liaisons, a nationally recommended best practice in which school-level liaisons collaborate with the district liaison, serve as a school-site point of contact, and help school staff understand the needs and rights of students experiencing homelessness.
- **Increase access to school services and supports that reduce barriers to student engagement.** Even once students are identified as experiencing homelessness, districts must mobilize services and supports to ensure these students can attend school and access learning opportunities. However, students experiencing homelessness face significant barriers to school engagement, including high rates of chronic absenteeism and school mobility. As districts work to support students' return to in-person learning, they should increase access to services and supports that help reengage them and remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and participation. This should include (1) updating district websites and enrollment materials to ensure they contain information about students' rights under McKinney-Vento, in multiple languages that represent a district's linguistic diversity; (2) ensuring enrollment systems allow students to indicate their living situations and provide students experiencing homelessness with pathways for enrolling without

needing to provide a parent or guardian signature, proof of residency, or other documents; and (3) providing transportation options that ensure students can get to and from their school of origin and participate in learning opportunities, including after-school, summer learning, and early learning programs.

- **Provide wraparound supports through community schools and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).** Housing insecurity, school instability, and the experience of homelessness can negatively affect students in multiple ways, including their social and emotional wellness, mental health, physical health, and educational achievement. By building or expanding community school initiatives, counties and districts can organize the infrastructure needed to secure and coordinate wraparound supports across systems and address the multifaceted challenges these students face. To further ensure that services and supports reach the students who need them, districts should also implement school-level coordinative structures, such as MTSS, to efficiently identify and meet student needs without cumbersome procedures in the way.

Introduction

California is in the midst of a crisis of homelessness, with about 1 in 5 of the nation's population of students identified as experiencing homelessness residing in the state.¹ Between 2015–16 and 2018–19, the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness in grades k–12 rose by 7%.² This increase mirrors a pattern seen in a majority of states and is likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, which has led to elevated unemployment and has disproportionately impacted already vulnerable communities.³

In 2018–19, nearly 270,000 students in California were identified as experiencing homelessness.⁴ A 2019 state auditor's report noted that this number almost certainly reflects an undercount.⁵ An accurate count of student homelessness remains a challenge for a variety of reasons—fear of stigmatization, the mobile nature of this student population, inadequate staff capacity, and uneven school reporting procedures.

Addressing the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness begins with increasing awareness and identifying those in need of services. A study by the American Civil Liberties Union and California Homeless Youth Project noted that homeless liaisons—school- or district-based staff charged with supporting families experiencing homelessness—lack sufficient capacity and resources to effectively identify and support families experiencing homelessness.⁶ Researchers at the Center for the Transformation of Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles conducted a landscape analysis of students experiencing homelessness in California to better understand their opportunities from cradle to career and concluded that students in this group face a complex, multifaceted set of challenges that merit attention across multiple sectors, including education, health, and housing.⁷

This study is a contribution to these efforts to better understand the opportunities and academic outcomes of students experiencing homelessness. It describes the population of students experiencing homelessness in California in 2018–19 and then, drawing on earlier data from the California Department of Education,⁸ identifies several school- and student-level factors associated with differences in academic achievement for these students.

With implementation of a new accountability system and the Local Control Funding Formula—which targets additional funds to historically underserved groups (English learners, students in foster care, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds)⁹—California has signaled its commitment to advancing educational equity. However, achieving the promise of a high-quality public education system for all students requires that educators and policymakers first understand what this population of students looks like and what barriers to success they face. This report reviews the findings about students experiencing homelessness in California and the implications for practice and policy.

These findings are of increased significance as the state grapples with the complex issues arising from COVID-19. The pandemic-driven economic downturn raises the risk of poverty and homelessness for already vulnerable families, and school closures—needed to safeguard the health of students, staff, and families—have brought additional challenges that threaten to exacerbate extant inequalities, such as difficulty accessing school meals, technology, educational services for those with additional learning needs, and other school-based supports. Although the research for this report was conducted prior to the pandemic, its findings can help local and state decision-makers better understand the multilayered issues these students face, as well as potential solutions.

Background and Context: Students Experiencing Homelessness

Who Are Students Experiencing Homelessness?

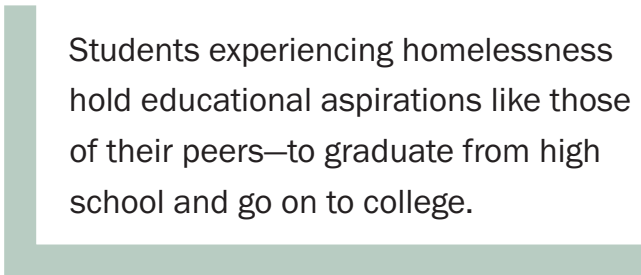
Students experiencing homelessness in California are defined under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”¹⁰ The federal law requires that all local education agencies (LEAs)—public school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education—ensure that students experiencing homelessness “have access to the same free, appropriate public education” as other children.¹¹

In addition to providing limited federal funding, McKinney-Vento also requires specific actions from districts. Among these, districts must designate a liaison for students experiencing homelessness and provide for school continuity, including transportation. If students experiencing homelessness do change schools, the receiving school and district must ensure immediate enrollment and full participation in school.

Students experiencing homelessness are not a single homogeneous group. They include students across a range of grades, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and in both urban and rural areas.¹² They also include students in different temporary living arrangements, which may include students forced to live doubled up with others due to economic hardship or loss of housing; students living in a motel, shelter, or substandard housing; and youth living unsheltered. They may also be unaccompanied youth—students experiencing homelessness who are “not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.”¹³ The complexity and vulnerability of their economic conditions and their often high mobility means these students may be underidentified and thus at risk of being underserved.

Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to have lower achievement and graduation rates and higher incidences of suspension and chronic absence. Using California’s five-color rating accountability system, the state achieved an “Orange” rating (the second lowest), indicating low and/or declining performance, on three of the six indicators on the California School Dashboard for students experiencing homelessness in 2019.¹⁴ In English language arts performance and graduation rates, the state received a “Yellow” rating (indicating moderate and unchanging performance); for chronic absenteeism, the state received a “Red” rating, the lowest of the five categories.

Yet students experiencing homelessness hold educational aspirations like those of their peers—to graduate from high school and go on to college.¹⁵ What separates students experiencing homelessness from their peers are the challenges of their circumstances, often due to the cumulative effects of poverty and the instability and disruption of social relationships associated with high mobility. All students have the capacity to develop resilience and persevere in the face of adversity,¹⁶ underscoring the importance of supportive policy and school environments to help them foster resilience and academic success.¹⁷



Students experiencing homelessness hold educational aspirations like those of their peers—to graduate from high school and go on to college.

How Do Districts Receive Resources to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness?

States receive federal funding to support students experiencing homelessness under McKinney-Vento, with at least 75% to be distributed to districts and county offices of education. In 2018–19, California received around \$10.6 million under the Act and allocated around 95% of these funds to districts and county offices of education.¹⁸ These funds are not distributed to states based on their homeless student counts, but rather on the ratio of funds they received under this program in 2001.¹⁹ As a result, in 2018–19, California received only \$41 per student experiencing homelessness under McKinney-Vento, compared to \$64 per student nationally.

The majority of McKinney-Vento funds that California receives are distributed as a competitive grant for which districts must apply. Grants range from \$15,000 to \$250,000 depending on the number of identified students experiencing homelessness, but only a small fraction of districts with students experiencing homelessness apply for and receive these funds.²⁰ According to a report by the state auditor, in 2018–19, just 130 districts (around 6%) applied for McKinney-Vento funds, and of these, 73 were awarded funds.²¹ Thus, the majority of students experiencing homelessness in California are enrolled in districts with no federal funds dedicated to the implementation of McKinney-Vento’s provisions, some of which may require significant district investments, such as hiring homeless liaisons and providing students with transportation to school.²²

There can be a reciprocal relationship between the identification of students experiencing homelessness and districts receiving grants. Due in part to limited staff capacity, districts may be unaware of the extent of student homelessness. Coupled with the uncertainty of the grant, districts may not apply for these funds. Conversely, the application for and receipt of McKinney-Vento funds can increase awareness of student homelessness in a district and further develop district capacity to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.²³

Students experiencing homelessness are also eligible under Title I, Part A of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for assistance regardless of what school they attend. Districts are required to set aside part of their Title I, Part A funding to support students experiencing homelessness. Districts can use these funds to support students experiencing homelessness through education resources, targeted instruction, and strategies such as expanded learning time, greater parental involvement, and teacher professional learning.²⁴ Funds can also, among other things, be used to provide transportation, medical services, clothing, and school supplies or to pay for the McKinney-Vento liaison’s salary.

In California, districts also receive state funding under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) that can be used to support students experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is not a stand-alone category under the LCFF, but once identified as experiencing homelessness, these students are categorically eligible to receive free meals.²⁵ Students experiencing homelessness are thus included in a district’s unduplicated pupil count of high-need students, which determines how much additional grant funding—through supplemental and concentration grants—a district receives under the LCFF.²⁶

Districts have discretion under their Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) regarding how to allocate funds to best support the learning of students experiencing homelessness. However, they must describe in the LCAP Federal Addendum the services they will provide to students experiencing homelessness—including services they will provide using the proportion of Title I,

Part A funds that they must reserve to serve these students—to support enrollment, attendance, and student success.²⁷ Districts with a “numerically significant” number (i.e., 30 or more) of students experiencing homelessness must also include planned goals, actions, and expenditures for these students in their LCAPs.²⁸ However, the state’s main LCAP template does not prompt districts to specify how they spent funds on students experiencing homelessness or how they will increase or improve services for these students, as they are required to do for students in foster care, English learners, and students from low-income families.²⁹ As a result, LCAPs may not show, with the same level of detail required for other student groups, how districts have targeted resources to improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness, particularly in districts where these students may not meet the “numerically significant” threshold due to underidentification.

Due to the expected continuation of pandemic-driven disruptions to in-person schooling, California substituted LCAPs with Learning Continuity and Attendance Plans, which explicitly mention students experiencing homelessness, for the 2020–21 school year.³⁰ In particular, districts were prompted to specify what additional supports they would provide during distance learning and the actions they would pursue to address learning loss and accelerate learning for students experiencing homelessness, among other student groups.

In addition to McKinney-Vento and LCFF dollars, California’s school districts will receive additional support through federal and state COVID-19 relief funds, including \$13.5 billion under the federal American Rescue Plan Act, which was signed into law in March 2021.³¹ Districts must use 20% of these funds to address lost learning time for students, but they are free to spend the remaining 80% to meet local needs and priorities.³² California will also receive \$98.7 million in federal funding for students experiencing homelessness. The first allocation, released to states in April 2021, was \$24.7 million, 75% of which (\$18.5 million) had to be distributed to districts.³³ In March 2021, California appropriated \$4.6 billion in COVID-19 relief funding to districts to provide students with extended learning time; accelerated learning opportunities; and integrated student supports, including mental health services. From this fund, districts will receive \$1,000 per student experiencing homelessness, with the remaining amount allocated to districts through the LCFF.³⁴

Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness Is Challenging

The number of students in grades k–12 identified as experiencing homelessness in California schools is growing. Cumulative data from the California Department of Education (CDE) show this number rose by 7% from 251,000 in 2014–15 to nearly 270,000 in 2018–19, even as the total number of all students declined slightly over the same period.³⁵ This increase might have arisen from changing economic conditions and, in some districts, improved identification of homelessness. However, given that the identification of students experiencing homelessness remains a significant challenge for many districts, these numbers are likely an undercount.³⁶ Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the loss of employment and housing security for many families, further increasing the likelihood that these numbers underestimate current student homelessness in the state. With students not physically at school due to the pandemic, identification of student homelessness may be especially challenging.

There are several reasons why students may not be identified as experiencing homelessness. Students can experience homelessness for various periods and at different times during the year, and students and parents may not wish to identify themselves as experiencing homelessness. For example, families may regard their situation as temporary and not wish to notify schools or districts

of their circumstances; they may be concerned about stigmatization and bullying; or they may fear disclosure could draw involvement from Child Protective Services. Furthermore, schools and districts may not be making families aware of their rights under McKinney-Vento or California law, nor of the services available to them.

Students experiencing homelessness are also a highly mobile student population, as we discuss later in this report, further complicating identification. Disruption of living arrangements may mean that students have to move schools and districts multiple times in a single school year. Movement between schools requires coordination and the building of new relationships between students, their families, and the receiving school. Absent strong, trusting relationships, students might not feel comfortable divulging that they are experiencing homelessness.

Disruption of living arrangements may mean that students have to move schools and districts multiple times in a single school year.

Other identification issues may result from limited school or district capacity. Each district is required to designate a staff member to serve as a local liaison for students experiencing homelessness. Liaisons are responsible for working with and providing professional development to school staff on the McKinney-Vento Act and how to support students experiencing homelessness. However, in most districts, such liaisons also serve in multiple capacities, with one study finding that around two thirds of liaisons in California spend less than 5 hours a week on their liaison role.³⁷ Having multiple roles restricts district liaisons' time to identify and support students experiencing homelessness and to develop school staff capacity for the same purpose. High turnover among liaisons can also result in loss of relationships with community organizations and professional knowledge about how to effectively support schools in identifying and assisting students experiencing homelessness.³⁸

There are also local policy issues that can complicate identification. One such issue is identification requirements and methods. California schools typically identify students experiencing homelessness through a student housing questionnaire at the outset of the school year or upon enrollment. It may then be up to school staff to identify students who first experience homelessness during the school year. Although the McKinney-Vento Act requires professional development for school staff, implementation can be uneven, and many staff may not have sufficient training to identify the signs of homelessness.³⁹ For example, staff insufficiently familiar with the McKinney-Vento provisions requiring immediate enrollment may ask for proof of residency or other documentation. Moreover, some data systems may not permit entry of two families at a single residence, complicating enrollment for those staying in doubled-up arrangements.⁴⁰

A second policy issue relates to funding and incentives. The small amount of federal funds that California receives under McKinney-Vento—and in turn, the small amount or, in most cases, the absence of federal funds that districts receive under the Act—may be insufficient to encourage districts to apply for funds and provides limited funding for capacity development for those that do. As noted above, some research finds that the receipt of McKinney-Vento funds can motivate districts to improve identification and support for students experiencing homelessness. Regardless of grants, however, identifying students as experiencing homelessness triggers the responsibilities outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act, in ESSA Title I, and under state law.

Homelessness, Student Well-Being, and Educational Achievement

Poverty is the strongest predictor of homelessness for families. Homelessness is often regarded as a manifestation of acute poverty, although other contributing factors, such as a lack of affordable housing, also play an important role.⁴¹ Some students are disproportionately likely to be impacted by homelessness. Without adequate supports, youth such as teenage parents and those who have faced family conflict or abuse are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness.⁴² In addition, the incidence of homelessness is higher among those who identify as LGBTQ, with lack of understanding and discrimination, inside and outside the home, cited as issues.⁴³ Rates of homelessness also tend to be higher among students of color owing to factors such as inequitable access to housing and economic opportunity.⁴⁴

Homelessness impacts youth in many ways. Housing instability can separate children from family and school and neighborhood friends, and this disruption can have important consequences for students' social and emotional well-being.⁴⁵ Students and families experiencing homelessness are also more likely to experience depression, anxiety, or symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴⁶ Absent supportive interventions, this combination of challenges to student well-being may impact students' opportunity to learn.⁴⁷

The experience of homelessness also increases risks to students' physical health.⁴⁸ Housing instability and acute poverty can lead to food instability, an increased reliance on low-quality or fast foods, and an increased likelihood of experiencing hunger.⁴⁹ High mobility among families experiencing homelessness can complicate efforts to receive needed health services.⁵⁰ Moreover, acute poverty can force students and families to choose between paying for medical services or other necessities, such as food.

Students' educational achievement is negatively associated with the experience of homelessness. Homelessness and high mobility are risk factors for lower achievement beyond that of poverty alone. Several studies find that highly mobile students and students experiencing homelessness have lower initial reading and mathematics scores, as well as slower rates of growth, even when compared with peers who are from low-income families but are more residentially stable.⁵¹ In one study, mathematics achievement was slowed for both the year in which homelessness occurred and the following year.⁵² The experience of homelessness is also negatively associated with other measures of educational achievement, including both grade repetition and lower graduation rates.⁵³

School, District, and Community Roles in Supporting Learning for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Educational attainment can be of particular significance in the lives of students experiencing homelessness. Lower educational achievement is not only a potential outcome of homelessness but also a risk factor for future homelessness. A national survey of youth experiencing homelessness found that youth without a high school diploma or GED credential were at a greatly elevated risk for homelessness as young adults.⁵⁴ The absence of a high school credential may limit youth to lower-paying employment opportunities, thus further risking homelessness.

Schools and districts can play a role in mitigating the factors associated with lower educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. One such factor is the living arrangement or shelter type. Different living arrangements may expose students to different combinations of

stressors. For example, although students in doubled-up housing may have access to peers or family members, they are also likely to live in cramped spaces, with few or no quiet places for studying.⁵⁵ Likewise, some studies find that temporary shelters often lack space and are un conducive to educational needs.⁵⁶ Some studies find that the duration of homelessness matters for students' social and emotional well-being as well as academic outcomes.⁵⁷ This underscores the importance of improving district and school staffs' understanding of homelessness and the early provision of appropriate supports.⁵⁸

Schools and districts can play a role in reducing school mobility, which studies show is a key challenge facing students experiencing homelessness.⁵⁹ Changing schools means new routines for students; arranging for credit transfers; and navigating different school environments, classes, curricula, and teacher expectations.⁶⁰ Students experiencing homelessness who change schools are also more likely to move to schools with fewer resources.⁶¹ Several studies find that students experiencing homelessness also have more absences from school than their housed peers, further inhibiting opportunities to learn.⁶²

The high mobility of students experiencing homelessness also disrupts key relationships that can support student success. Each new school environment means creating new relationships with peers, teachers, administrators, and counselors. Research finds that the experience of homelessness is associated with difficulty with classroom task engagement and social engagement, that is, skills such as the ability to work independently and persist with a task and to cooperate with peers and ask for and receive help.⁶³

Schools and districts can help create educational environments that foster positive relationships among students, staff, and peers and help support the social and emotional needs of students experiencing homelessness. Students can experience homelessness as disempowering, challenging their self-concepts and leading to lower self-esteem, which can impede both learning and the formation of relationships.⁶⁴ Highly mobile students are more likely to feel socially detached, which can lead to social and behavioral problems.⁶⁵ In the absence of supportive relationships, students are also less likely to fully participate in schooling, exacerbating the risk of absences and dropping out.⁶⁶ Students experiencing homelessness may have fewer opportunities to form peer relationships; these relationships influence the development of interpersonal skills—such as negotiation and conflict resolution—that support learning. Warm, responsive relationships with adults and peers can buffer against the stresses of poverty or homelessness.⁶⁷ Establishing a sense of belonging and stability in the school environment is important for all students but especially when housing is unstable.⁶⁸

Transportation policies thus play a key role in school attendance and stability.⁶⁹ This is especially the case when a student's living arrangement changes to one outside the district, where district-operated bus services do not run,⁷⁰ or in rural areas where transportation options might be limited.⁷¹ If it is determined that remaining in the school of origin is in the student's best interest, the McKinney-Vento Act requires that transportation to the school of origin be provided by the district. If the student's living arrangement is in another district, the two districts must determine how to share the responsibility and cost of transportation, or share equally.

Policy implementation also matters. As one study noted, although the provision of bus tokens may be sufficient for compliance with McKinney-Vento, accommodating for the diversity of circumstances of students experiencing homelessness is needed to support equitable access to

education.⁷² Consistency of transportation and school stability are enhanced when there is a strong connection among stakeholders. These include networks of community agencies, district homeless education and transportation departments, and connections between the district or school of origin and the district of residence.⁷³

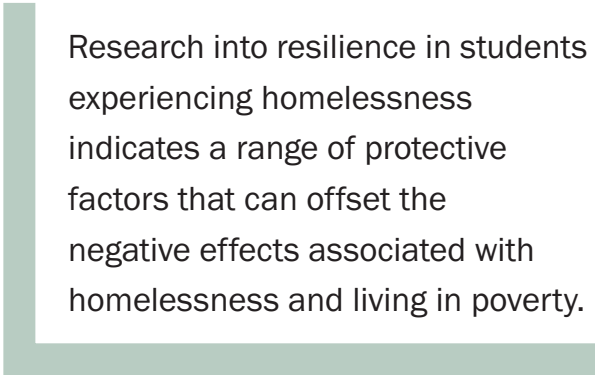
School disciplinary policy and practices can also play important roles in supporting learning for this student population. Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be exposed to stressors outside of school or to have suffered trauma, which in some cases can result in increased behavioral issues.⁷⁴ Moreover, the experience of homelessness itself is a form of trauma. Homelessness disrupts supportive social networks, such as family and friends, and the sense of control over one's life, including feelings of safety and stability.⁷⁵ Such trauma can lead to behavioral challenges, with research finding that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be referred for discipline than their peers.⁷⁶

Discipline that leads to school removal (i.e., suspensions and expulsions) can disrupt the stability that a school environment can provide and lead to a sense of disengagement, which may further result in negative behaviors and lower educational outcomes.⁷⁷ Studies find that preventive disciplinary and restorative justice approaches focused on repairing relationships and addressing the underlying causes of behavior are more successful at preventing minor behavioral issues from escalating into crises and can support a positive school climate.⁷⁸ The strategies that schools and districts use to approach problematic behaviors of students experiencing homelessness can thus have important impacts on student engagement with school and learning outcomes.

Research into resilience in students experiencing homelessness indicates a range of protective factors that can offset the negative effects associated with homelessness and living in poverty.⁷⁹ While some of these are attributable to individual and family characteristics, including early life experiences, there are also policy interventions that can help foster protective factors. These include interventions to support families as well as social and emotional learning curricula.⁸⁰

Such strategies include providing adult and peer mentors who support social engagement and improve classroom environments,⁸¹ the use of tutoring and portfolios to support academic progress, and professional learning to build educator awareness and challenge prior perceptions regarding students experiencing homelessness.⁸²

Early childhood education also plays an important role in developing resilience. Adverse experiences in early childhood can impact development and school readiness, with effects for learning that can persist into schooling.⁸³ Early intervention and exposure to high-quality and well-implemented early childhood education programs are effective in supporting both foundational skills, such as executive function, which can support engagement with learning,⁸⁴ and early academic skills, with lasting impacts into the school years.⁸⁵ Although this report focuses on learning for students experiencing homelessness in grades k–12, these years may be regarded as part of a continuum of learning that stretches across early childhood through college, with opportunities for support throughout.



Research into resilience in students experiencing homelessness indicates a range of protective factors that can offset the negative effects associated with homelessness and living in poverty.

Receiving supportive housing services has also been shown to positively impact student well-being and support educational achievement.⁸⁶ Coordination among school, district, and community agencies is important in connecting students and families with needed services. However, students staying in doubled-up arrangements due to economic hardship and those staying in motels—together accounting for the vast majority of students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act—may not meet the definition of homelessness used by some agencies, which can complicate the eligibility for and provision of some services. In particular, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development definition does not include families living doubled up due to economic hardship. This group accounts for as many as 80% of those experiencing homelessness as defined under the McKinney-Vento Act.⁸⁷

School-level structures like multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) can support students experiencing homelessness by providing an intervention framework that integrates academic, behavioral, and social and emotional competencies. Research finds that MTSS can be tailored to meet the specific needs of individual students, especially important given the complex needs of this student group.⁸⁸ MTSS also has to be well implemented to provide services effectively, which can be made challenging by the highly mobile nature of homelessness.⁸⁹

About This Study

This study begins with an overview of students experiencing homelessness in 2018–19 sourced from publicly available data. Thereafter, the majority of this report draws on data from the state’s Smarter Balanced English language arts and mathematics assessments under the 2016 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and pairs it with key information from the state’s California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), received from the California Department of Education through a special request. These data are also paired with publicly available data on school enrollment, funding, and staffing to investigate several school-level factors associated with student learning.

It is important to note these 2016 data reflect a time prior to when substantial changes to the McKinney-Vento Act went into effect. Among other improvements, changes in October 2016 expanded the allowable uses of ESSA Title I, Part A funds reserved to support students experiencing homelessness; strengthened school stability provisions when determining the school that is in a child’s or youth’s best interest to attend; and allowed for expanded funding, professional development, and support specifically for the identification of homeless children and youth.⁹⁰ Despite the 2016 changes to the McKinney-Vento Act, we restricted our analyses to 2015–16 due to data quality issues at the time of research for some variables from more recent years.

Our analyses compare findings for students experiencing homelessness both with all students in the CAASPP-tested grades and, for some analyses, with economically disadvantaged students. As students experiencing homelessness are themselves categorically defined as economically disadvantaged, in most cases the comparison is made with those economically disadvantaged students who are not experiencing homelessness.

This study seeks to bridge several gaps in understanding about this vulnerable student population. First, the student-level CAASPP data allow us to build a profile of learning outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. Second, the CALPADS data include information on student mobility, allowing us to understand how frequently students experiencing homelessness move schools. Third, these data also include information on student discipline.

Additionally, for some analyses, we combine student-level data with information about the schools and districts in which students are enrolled. This allows us to understand how key contextual factors, such as teacher qualifications and teacher turnover, may further influence learning outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

However, this approach also has several key limitations. Our achievement analyses focus on CAASPP data and therefore necessarily omit students in non-tested grades (k–2, 9–10, and 12). Although we analyze learning outcomes as measured by the CAASPP English language arts and mathematics assessments in 2016, we were not able to combine these analyses with other learning outcomes and variables for this year, such as graduation and chronic absenteeism rates. To accommodate, in the next section of the report, we use the public data sets from 2018–19 to create a profile of students experiencing homelessness across all grades k–12.

Additionally, our findings reflect students who have been identified as experiencing homelessness during the school year, regardless of the number of times, duration, or initial date of homelessness. Despite the data being more comprehensive than a single point-in-time snapshot, they still do not capture all students experiencing homelessness. Further details of the method and study limitations may be found in the Appendix.

A Note on Language

Throughout this report, we mainly use the term “students experiencing homelessness” rather than “homeless students.” This choice is consistent with an approach that emphasizes homelessness as a circumstance that is external to the student and can change, not an inherent characteristic. We use the term “homeless” only in limited circumstances in this report and primarily in charts and tables for space considerations.

Definitions Used in This Report

- **Socioeconomically disadvantaged students:** Students who are economically disadvantaged and eligible for free or reduced-price meals (either by income or categorically) or who have parents who did not graduate from high school. Used in analyses of enrollment data.
- **Economically disadvantaged students:** Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Includes categorically eligible students, such as students from migrant families, students in foster care, and students experiencing homelessness. Used in analyses of CAASPP data.
- **Students experiencing homelessness:** Students identified in CALPADS as experiencing homelessness and/or whose record includes a homelessness living arrangement or shelter type.
- **All students:** In analyses of enrollment data, this refers to all students from publicly available data sets in grades k–12. In subsequent sections, it refers to students included in the data set from the grades eligible to participate in CAASPP assessments: grades 3–8 and 11.
- **Students with disabilities:** Students identified under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as eligible for special education services.
- **English learners:** Students who are defined as eligible for English language services according to their English proficiency levels.

Students Experiencing Homelessness in 2018–19 (K–12)

In this section, we report the number and distribution of students experiencing homelessness in California, their racial or ethnic composition, and their special education or English learner identification frequency in 2018–19. Additionally, the data show charter enrollment, chronic absenteeism rates, and graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness. Data are drawn primarily from cumulative enrollment data from California Department of Education (CDE) DataQuest and include students in all grades k–12.⁹¹ We also include analyses of publicly available files and data from the CDE. Comparison groups in this section are all students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

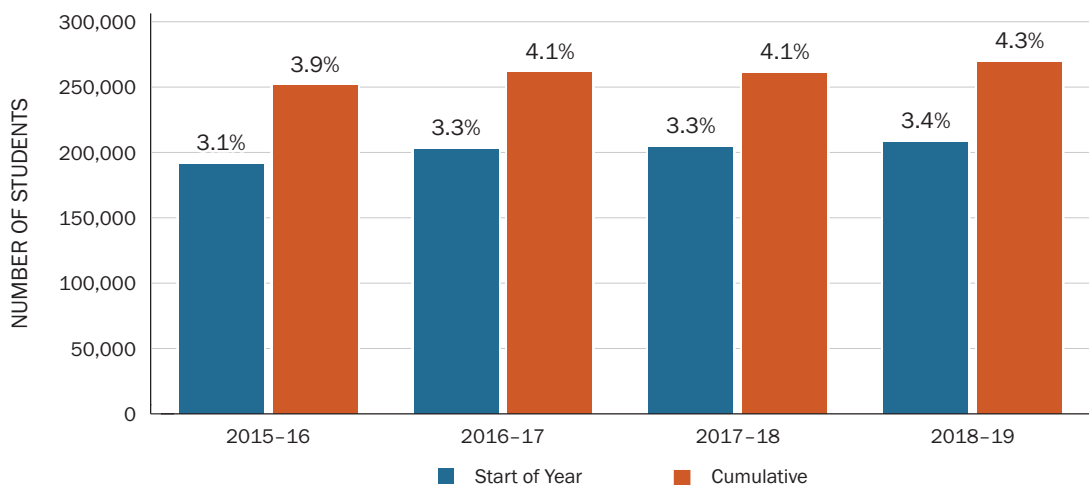
Demographics and Student Characteristics

The number of students experiencing homelessness is growing and is likely still an undercount

The number of k–12 students identified as experiencing homelessness in California public schools is large and growing. Figure 1 shows that the cumulative count of students identified as experiencing homelessness increased by more than 7% over 4 years, from 251,000 in 2015–16 to nearly 270,000 in 2018–19. This occurred even as the total number of students in the state decreased slightly over the same period. The proportion of students identified as experiencing homelessness thus rose from 3.9% to over 4.3%, or around 1 out of every 23 students.⁹²

Figure 1 also shows the difference between enrollment counts taken at the start of the school year (in October) and cumulative counts. In 2018–19, the proportion of students identified as experiencing homelessness was 3.4% at the start of the year, rising to 4.3% in cumulative counts. Thus, nearly a quarter of all students experiencing homelessness—around 62,000 students—were identified during the school year after the October count, underscoring the importance of school and district staff being trained to recognize the signs of homelessness.

Figure 1
Students Experiencing Homelessness in California
(2015–16 to 2018–19)



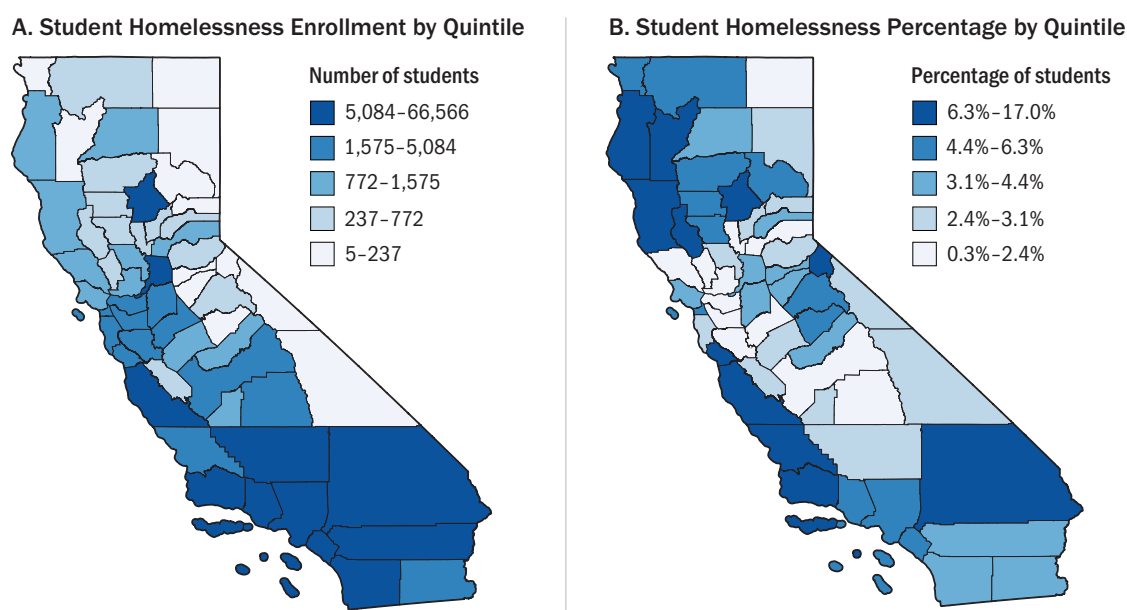
Data source: California Department of Education, DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Students experiencing homelessness are not evenly distributed in the state

Among California’s 58 counties, the five counties with the largest student enrollments—Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Orange, San Diego, and Riverside—also have the largest numbers of students experiencing homelessness. Together, these account for 62% of all students experiencing homelessness in the state. (See Figure 2, Map A.) Other counties have been disproportionately impacted by homelessness. These include coastal counties in central and northern California. In four California counties—Butte, Alpine, Santa Barbara, and Monterey—students experiencing homelessness constituted more than 10% of students enrolled in 2018–19. (See Figure 2, Map B.)

Figure 2
Distribution of Students Experiencing Homelessness

by County (2018–19), Total Number and Percentage



Data source: LPI analysis of cumulative enrollment and unduplicated student count data. California Department of Education, downloadable data files. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/downloadabledata.asp>.

The proportion of students experiencing homelessness also varies significantly by district (not pictured). In 9% of the more than 1,000 districts in California, at least 1 in 10 students were experiencing homelessness. While some of these were very small districts, they also included 55 districts with enrollments of at least 1,000 students. In 12 of these districts, the proportion of students experiencing homelessness exceeded 20%. In some districts—notably those in Butte County—homelessness was attributable to devastating wildfires that displaced a large number of students. In other districts, issues such as poverty and housing affordability predominate as drivers of homelessness.

By contrast, some districts reported few or no students experiencing homelessness. A 2019 state auditor’s report found that in 2017–18, 74% of local educational agencies (districts and charter schools) throughout California identified less than 5% of their economically disadvantaged students as experiencing homelessness, a benchmark figure for estimating student homelessness.⁹³ Our analysis found that among districts with more than 500 students, 32 reported no students

experiencing homelessness, including nine districts in which more than half of students enrolled were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This may be because there are, indeed, no students experiencing homelessness in these districts. Alternatively, this may reflect that identifying such students remains a challenge in some districts.⁹⁴

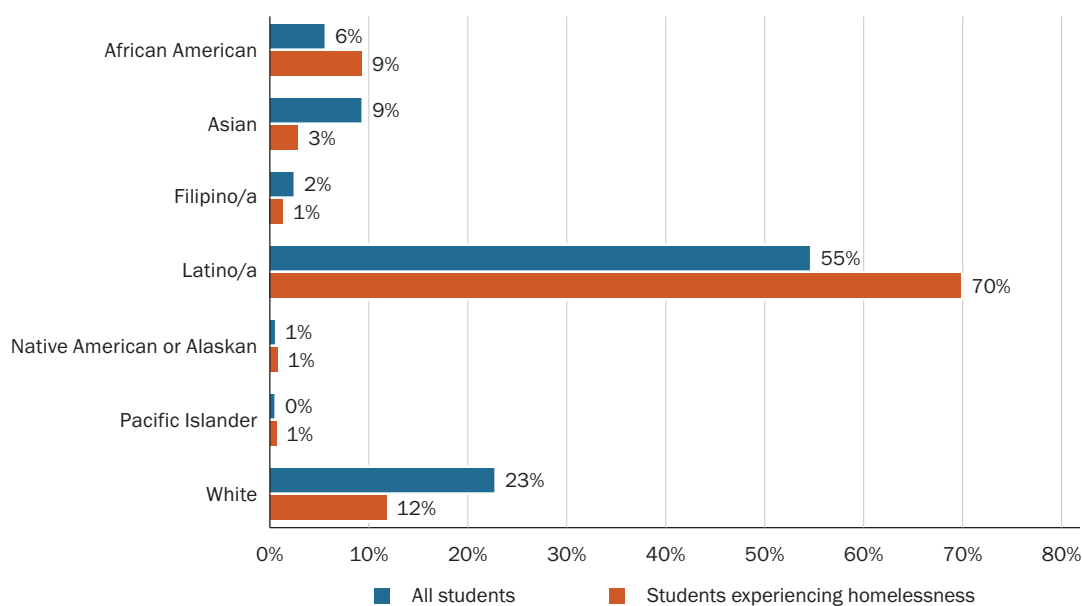
Homelessness is more prevalent among students from African American, Latino/a, Native American or Alaskan, and Pacific Islander backgrounds

While 4.3% of students were identified as experiencing homelessness according to cumulative enrollment data, more than 7% (around 1 in every 14) of African American students, 6% of Native American or Alaskan students, and 6% of Pacific Islander students were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2018–19.⁹⁵

This disproportionality can be seen more clearly when looking at students experiencing homelessness from each racial or ethnic group as a proportion of all students experiencing homelessness. (See Figure 3.) While Latino/a students represented around 55% of all students experiencing homelessness, nearly 70% of all California students experiencing homelessness were from Latino/a backgrounds. Similarly, African American students represented less than 6% of all students in grades k–12 but represented 9% of all students who were experiencing homelessness. Similar patterns were seen for Native American or Alaskan and Pacific Islander students.

By contrast, while White students represented around 23% of all k–12 students, they represented around 12% of those students experiencing homelessness.⁹⁶

Figure 3
Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race/Ethnicity
 (2018–19)



Notes: Percentages are based on cumulative enrollment data. Figures do not add up to 100%: This chart does not display figures for students with two or more races and students whose race/ethnicity was not reported.

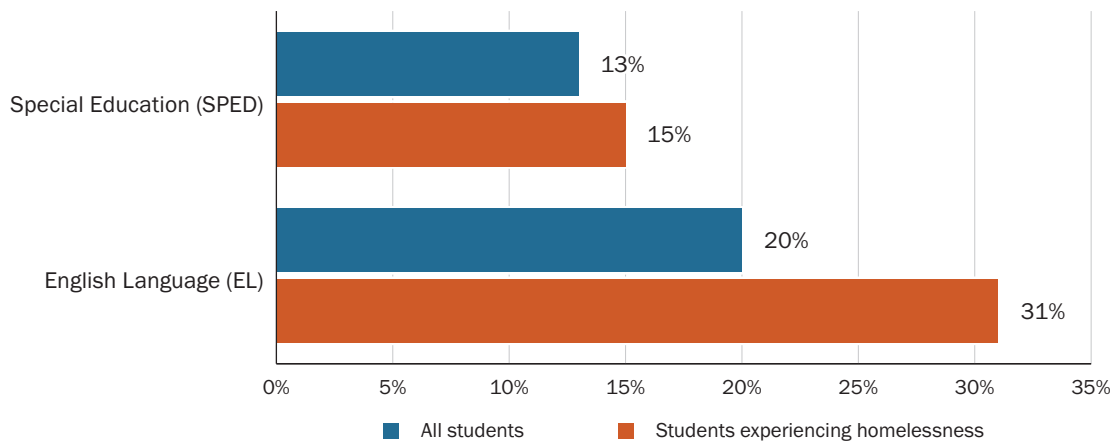
Data source: California Department of Education, DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be eligible for special education services and to be English learners

Among students experiencing homelessness, around 15% were eligible for special education services, a slightly larger proportion than among the overall student population (13%).⁹⁷ (See Figure 4.)

These differences were much larger when looking at students eligible for English learner services. Nearly 31% of students experiencing homelessness were classified as English learners, compared with just 20% of all students in grades k–12.

Figure 4
Students Experiencing Homelessness, by English Learner and Special Education Status
(2018–19)



Note: Percentages are based on cumulative enrollment data.

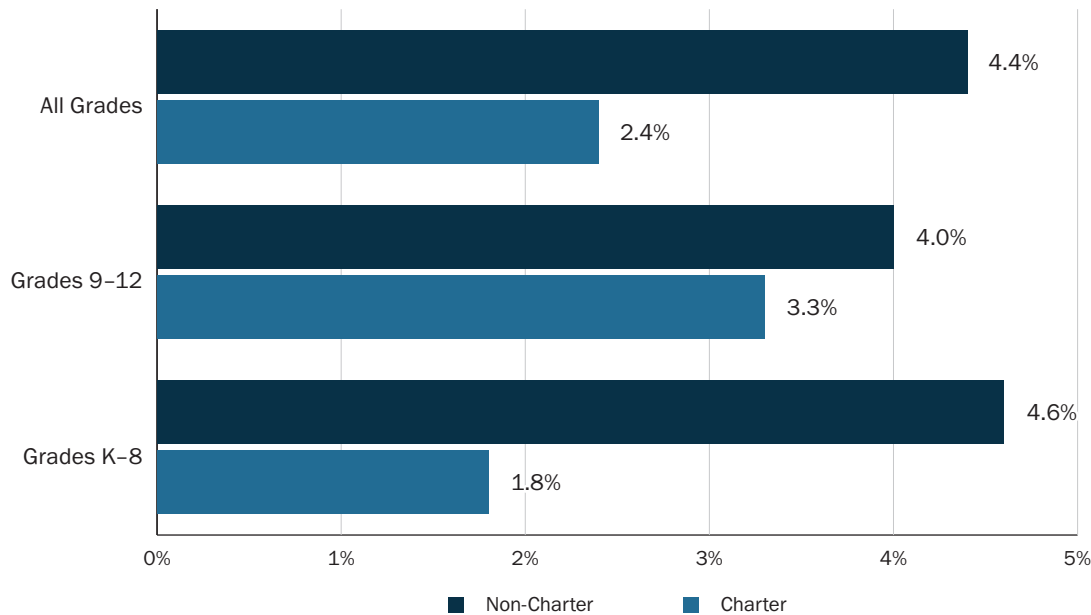
Data source: California Department of Education, DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

School Enrollment and Chronic Absenteeism

Students experiencing homelessness are less likely to be enrolled in charter schools

Students identified as experiencing homelessness represented 2.4% (or around 1 in 42) of all students enrolled in charter schools but 4.4% of those enrolled in non-charter schools.⁹⁸ (See Figure 5.) There were considerable differences across grade levels. In elementary and middle school grades, students experiencing homelessness represented 1.8% of students enrolled in charter schools compared to 4.6% in non-charter schools; in grades 9–12, these proportions were 3.3% and 4.0% respectively.

Figure 5
Enrollment of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Charter Schools
(by Grade Level, 2018–19)



Note: Percentages are based on cumulative enrollment data.

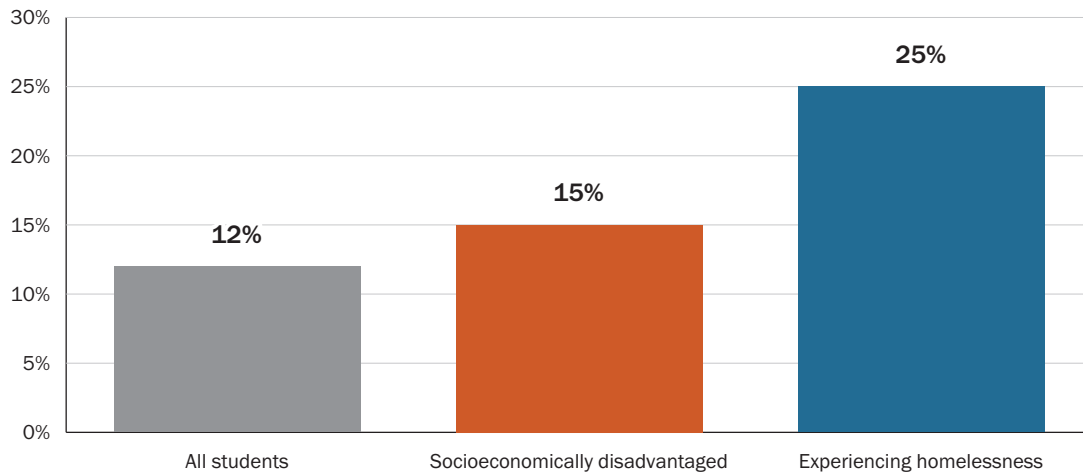
Data source: California Department of Education, DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be chronically absent

Housing instability can result in irregular or interrupted attendance patterns. Chronic absenteeism is a risk factor for educational outcomes: It is associated with decreased educational and social engagement, increased risk for ongoing absenteeism, lower achievement, and lower graduation rates.⁹⁹ Students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent—defined as being absent 10% or more of the days one was expected to attend—at significantly higher rates than other socioeconomically disadvantaged students and the overall student population.

The rate of chronic absence among students experiencing homelessness in 2018–19 was 25%. That is 60% higher than the rate among socioeconomically disadvantaged students (15%) and double the state average (12%). (See Figure 6.) Among students experiencing homelessness, some racial and ethnic groups have even higher rates of chronic absence. For example, more than 2 out of 5 African American students and Native American or Alaskan students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent.

Figure 6
Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Experiencing Homelessness
(2018–19)



Note: Percentages are based on cumulative enrollment data.

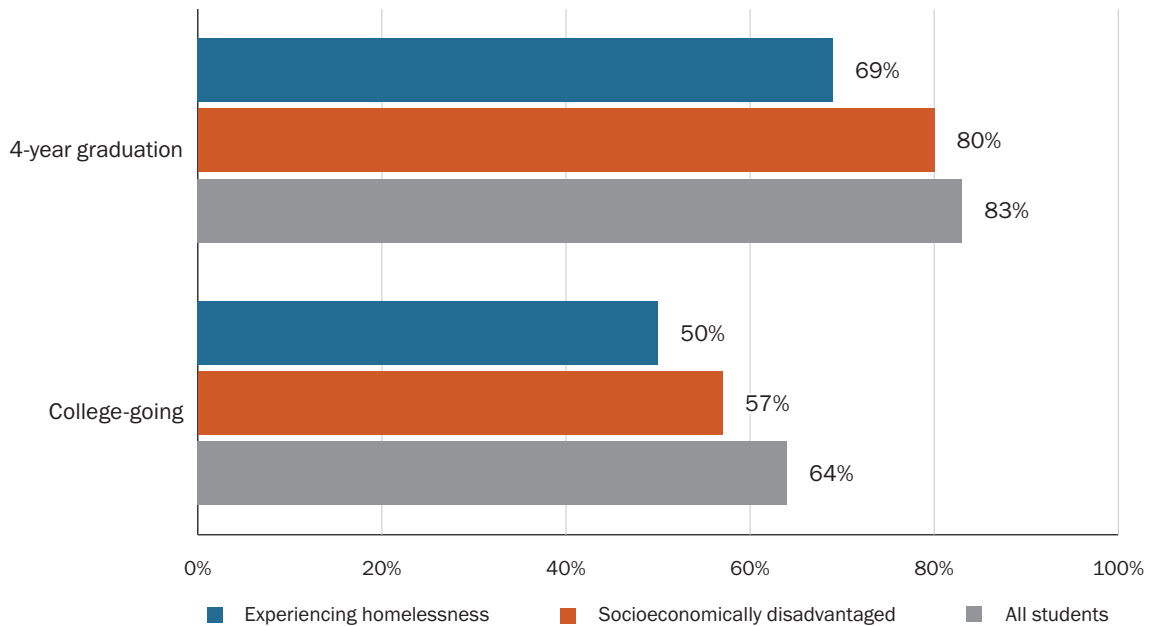
Data source: California Department of Education, DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Graduation and College-Going Rates

The experience of homelessness is negatively correlated with the prospects of completing high school and undertaking postsecondary study. The 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for students experiencing homelessness was lower than that of all students and of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Whereas the average graduation rate for socioeconomically disadvantaged students was 80%—just 3 percentage points lower than the state average—for students experiencing homelessness, it was just 69%, a stark 14 percentage point difference.¹⁰⁰ (See Figure 7.) The 5-year adjusted cohort graduation rate shows little improvement in closing this gap. Seventy-four percent of students experiencing homelessness graduated in 5 years compared to 86% of all students and 83% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.¹⁰¹

Among high school graduates, students experiencing homelessness were also less likely to meet University of California and California State University admission requirements compared to all students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Not completing these admission requirements, often referred to as A–G requirements, in secondary school could complicate postsecondary attendance or success, particularly considering that over 95% of students experiencing homelessness who do go on to college enroll in in-state institutions.¹⁰² In 2017–18, 50% of all high school graduates and 42% of socioeconomically disadvantaged graduates completed A–G requirements compared to just 28% of graduates experiencing homelessness. These rates were even lower for Native American or Alaskan (20%), African American (23%), and White (24%) high school graduates experiencing homelessness.¹⁰³

Figure 7
Four-Year Cohort Graduation and College-Going Rates
 (2017–18)



Note: Figures are based on cumulative enrollment data.

Data source: California Department of Education, DataQuest. <https://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Further, students experiencing homelessness who did graduate from high school were less likely than their counterparts to attend college. Among all California students, 64% of high school completers were enrolled in college the following year.¹⁰⁴ For students experiencing homelessness, this was just 50%.

Students identified as experiencing homelessness are a growing group of students across California. In recent years, identified homelessness rates have increased among all racial and ethnic groups. Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be eligible for special education services and to be identified as English learners, underscoring that student learning needs may be complex. The importance of addressing student needs is further indicated by the fact that this group is more likely to be chronically absent and less likely to graduate or attend college than their peers. In the next sections, we examine a subset of the population of students experiencing homelessness in California (those in tested grades 3–8 and 11) and explore the association between the experience of homelessness and student achievement as indicated by performance on the state’s CAASPP assessments. Additionally, we explore factors associated with performance on these assessments.

Schooling Characteristics for Students Experiencing Homelessness (2015–16, Grades 3–8 and 11)

This section uses CAASPP and enrollment data from 2015–16 to provide a closer analysis of students experiencing homelessness and the relationship with various educational inputs and outcomes. We investigate patterns in living arrangements among students experiencing homelessness and compare rates of school mobility and discipline among students experiencing homelessness and their peers. We also discuss the educational environments and educators to which students experiencing homelessness have access and how this compares to their peers.

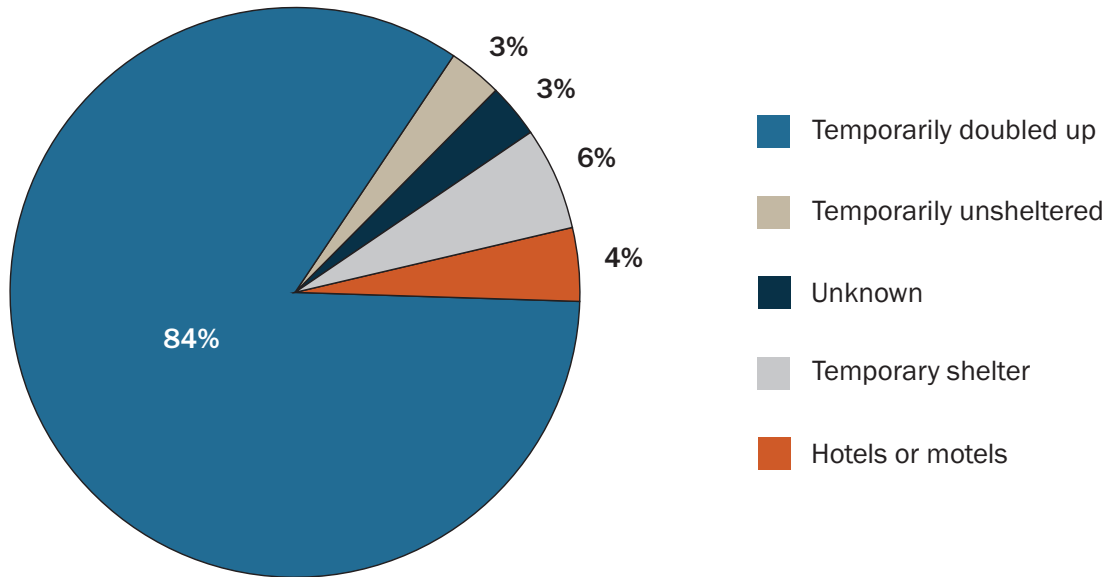
The data set covers students eligible for the CAASPP English language arts and mathematics assessments in the tested grades (3–8 and 11). Comparison groups in this section are CAASPP-eligible students and economically disadvantaged students not experiencing homelessness.¹⁰⁵ The data are captured at the end of the school year and thus include any student identified as experiencing homelessness during the 2015–16 school year, regardless of the student’s homelessness status at the time of assessment. The data set includes 3,329,986 students, among whom 105,143 experienced homelessness in 2015–16. Among these students experiencing homelessness were 2,154 unaccompanied youth—those not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Living Arrangements

We begin this section with an exploration of the housing situations for the population of students experiencing homelessness. As noted above, the type of living arrangement for students experiencing homelessness can make a difference in their educational outcomes.

The majority of students experiencing homelessness stayed in temporarily doubled-up living arrangements. California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) data identify four types of living arrangements for students experiencing homelessness. Living arrangements are generally recorded at the time of first enrollment, and students may move through various situations as they grapple with the experience of homelessness. The most common living arrangement recorded for students identified as experiencing homelessness was temporarily doubled up (84%), that is, staying with others due to economic hardship, loss of housing, or a similar reason. (See Figure 8.) One in seven students experiencing homelessness was identified as falling within one of the remaining categories: living in a hotel or motel; living in a temporary shelter or transitional housing; temporarily unsheltered, which may include living in abandoned buildings, campgrounds, vehicles, trailer parks, FEMA trailers, or bus or train stations; or the living arrangement was unknown.

Figure 8
Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Living Arrangement
(2015–16)



Notes: Percentages are computed for 105,143 students experiencing homelessness in grades 3–8 and 11. Records missing a shelter type are assigned “unknown.”

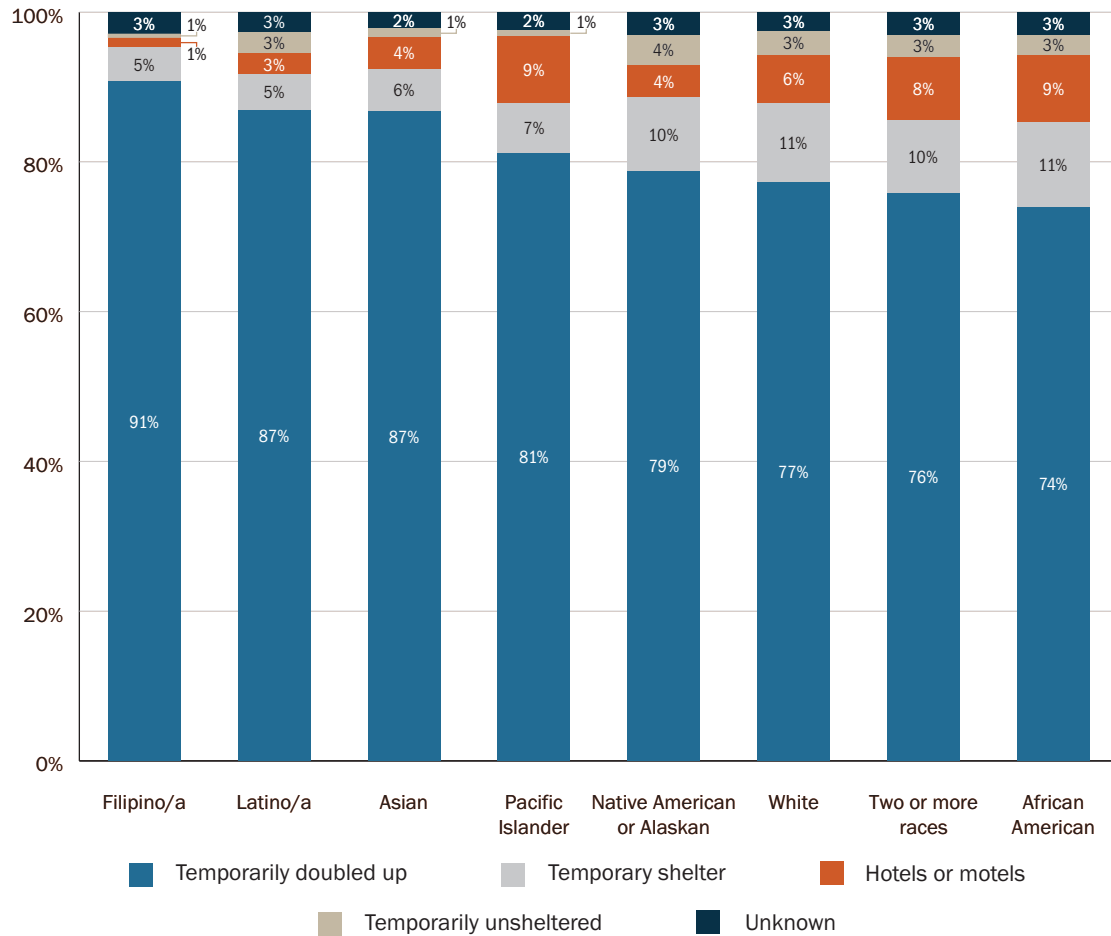
Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

These proportions differed for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. While the majority (73%) were also temporarily doubled up, unaccompanied youth were three times more likely to be in temporary shelters than other students experiencing homelessness (19% vs. 6%.)

There was also some variation in the type of living arrangement across racial or ethnic groups. While around 87% of Latino/a and 91% of Filipino/a students experiencing homelessness were identified as temporarily staying in doubled-up housing, this was true for just 74% of African American students. (See Figure 9.) Among African American students experiencing homelessness, around 11% were living in temporary shelters and 9% in hotels or motels, the largest proportion in each of these two categories among all racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 9
Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Living Arrangement
and Race/Ethnicity

(2015–16)



Note: Percentages are computed for 105,143 students experiencing homelessness in grades 3–8 and 11.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

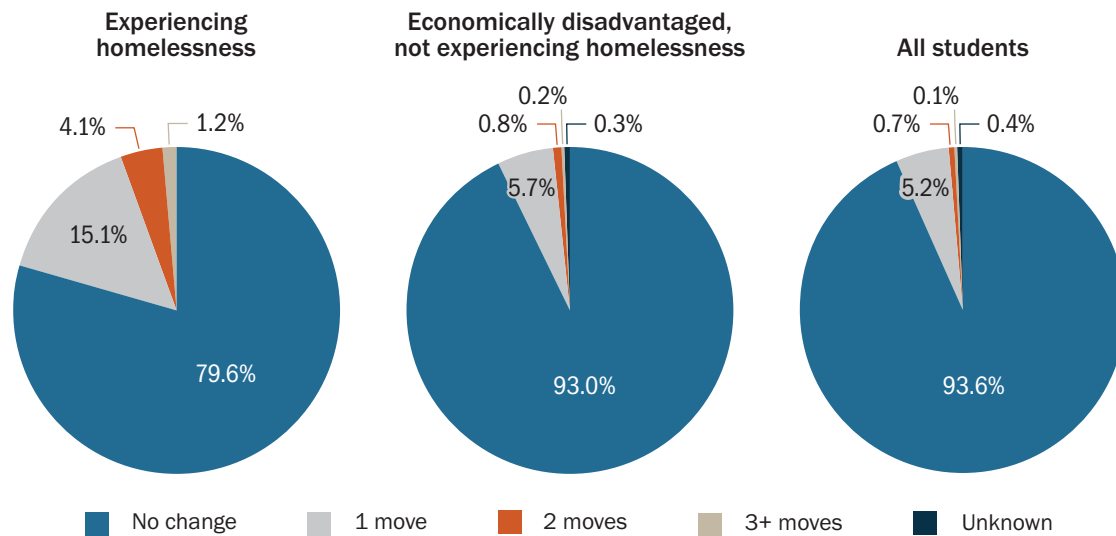
School Mobility

Frequent school moves can impact opportunities to learn; disrupt key relationships with teachers, peers, and the community; and require changes in schedules and transportation, leading to absenteeism and loss of learning time. In our analysis, we counted only moves in primary enrollments of at least 10 days in length for students in CAASPP-tested grades.

More than 1 in 5 students experiencing homelessness changed schools at least once during the school year—triple the rate of other students. Students experiencing homelessness had higher rates of school mobility than other student populations.¹⁰⁶ Although the majority of students experiencing homelessness (80%) attended the same school for the full school year,¹⁰⁷ 1 in 5 students changed schools at least once during the school year. (See Figure 10.) For unaccompanied

youth, these rates were twice as high, with 44% of these students having changed schools at least once. By contrast, school mobility rates were similar among economically disadvantaged students and all students in grades 3–8 and 11, suggesting that school mobility was due primarily to students’ homelessness status.

Figure 10
School Mobility Among Students Experiencing Homelessness
 (2015–16)



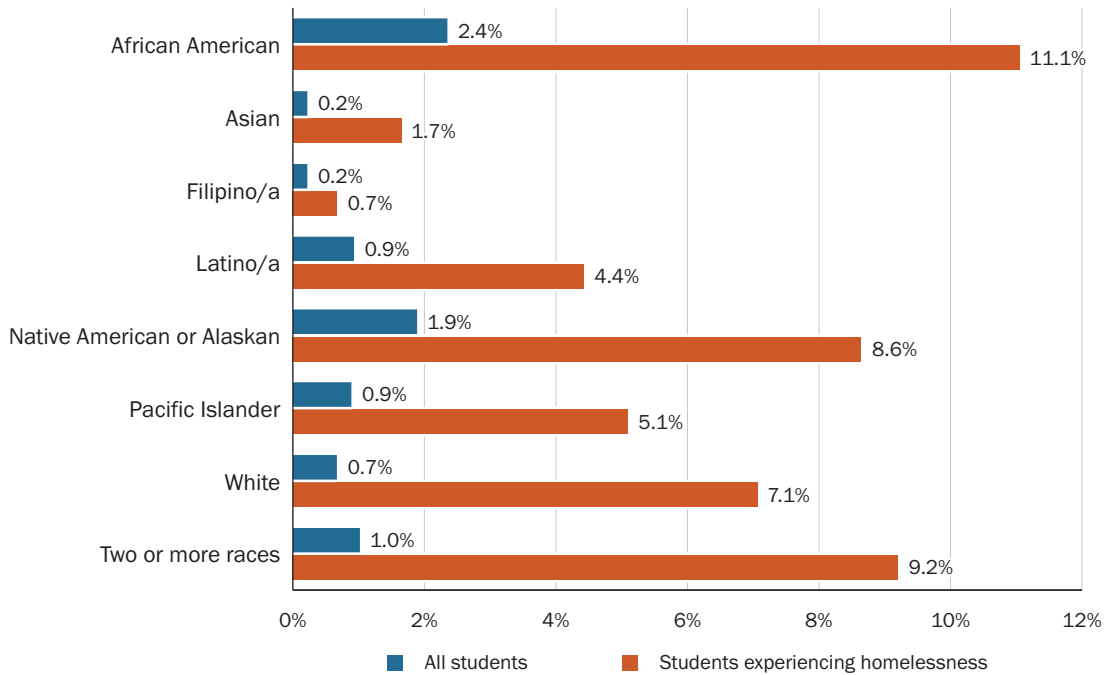
Note: Percentages are computed for 3,329,986 students in grades 3–8 and 11, including 105,143 students experiencing homelessness and 1,953,769 economically disadvantaged students not experiencing homelessness.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Especially important is movement between districts. Moving to a school in another district increases the likelihood of shifts in curriculum, instruction, and instructional resources as well as possible complications for credit transfer.¹⁰⁸ It also entails a change in the district liaison responsible for the coordination of that student’s support. Inter-district mobility was higher among students experiencing homelessness than among all students. Of the 21,438 students experiencing homelessness in grades 3–8 and 11 who moved schools at least once during the school year, 77% also changed districts, and 18% changed districts more than once, compared with 66% and 8%, respectively, among all students.

Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to change schools multiple times, especially African American students experiencing homelessness. Approximately 5% of students experiencing homelessness changed schools at least twice during the school year, around five times the school mobility rate of other economically disadvantaged students and all students. There were also some differences in this high mobility group by student race and ethnicity. In particular, we found that school mobility rates tended to be higher for African American students. Around 11% of African American students experiencing homelessness changed schools two or more times, more than twice the (already high) average for all students experiencing homelessness. (See Figure 11.) Rates were also higher among Native American or Alaskan and White students and students with two or more races.

Figure 11
High Mobility Among Students Experiencing Homelessness,
by Race/Ethnicity
 (2015–16)



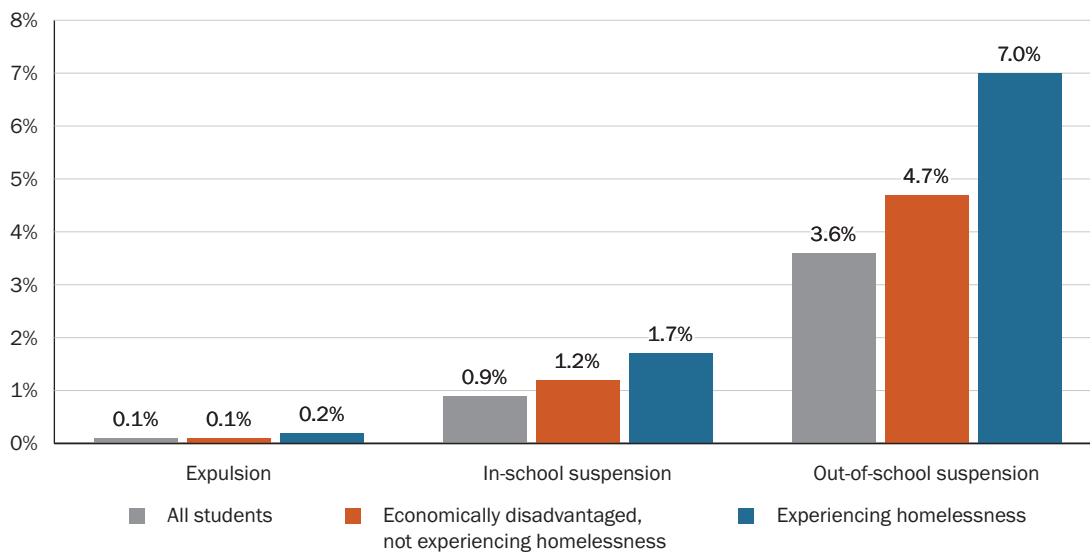
Notes: Percentages are computed for 3,329,986 students in grades 3–8 and 11, including 105,143 students experiencing homelessness. School moves may include a return to a previous school and an enrollment duration of at least 10 days. High mobility refers to two or more school changes in one year.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Discipline

Students experiencing homelessness were more likely than other students to experience exclusionary school discipline. Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to receive disciplinary action than other students, including those who are economically disadvantaged. This pattern held for all three of the disciplinary actions recorded: in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. Students experiencing homelessness were 50% more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than other economically disadvantaged students and twice as likely as all students. (See Figure 12.)

Figure 12
Exclusionary School Discipline Among Students
Experiencing Homelessness
 (2015–16)



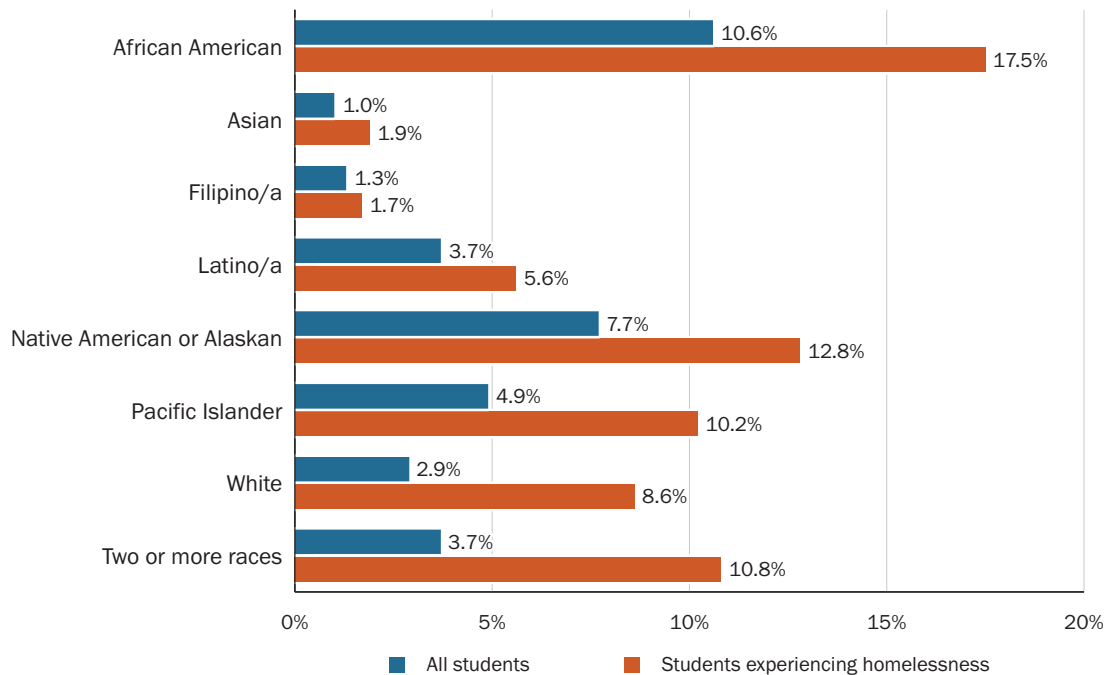
Note: Percentages are computed for 3,329,986 students in grades 3–8 and 11, including 105,143 students experiencing homelessness and 1,953,769 economically disadvantaged students not experiencing homelessness.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Students experiencing homelessness from all racial or ethnic groups were more likely than other students to be suspended. Higher suspension rates were found for students experiencing homelessness. For example, focusing just on out-of-school suspensions, students experiencing homelessness from all racial/ethnic groups were more likely to be suspended compared to all students. (See Figure 13.) Suspension rates were especially high for African American students experiencing homelessness, with more than 1 in every 6 (17%) suspended at least once during the 2015–16 school year. Suspension rates were also higher for Native American or Alaskan students and Pacific Islander students experiencing homelessness, at over 10% for each.

Although higher suspension rates were found for students experiencing homelessness across all racial/ethnic groups, the magnitude of the difference varied. For example, the suspension rate for all White students in CAASPP-tested grades was 2.9%, compared with 8.6% for those White students experiencing homelessness. The suspension rate for all Latino/a students in tested grades was 3.7%, compared with 5.6% for Latino/a students experiencing homelessness.

Figure 13
Out-of-School Suspensions Among Students Experiencing Homelessness,
by Race/Ethnicity
 (2015–16)



Note: Percentages are computed for 3,329,986 students in grades 3–8 and 11, including 105,143 students experiencing homelessness.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

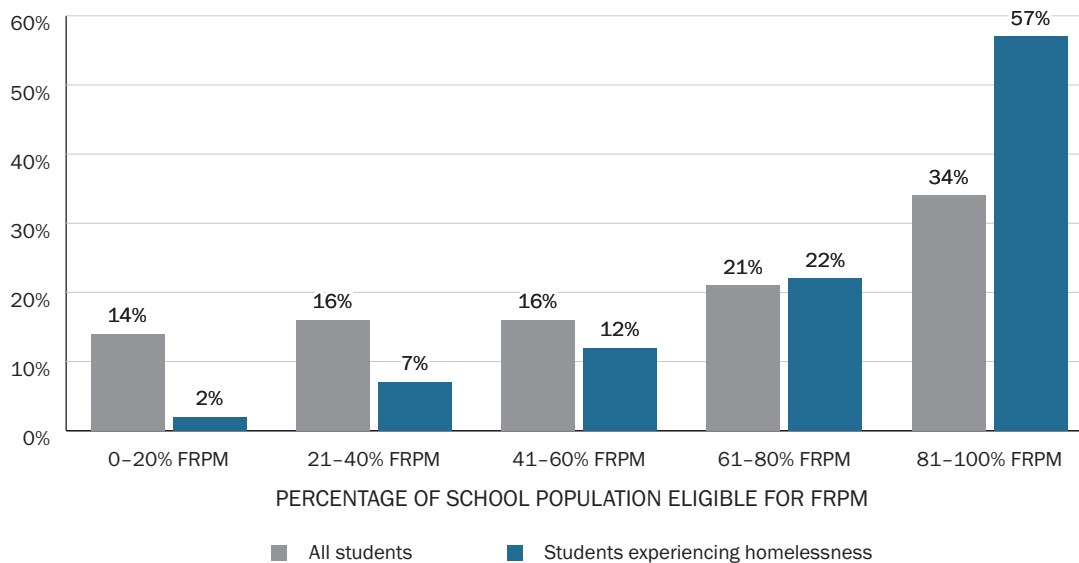
School Environments

When students face housing instability, they are more likely to move to schools and neighborhoods that are less well-resourced than their previous locations.¹⁰⁹ We therefore examined several school-related factors associated with students experiencing homelessness, including school poverty level and its association with the teaching workforce.

Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to be enrolled in schools with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students. We looked at the relative poverty level of the schools in which students experiencing homelessness were enrolled—using the schools’ proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals as a proxy for poverty—and compared all students with those experiencing homelessness.¹¹⁰ Around 57% of students experiencing homelessness were enrolled in schools in which the percentage of the school population eligible for free or reduced-price meals was greater than 80%. This compares with just 34% of all students. A further 22% of students experiencing homelessness were in schools with enrollment between 60% and 80% eligible for free or reduced-price meals. (See Figure 14.)

Figure 14
Distribution of Students Experiencing Homelessness, by School Poverty Level

(2015–16)



Notes: FRPM = free or reduced-price meals. Percentages are computed for 105,143 students experiencing homelessness in grades 3–8 and 11. Percentages may not add up to 100%, as some school enrollments were unknown.

Data sources: California Department of Education. (n.d.). Downloadable data files. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/downloadabledata.asp>. Data also provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

The concentration of students experiencing homelessness in high-poverty schools also means that they are more likely to be in schools with greater resourcing challenges. Among these challenges is the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. High-poverty schools tend to have higher teacher turnover—the proportion of teachers each year that either leave the school or leave teaching altogether—than low-poverty schools.¹¹¹ High teacher turnover negatively impacts learning for all students and particularly for students in lower-performing schools.¹¹² It disrupts collegial staff relationships and processes that can support a coherent approach to teaching and disrupts student–teacher relationships,¹¹³ which may be especially important for students experiencing homelessness.¹¹⁴

Similarly, the proportion of teachers with 2 years of experience or less tends to be higher in high-poverty schools, and the proportion of underprepared teachers—interns or those on permits or waivers—tends to be greater in high-poverty than low-poverty schools.¹¹⁵ Research finds that novice and underprepared teachers are less effective than fully qualified and experienced teachers.¹¹⁶

Together, these data indicate that students experiencing homelessness face significant obstacles to their academic success—higher rates of school mobility and discipline than their peers—beyond the immediate challenges associated with homelessness. It also extends to school environment conditions, such as being enrolled in schools with high concentrations of students experiencing poverty, high teacher turnover, and high proportions of underprepared teachers. In the following section, we analyze the impact of these inputs and conditions on the learning outcomes of students experiencing homelessness.

Student Achievement on CAASPP Assessments (2015–16, Grades 3–8 and 11)

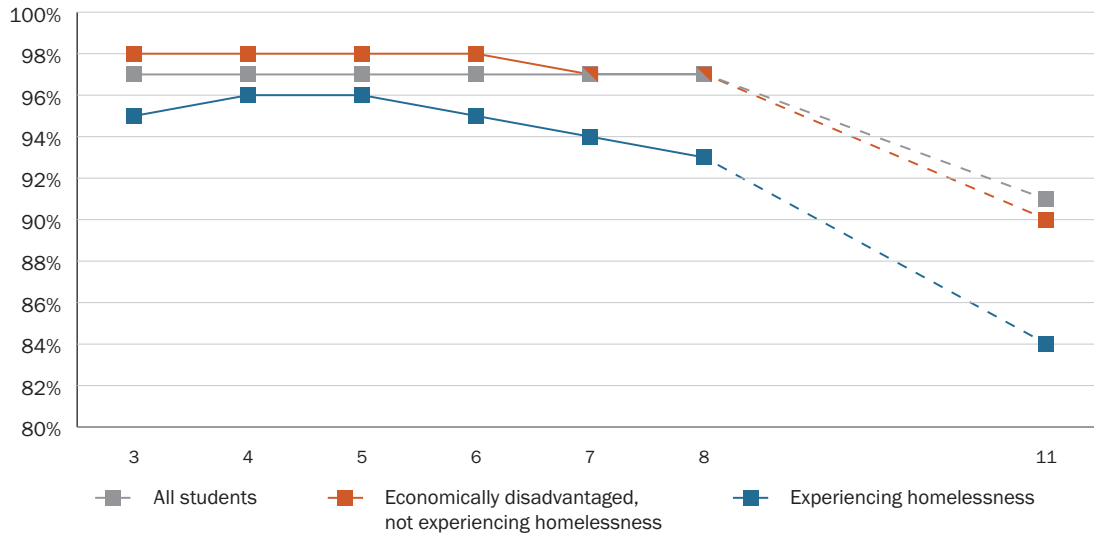
In this section, we examine the learning outcomes, and the factors associated with them, for students experiencing homelessness in California. We first describe rates in statewide testing among student groups. We then display results illustrating how various factors associated with student learning intersect with homelessness. For example, we look at outcomes for English learners and students with disabilities who experience homelessness. We also look at whether the type of living arrangement and school mobility are related to learning outcomes. The analysis looks at students in grades 3–8 and 11 using CAASPP and enrollment data from 2015–16.

Students experiencing homelessness were slightly less likely to participate in statewide testing, especially in grade 11. All California public school students in grades 3–8 and 11 are required to take statewide tests, known as the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), developed for each grade and subject. We look here only at the CAASPP Smarter Balanced assessments in English language arts and mathematics. We do not include the California Alternative Assessments for students whose disability prevents them from taking the CAASPP Smarter Balanced assessments.¹¹⁷

Students may not take the CAASPP assessment for a variety of reasons. For example, they may miss the test if they are excused by parental request, have a medical emergency, or moved schools during the testing window. Among students who take the test, some may not receive a valid score due to attempting or completing an insufficient number of questions.

Figure 15 shows the proportion of eligible students who took the CAASPP mathematics assessment and received a valid score in 2015–16. This rate for all students was generally high, averaging 97% for all students in grades 3–8, and 91% in grade 11. Students experiencing homelessness were only slightly less likely to take the assessment or to receive valid scores, with an average of 95% across grades 3–7, falling to 93% and 84% in grades 8 and 11, respectively. Similar patterns were observed for English language arts.

Figure 15
Percentage of Students With CAASPP Mathematics Scores
 (2015–16)



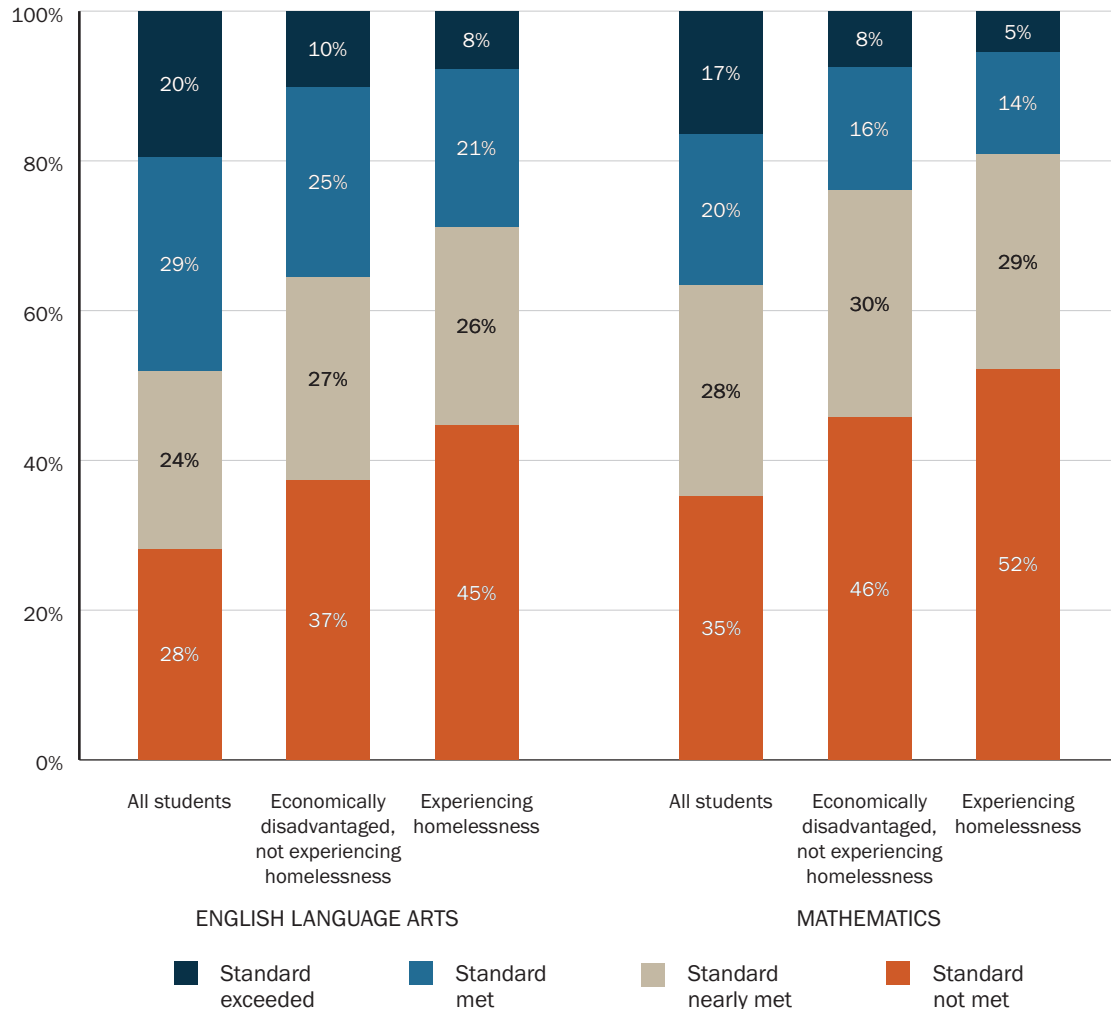
Note: Percentages are computed for 3,329,889 students in grades 3–8 and 11 eligible to take the CAASPP mathematics assessment, including 1,953,697 economically disadvantaged students not experiencing homelessness and 105,135 students experiencing homelessness.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

The reasons for the lower proportion of students experiencing homelessness with test scores are not clear. While a small proportion of such students had exemptions due to a parent request, medical emergency, or school move during the test-taking period, no reason was recorded in the majority of cases.

Students experiencing homelessness were less likely to meet or exceed standards than all students and other economically disadvantaged students. Results of the CAASPP for English language arts in grades 3–8 and 11 are presented in Figure 16. Statewide, 48% of all students met or exceeded state standards in English language arts, while 37% did so in mathematics. For economically disadvantaged students, the proportions were lower, at 36% and 24%, respectively. Outcomes for students experiencing homelessness were lower still than those of other economically disadvantaged students. Less than one third (29%) of students experiencing homelessness met or exceeded standards in English language arts and fewer than 1 in 5 (19%) in mathematics. These numbers were nearly 20 percentage points below that of all students in both English language arts and mathematics and 7 to 5 percentage points lower, respectively, compared to other economically disadvantaged students, a striking difference. For unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, these proportions were even lower, with just 25% meeting or exceeding standards in English language arts and 12% doing so in mathematics.

Figure 16
CAASPP Achievement Levels in English Language Arts and Mathematics
(by Student Group, 2015–16)



Notes: Percentages are calculated for 3,196,619 students with valid CAASPP English language arts scores and 3,204,822 with valid mathematics scores, including scores for 1,882,409 and 1,886,912 economically disadvantaged students and for 97,740 and 98,671 students experiencing homelessness in English language arts and mathematics, respectively. Some columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

The differences in learning outcomes for students experiencing homelessness compared with their peers becomes more visible when considering all four achievement levels. In mathematics, over half of all students experiencing homelessness were recorded in the “standard not met” category. For students experiencing homelessness in grade 11, this proportion was 63%.¹¹⁸ In English language arts, 45% of students experiencing homelessness scored in the “standard not met” category.¹¹⁹ Still, around 8% of students experiencing homelessness exceeded state standards in English language arts, and 5% did so in mathematics. Thus, some students experiencing homelessness can and do succeed academically despite the significant challenges they face. This finding underscores the importance of providing them with access to needed supports so more students can meet their potential.

Nonetheless, the overall differences in learning outcomes persist across all tested grades. Table 1 shows the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in grades 3–8 and 11 for CAASPP English language arts and mathematics. Students experiencing homelessness scored, on average, below that of all students and economically disadvantaged students in tested grades. In a later section, we show this association persists even after controlling for a host of factors impacting student performance.

Table 1
Achievement on CAASPP English Language Arts and Mathematics
 (2015–16)

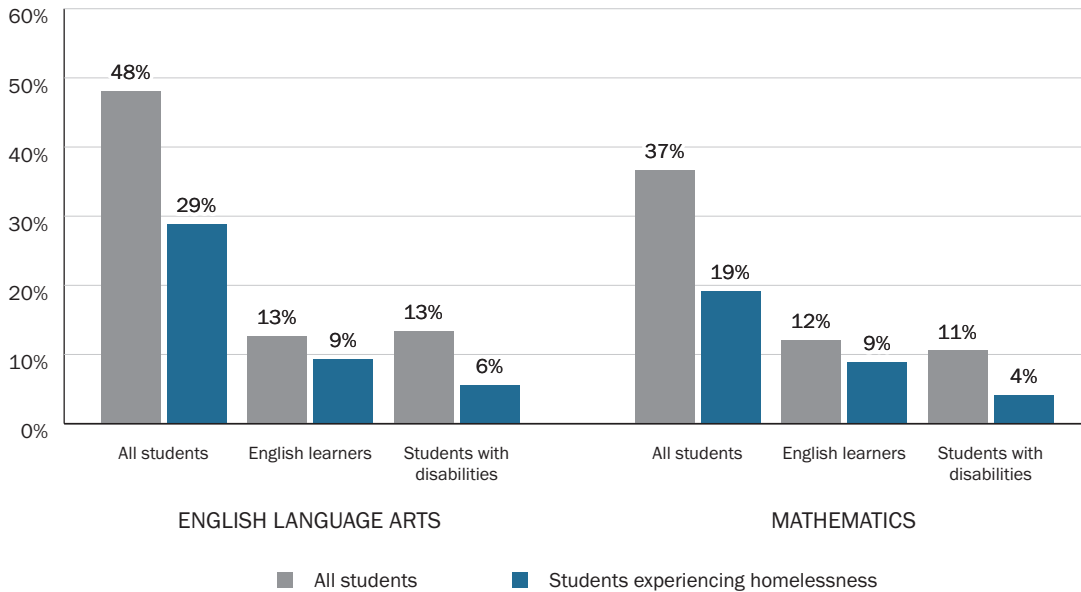
Grade	English language arts: Percent meeting or exceeding standards			Mathematics: Percent meeting or exceeding standards		
	Experiencing homelessness	ED, not experiencing homelessness	All students	Experiencing homelessness	ED, not experiencing homelessness	All students
All grades	29%	36%	48%	19%	24%	37%
3	24%	30%	42%	27%	33%	45%
4	26%	31%	44%	20%	25%	38%
5	30%	36%	49%	16%	20%	33%
6	29%	34%	47%	17%	22%	35%
7	28%	34%	48%	18%	23%	36%
8	30%	36%	49%	18%	23%	36%
11	39%	49%	59%	16%	21%	32%

Notes: Percentages are computed for 3,196,619 students with CAASPP English language arts scores and 3,204,822 with CAASPP mathematics scores in grades 3–8 and 11, including 97,740 and 98,671 students experiencing homelessness in ELA and mathematics, respectively. ED = economically disadvantaged.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

English learners and students with disabilities experiencing homelessness were less likely to meet or exceed state standards than their peers. Given that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be English learners or students with disabilities, the impact of homelessness on learning outcomes for these students is of particular importance. Figure 17 shows the proportion of students meeting or exceeding standards on CAASPP assessments for all students, English learners, and students with disabilities. Among each group, students experiencing homelessness were less likely to meet or exceed standards than their peers. For English learners experiencing homelessness, fewer than 9% met or achieved state standards in mathematics; for students with disabilities experiencing homelessness, this proportion was just 4%.

Figure 17
Achievement on CAASPP, by English Learner and Special Education Status
 (2015–16)



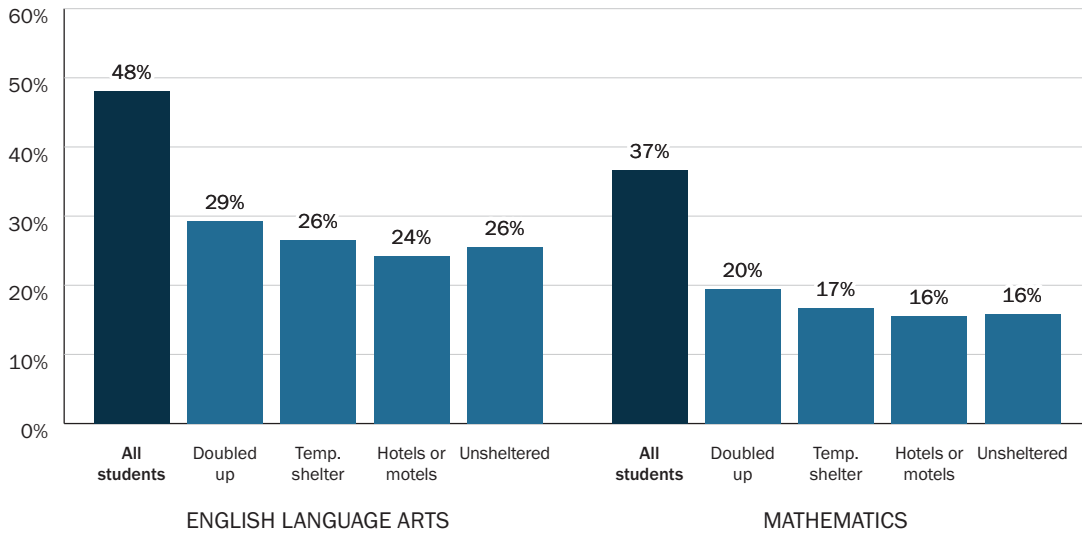
Notes: Figure shows the proportion of students meeting or exceeding state standards. Percentages are computed for 3,196,619 students with CAASPP English language arts scores and 3,204,822 with CAASPP mathematics scores in grades 3–8 and 11, including 97,740 and 98,671 students experiencing homelessness in English language arts and mathematics, respectively.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Homelessness was negatively associated with student learning outcomes regardless of living arrangements. Figure 18 shows the proportion of students experiencing homelessness meeting or exceeding state standards on CAASPP English language arts and mathematics assessments in 2015–16, disaggregated by living arrangements.¹²⁰ The proportion of students in doubled-up living arrangements meeting or exceeding standards was higher than for other living arrangements, although differences were modest in size: less than 3 percentage points above the next largest category in each of English language arts and mathematics. Additionally, in each subject, only 4–5 percentage points separated the proportion of students meeting or exceeding standards among all living arrangements: doubled up, temporary shelters, hotels or motels, and temporarily unsheltered. Moreover, as noted earlier, these categories are not entirely distinct, as students’ housing arrangements may change during the school year.

These differences in achievement among students experiencing homelessness in different living arrangements were smaller than those between students experiencing homelessness as a whole and those of all students. Specifically, the 5 percentage point difference among students experiencing homelessness in different living arrangements is about a quarter of the size of the near 20 percentage point gap in performance between students experiencing homelessness and all students. Thus, the experience of homelessness is associated with lower learning outcomes regardless of living arrangement. In further grade-level analyses (not shown), we found the average achievement levels of students in doubled-up arrangements were between those of economically disadvantaged students and those of other students experiencing homelessness in different living arrangements.

Figure 18
Achievement on CAASPP, by Living Arrangement
 (2015–16)



Notes: Figure shows the proportion of students meeting or exceeding state standards. Percentages are computed for 3,196,619 students with CAASPP English language arts (ELA) scores and 3,204,822 with CAASPP mathematics scores in grades 3–8 and 11, including 97,740 and 98,671 students experiencing homelessness in ELA and mathematics, respectively. This chart excludes those students experiencing homelessness whose shelter type was unknown.

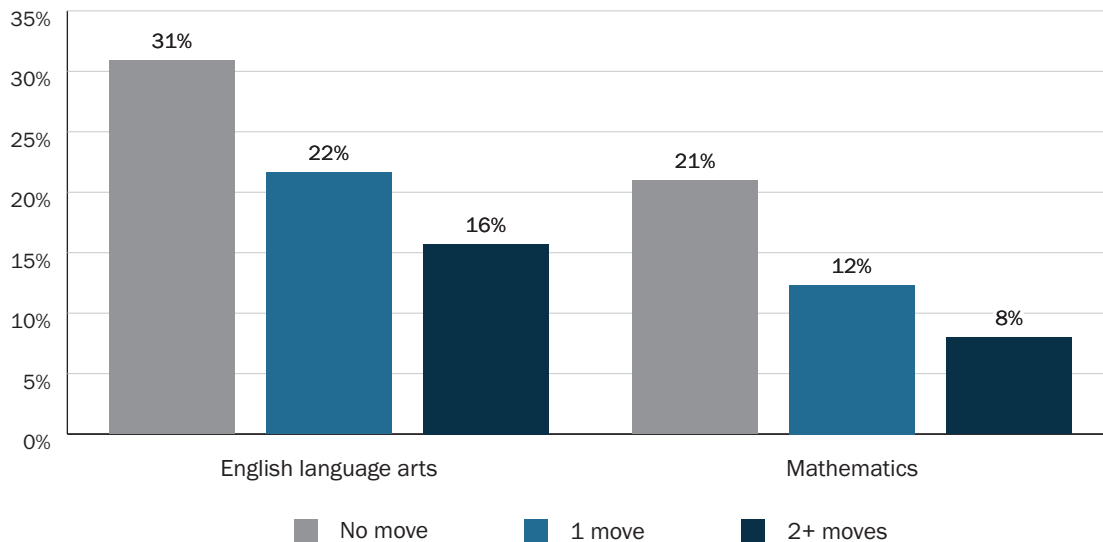
Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

High rates of school mobility were associated with lower assessment outcomes, especially for students experiencing homelessness. School mobility was a significant factor associated with outcomes on state assessments. As noted earlier in Figure 10, school mobility was considerably higher for students experiencing homelessness (20%) than for other students (6%). Nearly 5% of students experiencing homelessness moved schools more than once, representing nearly a fifth of all students who moved schools two or more times.

Figure 19 shows the proportion of students experiencing homelessness meeting or exceeding standards on CAASPP assessments by the number of school moves. Students who changed schools during the year were considerably less likely to meet or exceed standards. Among those students experiencing homelessness with high school mobility (two or more school moves in the year), just 8% met or exceeded standards in mathematics and 16% in English language arts.

Figure 19
Achievement on CAASPP Among Students Experiencing Homelessness,
by School Mobility

(2015–16)



Notes: Figure shows the proportion of students meeting or exceeding state standards. Percentages are calculated for 97,740 and 98,671 students experiencing homelessness with scores in CAASPP English language arts and mathematics, respectively.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

While school mobility was also correlated with economic disadvantage, the differences in outcomes between those students experiencing homelessness with lower versus higher mobility is suggestive of the disruptive effect of changing schools during the year, especially for those who moved more than once.

In summary, the disadvantage of experiencing homelessness in terms of academic performance on standardized tests is present no matter which way one slices the data. Regardless of grouping by living arrangement, racial/ethnic group, or English learner status, all reveal a striking and consistent pattern: The challenges of experiencing homelessness impact students' opportunities to learn and achieve compared to their peers who are not experiencing homelessness. In the next section, we investigate the impact of these factors on student achievement using regression analysis.

Predictors of Student Achievement (2015–16, Grades 3–8 and 11)

In the previous section, we found that learning outcomes for students experiencing homelessness were associated with factors including school mobility and students' English learner and special education status. In this section, we use a statistical approach known as regression analysis to further investigate the predictors of student achievement. Regression analysis allows us to estimate the relative association of multiple factors with achievement.¹²¹ For example, it permits us to investigate the extent to which homelessness is associated with student performance on English language arts and mathematics assessments while accounting for economic status, mobility, school size, and teacher turnover.

Regression Analysis: Data, Method, and Models

Our approach used achievement data from the CAASPP English language arts and mathematics assessments taken in grades 3–8 and 11 from 2015–16. We paired these data with student characteristic variables from the state's CALPADS data system, including demographics, school mobility, homelessness, living arrangement, and whether the student had been suspended from school.

We also paired these data with several school-level variables. These included the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals; annual teacher turnover; the proportion of underprepared teachers; and ratios of teachers, administrators, and support staff to students in the school. These variables allowed us to account for aspects of the different school environments experienced by students and the resources available for teaching and learning.

We established four statistical models with student learning outcomes on CAASPP as the dependent variable, first with English language arts and then with mathematics. We ran each of the models twice: once for all students, including students experiencing homelessness, and once for students experiencing homelessness only. Each of the four models built on the previous one by including additional variables. Findings from the preferred model are shown below.

The outcome variable in each case was the student “theta” score, an estimate of student achievement based on the specific questions answered and their relative difficulty.¹²² Theta scores are those later transformed to the more familiar scale scores that are reported to schools and parents. The interpretation of regression coefficients from the model differs slightly depending on student grade level. For example, a coefficient of 0.25 theta units is equivalent to 0.24 standard deviations in grade 3 English language arts and 0.16 standard deviations in grade 11 mathematics. These in turn are equivalent to a move from the 50th percentile to the 59th and 56th percentiles, respectively.¹²³ (Further details of the regression model are shown in the Appendix.)

Student-Level Factors Associated With Student Academic Outcomes

Findings from the preferred regression model for English language arts and mathematics are shown in Table 2 and Table 3.¹²⁴ (Details are shown in Tables A7 and A8 of the Appendix.) The coefficients listed in the tables are shown in theta units and denote the average association of a predictor (e.g., temporarily doubled up, ever suspended, or moved once) with the achievement of the reference

group.¹²⁵ Positive coefficients indicate a higher average association with student achievement, while coefficients less than zero indicate a lower average association with achievement relative to the reference group.¹²⁶ The magnitude of each coefficient indicates the relative strength of association of that predictor, after accounting for all other variables in the model.

Homelessness was significantly and negatively associated with student achievement. For example, the experience of homelessness was predicted to impact student achievement by an average of 0.1 to 0.3 units in English language arts and mathematics compared to peers not identified as experiencing homelessness, after accounting for all other factors in the model. There were small differences in associations with living arrangements. The achievement of students in doubled-up arrangements was predicted to be lower in English language arts and mathematics compared to that of all students. However, the magnitude of this disadvantage for doubled-up students was not quite as severe as for students experiencing homelessness in other living arrangements. For example, living in a hotel or motel was associated with a larger predicted drop in performance on English language arts and mathematics assessments compared to those staying in doubled-up arrangements.

School mobility was found to be another strong predictor of student achievement. Table 2 shows that the coefficients for the number of school moves are increasingly negative—ranging from around 0.3 units lower for one move to more than 0.7 units lower in English language arts for students moving schools four or more times. On average, the more times students move, the lower their predicted academic performance. This effect held when the model was run both for all students and only for those students experiencing homelessness. However, as shown earlier in Figure 10, students experiencing homelessness moved schools at a rate three times that of the general student population—over 1 in 5 for students experiencing homelessness compared to 1 in 17 among all students in grades 3–8 and 11. While not every student experiencing homelessness moves schools in a single school year, for those that do, there is a large, negative predicted association with their learning.

Whether a student had been suspended during the school year was another salient factor associated with lower achievement. Suspension was associated with an achievement drop, on average, between 0.5 and 0.6 units in English language arts. However, it is important to emphasize the associative, rather than causal, nature of the analysis. Nonetheless, the significance of suspension as a factor in achievement has several important implications for policy and practice that can mitigate the relationship of discipline and achievement, which we discuss later in this report.

Other student-level covariates were also found to be significantly related to student achievement. Special education status and English learner status were two further factors that were substantially related to student achievement, with large, negative coefficients. For example, English learners were associated with achievement that was around 0.8 units lower than that of English-only students in each of English language arts and mathematics. For students experiencing homelessness, this negative association with achievement is in addition to that based on homelessness.

Table 2
Student-Level Predictors of Student Achievement in English Language Arts and Mathematics

(2015–16)

Student-Level Variables	Coefficient (ELA)	Coefficient (Math)
Living Arrangement		
Temporary shelter	-0.19***	-0.19***
Hotels/Motels	-0.25***	-0.26***
Temporarily Doubled Up	-0.12***	-0.10***
Temporarily Unsheltered	-0.19***	-0.19***
School Mobility		
Moved Once	-0.32***	-0.39***
Moved Twice	-0.48***	-0.57***
Moved Three Times	-0.59***	-0.69***
Moved Four or More Times	-0.75***	-0.78***
Ever Suspended	-0.57***	-0.66***
English Learner	-0.84***	-0.76***
Special Education (eligible)	-0.97***	-1.15***

Note: Asterisks denote p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

School Context and Student Achievement

In addition to student-level covariates, we also explored various school-level variables. Controlling for school and district size, charter status, and proportion of students enrolled in special education, we found several factors significantly related to student achievement. Table 3 shows the coefficients for average predicted association with student achievement, scaled to 10% increments. In practice, these values can be adjusted proportionally for different school contexts. It is helpful to consider examples, discussed below.

Enrollment in a school with a large proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals was associated with lower average achievement. The coefficient size was 0.08 units lower for English language arts and 0.1 units lower for mathematics. As most students experiencing homelessness are enrolled in schools in which 80% or more of students are eligible, this is equivalent to at least 0.6 units lower in English language arts (that is, 8 multiplied by the coefficient) and 0.8 units lower in mathematics, respectively.

Two factors associated with teaching quality were also found to be related to student achievement after accounting for all other factors in the model: teacher turnover, as measured by the proportion of teachers who either left the profession or changed schools from the previous year; and

underprepared teachers, as measured by the proportion of teachers with substandard credentials (defined as interns, permits, and waivers). For example, the coefficient for a 10% change in teacher turnover was -0.04 units in English language arts and -0.05 in mathematics. Thus, for a school with high teacher turnover, that is, at least 20%, achievement is predicted to be around 0.08 to 0.1 units lower. The additional negative association with achievement for the proportion of teachers on substandard credentials is somewhat smaller. With a coefficient of magnitude just under 0.03 units for English language arts and mathematics, for schools close to the median proportion of underprepared teachers (around 2%), this association was less than 0.01 units. However, the effect was large for schools with significantly high proportions of underprepared teachers.

Table 3
School-Level Predictors of Student Achievement in English Language Arts and Mathematics
(2015–16)

School-Level Variables	Coefficient (ELA)	Coefficient (Math)
Proportion of school enrollment eligible for free or reduced-price meals	-0.08^{***}	-0.10^{***}
Proportion of teacher turnover	-0.04^{***}	-0.05^{***}
Proportion of interns, permits, and waivers	-0.03^{**}	-0.03^{**}

Notes: The coefficients are the associated change in theta score with a 10% change in the variable. Asterisks denote p-values: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

These findings indicate that the quality and stability of the teaching workforce remain significant factors that support student learning, even after accounting for all other student- and school-level factors in the model. The negative association of teacher turnover with student learning outcomes persisted when the models were run only for students experiencing homelessness.¹²⁷

We found no additional association with achievement for several variables related to human resources: the student–teacher ratio, student–administrator ratio, or student–support staff ratio. Although in some models these were statistically significant, the magnitude of the associations were not of a size that indicated a meaningful influence on student learning outcomes. This does not necessarily imply that these resource factors are unrelated to student learning but rather that the effects were small after accounting for the other factors in the model. In future studies, researchers may like to further explore the associations of these variables.

Our regression analysis shines a light on the layered challenges impacting the educational achievement for students experiencing homelessness. The high rates of school mobility, high likelihood of attending a high-poverty school, high average suspension rates—double the state average—and significant negative impact of each of these on performance make evident that students experiencing homelessness require unique supports if the state is to achieve educational equity. And while the challenges are multiple, they also point to possible responses that could positively impact this vulnerable group, which we discuss in the next section.

Findings and Policy Considerations

This report provides a snapshot of students experiencing homelessness in California and examines important contextual factors and their associations with learning outcomes. The findings underscore the scope of student homelessness and the need for targeted comprehensive policy and practice strategies that address the multiple challenges that students experiencing homelessness face. The incidence of student poverty and homelessness in the state rose steadily from 2015–16 to 2018–19, increasing both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total student population. Data for that year show that 1 in every 23 students in the state was identified as experiencing homelessness, and the rate was even higher among students of color. However, these figures likely represent undercounts. Emerging evidence suggests that with many schools in distance learning, identification of student homelessness has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic began,¹²⁸ even as the incidence of homelessness among students is likely exacerbated by the COVID-19-related economic downturn.¹²⁹

Our data analyses reveal the following findings about students experiencing homelessness in California:

Demographics and student characteristics

- The number of students identified as experiencing homelessness increased by 7% from 2015–16 to 2018–19. Students of color, particularly African American and Latino/a students, are more likely to be impacted by homelessness.
- Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be eligible for special education services and are significantly more likely to be English learners.
- The majority of students experiencing homelessness stayed in temporarily doubled-up living arrangements.

Chronic absenteeism, graduation, and college-going rates

- Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be chronically absent than other socioeconomically disadvantaged students and the overall student population. The rate of chronic absence among students experiencing homelessness in 2018–19 was 25%—double the state average (12%). The rates are higher among some racial and ethnic groups: More than 40% of African American students and Native American or Alaskan students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent.
- Students experiencing homelessness are less likely to complete high school and continue in their education. Only 69% of California students experiencing homelessness graduated in 4 years in 2017–18, compared to the statewide average of 83%. While economically disadvantaged students also graduate at rates below that of their more affluent peers, graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness are markedly lower still. Among high school completers, students experiencing homelessness are less likely to be enrolled in college the year following completion compared to all students.

Discipline and school environments

- Compared to all students, those experiencing homelessness are more likely to be suspended. Suspension rates are highest for African American, Native American or Alaskan, and Pacific Islander students experiencing homelessness.
- Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be enrolled in high-poverty schools. Approximately 57% of students experiencing homelessness in the tested grades were enrolled in those schools in which the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals was greater than 80%. This compares with just 34% of all students.

Student achievement on state assessments

- The experience of homelessness is associated with lower student achievement, regardless of living arrangement. Statewide, 48% of all students met or exceeded state standards in English language arts in 2015–16, and 37% did so in mathematics. For students experiencing homelessness, those outcomes were 29% and 19%, respectively. Compared to students experiencing homelessness overall, English learners and students with disabilities experiencing homelessness have even lower outcomes.
- One in five students experiencing homelessness changed schools at least once during the school year—triple the rate of other students—and a quarter of these changed schools twice or more. High mobility is more common among African American, Native American or Alaskan, and White students experiencing homelessness.
- School mobility is associated with lower average educational achievement in both English language arts and mathematics, especially for students who move multiple times in a single school year.
- There is a strong and negative correlation with learning outcomes for students enrolled in high-poverty schools. The factors underlying this association are likely complex, involving a range of elements, from school resources and allocation, to staff training and capacity, to family and peer effects.
- Schools with high teacher turnover and, to a lesser extent, a large proportion of underprepared teachers are negatively associated with student achievement in English language arts and mathematics, even after accounting for other student- and school-level factors. This negative association holds both for all students and for those experiencing homelessness.

In sum, students experiencing homelessness face a complex mix of challenges that include higher school mobility, an increased likelihood of attending a high-poverty school, and increased suspension rates. Each of these negatively impacts educational achievement. If California is to achieve its vision of educational equity, additional supports will be needed for this significant student population.

Students experiencing homelessness face a complex mix of challenges that include higher school mobility, an increased likelihood of attending a high-poverty school, and increased suspension rates.

Recognizing California’s growing crisis of homelessness, state policymakers have invested in programs designed to reduce housing insecurity and mitigate the impacts of homelessness. Over the past 2 years, the state has allocated over \$1.15 billion to address homelessness, directing these funds to local governments and continuums of care, which help coordinate housing and local services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. These investments included \$500 million in the 2018–19 state budget that established the Homeless Emergency Aid Program, which requires recipients to use at least 5% of their grants to establish or expand services that meet the needs of youth experiencing, or at risk for, homelessness. With the emergence of COVID-19, the state has also launched initiatives designed to quickly house people experiencing homelessness and is considering major investments to reduce family homelessness.¹³⁰

While these investments will be critical for addressing the overall crisis of homelessness, additional steps are needed to mitigate the impacts of homelessness on students. Although students experiencing homelessness hold educational aspirations like those of their peers,¹³¹ the findings in this report highlight the multilayered challenges that these students face and suggest that comprehensive practice and policy strategies are needed to improve their educational outcomes. Decision-makers working to address these challenges should consider the following strategies, organized by federal, state, and local levels of governance.

1. Federal Actions to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

Federal action is needed to address two major challenges for improving outcomes for students experiencing homelessness: inadequate federal funding and barriers to cross-system collaboration, which can impede the provision of wraparound supports. To help address these issues, federal policymakers should consider the following:

Increase federal funding under McKinney-Vento, and revise the formula to target funds based on the enrollment of students experiencing homelessness

Receiving McKinney-Vento funds can increase districts’ capacity to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.¹³² However, these funds are not distributed to states based on their homeless student counts, but rather on the ratio of funds that they received under this program in 2001.¹³³ As a result, in 2018–19, California received only \$41 per student experiencing homelessness under McKinney-Vento, compared to \$64 per student nationally. If the federal government had provided McKinney-Vento funding on a per-pupil basis, California would have received an additional \$6.3 million in homeless funding that year.

In 2018–19, California received only \$10.6 million under McKinney-Vento. Due to limited funds, the majority of students experiencing homelessness are enrolled in districts that do not receive dollars dedicated to implementing the Act’s provisions.¹³⁴ In districts that receive grants, funding levels are minimal, ranging from maximum grants of \$15,000 in districts with 50–100 students experiencing homelessness to \$250,000 in districts with over 5,000 students in this group.¹³⁵

In March 2021, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which appropriates \$800 million, or about \$577 per student experiencing homelessness (based on fiscal year 2018–19 counts), for the purposes of identifying these students, providing wraparound services, and delivering supports that enable them to attend and fully participate in school activities, including in-person instruction, summer learning, and enrichment programs.¹³⁶ In addition, ARPA provides nearly \$123 billion for k–12 education through the Elementary

and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, and it recommends that states and districts attend to the needs of high-need student groups that have been historically underserved and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including students experiencing homelessness.¹³⁷ Over the next several years, this one-time funding will infuse states and districts with much needed resources to increase services and supports for students experiencing homelessness. However, ARPA will not provide a long-term solution to underfunding for McKinney-Vento. In addition, it will not remedy issues with the program's formula, which does not target funds to the states with the highest numbers of students experiencing homelessness. Federal policymakers should increase long-term investment in McKinney-Vento as well as revise the formula to ensure that funds are targeted to states based on their enrollment of students experiencing homelessness.

Increase federal funding for community schools and wraparound supports

Findings from this report and other studies collectively show that housing insecurity, school instability, and the experience of homelessness can negatively affect multiple aspects of students' lives, including their academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, mental health, and physical health.¹³⁸ To fully realize the promise of whole child education for students experiencing homelessness—in which students are positioned to succeed by having their physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional needs met—local decision-makers need to ensure that students can access wraparound supports across multiple sectors, including education, housing, health, and social services. For students experiencing homelessness and their families, this type of cross-system work can mean the difference between receiving needed supports or languishing in the gaps between systems. However, local collaboration can be complex and may require partners to overcome multiple barriers, including between-system differences in priorities, funding and reporting requirements, and program eligibility rules.¹³⁹

For students experiencing homelessness and their families, this type of cross-system work can mean the difference between receiving needed supports or languishing in the gaps between systems.

Community schools—a site-based strategy for provisioning students with a whole child education, with strong family and community engagement—can help bring together funding streams and resources by establishing partnerships across the education system, nonprofits, and local government agencies. Community schools have proven to be well-positioned to respond to the increased needs that COVID-19 has placed on students, families, and communities.¹⁴⁰ Federal policymakers should build on ARPA's one-time support for the federal Full-Service Community Schools Program to ensure that schools are positioned to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and support the whole child over the long term. This program provides support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for students in high-poverty schools. Increasing funding for this program, as proposed in the Full-Service Community School Expansion Act of 2021,¹⁴¹ and investing in specialized instructional support personnel—including social workers, school counselors, and psychologists—would help states better meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness and other historically underserved students.

Align definitions of “homeless” used by federal housing and education programs

Different definitions of “homeless” used by federal education and housing programs can make it difficult for local agencies to provide comprehensive wraparound supports to students experiencing homelessness and their families. In California, students identified as experiencing homelessness under McKinney-Vento may not be eligible for housing and other supportive services provided through state programs such as the Homeless Emergency Aid Program, which uses the definition of homelessness established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and does not include students living in motels or temporarily with other people.¹⁴² Of the nearly 270,000 students identified as experiencing homelessness in California, over 80% do not qualify for services provided through HUD programs.¹⁴³ Federal policymakers should align HUD’s definition of “homeless” with that established by McKinney-Vento to ensure that students living in motels or doubled up can access housing and homeless assistance administered under HUD.

2. State Actions to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

California policymakers can help improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness by taking steps to accomplish the following: (1) elevate the visibility of these students in the state’s accountability system; (2) establish infrastructure and programs to support local collaboration; and (3) invest in educator training. Specifically, state policymakers should consider the following:

Elevate the visibility of students experiencing homelessness in the state’s accountability system by adding them as a stand-alone category under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

Underidentification and low visibility of students experiencing homelessness can prevent them from receiving much needed services and supports.¹⁴⁴ Although students experiencing homelessness are already considered part of the LCFF weightings (they are included in districts’ unduplicated pupil counts due to their categorical eligibility for free or reduced-price meals), the state’s main Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) template does not prompt districts to specify how they spent funds on this student group or how they will increase or improve services for them, as they are required to do for students in foster care, English learners, and students from low-income families.¹⁴⁵ State policymakers should consider adding students experiencing homelessness as a stand-alone category under the LCFF, which would elevate their visibility in the state’s accountability system and help ensure that resources are targeted toward this student group. The state has taken a similar approach for students in foster care, who are included as a stand-alone category under the LCFF, even though they already qualify for additional LCFF grants through categorical eligibility for free or reduced-price meals.¹⁴⁶

Expand investments in community schools to provide wraparound supports that meet students’ multiple needs

To support local collaboration, state policymakers should expand investment in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), which was established in the 2020–21 state budget using \$45 million from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. This program will issue competitive grants to local education agencies, including county offices of education, to support and expand existing community schools. Applicants were prioritized for funding based on several factors, including whether they served students in high-poverty schools, demonstrated a need for expanding access to integrated services, or partnered with local agencies. Demand for grants exceeded capacity: Out of 102 applicants,

requesting a total of \$168 million, only 20 received awards. The state should expand this program with additional funding and invest in technical assistance to ensure that grant recipients receive support as they develop and expand their community school initiatives and navigate the complexities of cross-sector collaboration.

Create a state-level children's cabinet to identify and address barriers to state and local cross-system collaboration

To help address barriers to local collaboration, California should also consider creating a children's cabinet, composed of key state agencies that administer programs serving children and families. The cabinet's tasks should include (1) strengthening collaboration among state agencies to support the development and implementation of state policy that is grounded in shared goals for California's families and children; (2) identifying barriers to interagency collaboration and issuing recommendations to the state, informed by insights from the state's new Cradle-to-Career Data System; and (3) leveraging the expertise of state and local stakeholders engaged in cross-system initiatives, including recipients of grants from the CCSPP, to inform state efforts to support local collaboration.

Invest in training that prepares educators and support staff to work with and reengage students experiencing homelessness

Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience stressors outside of school and to have suffered trauma.¹⁴⁷ In addition, findings from this report and others show that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be African American or Latino/a, experience exclusionary discipline, and identify as LGBTQ.¹⁴⁸ To increase their sensitivity to the issues that these students face, teachers, principals, counselors, and other specialized instructional support staff should receive training framed around social and emotional learning and trauma-informed practice. Training should also include strategies for implementing restorative practice and creating identity-safe classrooms. Training in these areas can equip staff with strategies for supporting strong relationships and community-building in schools and classrooms, as well as helping students learn self-regulation and conflict resolution strategies; they can also help staff understand and address underlying issues affecting students' behavior and support a positive climate without resorting to exclusionary discipline. In 2020, the state budget deficit caused by COVID-19's economic impacts resulted in suspension of state investment that would have provided professional learning on social and emotional learning and restorative justice.¹⁴⁹ Especially as schools reopen for in-person learning, the state should reinvest in training to help ensure that educators and support staff are prepared to work with and support vulnerable student groups, including students experiencing homelessness.

3. Local Actions to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

Over the course of 2021, California's school districts will receive an unprecedented infusion of state and federal funds, including \$13.5 billion under ARPA.¹⁵⁰ Districts must use 20% of their allocation to address lost learning time for students, but they are free to spend the remaining 80% to meet local needs and priorities.¹⁵¹ Under ARPA, California will also receive \$98.7 million in federal funding for students experiencing homelessness. The first allocation in April 2021 was \$24.7 million, 75% of which (\$18.5 million) must be distributed to districts.¹⁵² In addition, in March 2021, California appropriated \$4.6 billion in COVID-19 relief funding to districts to provide students with extended learning time; accelerated learning opportunities; and integrated

student supports, including mental health services. From this fund, districts will receive \$1,000 per student experiencing homelessness, with the remaining amount allocated to districts through the LCFF.¹⁵³

Districts should invest these funds in capacity building to help them meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Specifically, districts should consider the following strategies:

Improve identification of students experiencing homelessness by dedicating more staff time and resources to liaison responsibilities

Findings both nationally and in California indicate that large numbers of students experiencing homelessness may have become disengaged after schools closed in March 2020 due to COVID-19.¹⁵⁴ Districts should include in their recovery plans resources to identify and reengage these students. Homeless liaisons—which districts must maintain under McKinney-Vento—should play a key role in facilitating these activities. However, in most districts, liaisons serve in multiple capacities, with one study finding that around two thirds of surveyed liaisons in California spend less than 5 hours a week in their liaison role. A lack of sufficient time and resources can negatively impact the ability of district liaisons to identify students experiencing homelessness and provide professional development to school staff. These responsibilities are interconnected, since liaisons often rely upon school personnel to help identify students experiencing homelessness, and training helps school staff understand how to identify these students.¹⁵⁵

Districts should examine the demands placed on staff serving as homeless liaisons and, if needed, increase the amount of staff time and resources dedicated to liaison responsibilities, which include ensuring that students experiencing homelessness are identified and immediately enrolled in school; disseminating information about McKinney-Vento to places frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth; referring families and students experiencing homelessness to housing services; developing and coordinating partnerships with local agencies and organizations; and ensuring that school staff providing services under McKinney-Vento receive training.¹⁵⁶ In addition to increasing staff time dedicated to the district liaison role, districts can designate school-site liaisons, a nationally recommended best practice in which school-level liaisons collaborate with the district liaison, serve as a school-site point of contact, and help school staff understand the needs and rights of students experiencing homelessness.¹⁵⁷

Increase access to school services and supports that reduce barriers to student engagement

Even once students are identified as experiencing homelessness, districts must mobilize services and supports to ensure these students can attend school and access learning opportunities. However, findings from this study and others show that students experiencing homelessness face significant barriers to school engagement, including high rates of chronic absenteeism and school mobility, which can disrupt key relationships.¹⁵⁸ Ensuring that students experiencing homelessness are immediately enrolled in school, even if they are missing documents; can remain in their school of origin if it is in their best interest; and can attend and fully participate in educational opportunities—all of which are required under McKinney-Vento—are foundational to improving their educational outcomes.¹⁵⁹ As districts work to support students' return to in-person learning, they should increase access to services and supports that help reengage them and remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and participation. This should include:

- updating district websites and enrollment materials to ensure they contain information about students’ rights under McKinney-Vento, in multiple languages that represent a district’s linguistic diversity;
- ensuring that enrollment systems, whether online or on paper, allow students to indicate their living situations and allow students experiencing homelessness to enroll without needing to provide a parent or guardian signature, proof of residency, or other documents; and
- providing transportation options that ensure students can get to and from their schools of origin and participate in learning opportunities, including after-school, summer learning, and early learning programs.

Provide wraparound supports through community schools and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

As described earlier, housing insecurity, school instability, and the experience of homelessness can negatively affect students in multiple ways, including their social and emotional wellness, mental health, physical health, and educational achievement. By building or expanding community school initiatives, counties and districts can organize the infrastructure needed to secure and coordinate wraparound supports and address the multifaceted challenges these students face. For example, in Los Angeles and Alameda Counties, county offices of education and large districts are collaborating with county agencies and community-based organizations to provide students and families with a range of supports, including enrichment opportunities and health, mental health, social, and immigration services. Initiatives should include a focus on examining and improving outcomes for students experiencing homelessness, as has been the case for a partnership between the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency and the Alameda County Office of Education.¹⁶⁰

To ensure that services and supports reach the students who need them, districts should also implement school-level coordinative structures, such as MTSS, to efficiently identify and meet student needs without cumbersome procedures in the way. When designing and implementing MTSS, districts should take into consideration the specific challenges that students experiencing homelessness face and their potential need for services across systems. For example, the Pivot–Sanger MTSS Project—which brought MTSS experts from the Sanger Unified School District to a district in Monterey County, CA, where nearly 10% of students were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2016–17¹⁶¹—focused on building district capacity to implement MTSS. This work leveraged a partnership with the National Center for Youth Law, which co-located staff at the district’s high schools. Although the Pivot–Sanger MTSS Project concluded recently, the district continues to partner with the National Center for Youth Law. A district leader in Monterey stated that as a result of this work, his district had improved at “identifying students experiencing homelessness and wrapping [our] arms around the challenges these students face.”¹⁶²

Conclusion

Student homelessness in California is of urgent concern. The number of students identified as experiencing homelessness rose steadily over the 4 years from 2015–16 to 2018–19, and it is particularly acute among communities of color and English learners. Additionally, due to challenges identifying students experiencing homelessness that may have been further exacerbated by the closure of in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, current numbers likely underestimate the true scope of homelessness in the state. Homelessness among students may increase further still in the coming months due to the impacts of COVID-19 on already vulnerable communities.

The experience of homelessness is associated with significantly lower educational outcomes, including performance on state assessments in all tested grades, graduation rates, and college-going rates. While California has made recent investments to reduce housing insecurity and address overall homelessness, additional steps are needed to mitigate the impacts of homelessness on student experiences and outcomes. To address the multilayered challenges that students experiencing homelessness face, policymakers at multiple levels of governance must pursue comprehensive policy and practice strategies to achieve the state’s promise of a high-quality public education system for all students.

Appendix: Methods and Data Tables

Data Sources

The majority of this report used data provided to the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) by the California Department of Education (CDE) under special request. These data consisted primarily of files from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) and from the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). In each case, data were for the 2015–16 school year. The data sets were as follows:

- CAASPP: Student-level achievement data for 2015–16 were provided. The data provided scale and theta scores and achievement levels for the tested grades 3–8 and 11. Demographic information (i.e., gender, ethnicity, and age) was also drawn from this data set. Other student-level variables included English language status and tested dates, economic status, and special education status.
- CALPADS: Data from CALPADS were provided in several data files, listed below. Data are from the CALPADS Operational Data Store (ODS). The CALPADS data sets were as follows:
 - Enrollment file: Enrollment data on school and period of attendance were used to calculate student mobility (i.e., frequency of changing schools in a given school year).
 - Program file: Program data provided an indicator of a student’s homelessness status and shelter type (i.e., living arrangement).
 - Discipline file: Discipline data provided information on student suspensions and expulsions.

We defined the 2015–16 school year using two dates: September 1, 2015, to June 1, 2016. Records with an enrollment exit date prior to September 1, 2015, or students with an enrollment start date after June 1, 2016, were excluded from our analytic sample.

Additional district- and school-level variables, such as the teacher turnover rate (proportion of teachers who left the teaching profession or moved to another school from the 2014–15 to the 2015–16 school years), the proportion of underprepared teachers (those teaching as interns or with permits or waivers), staffing ratios, and district size, were drawn from publicly available data sets and CDE staffing data files received by request.

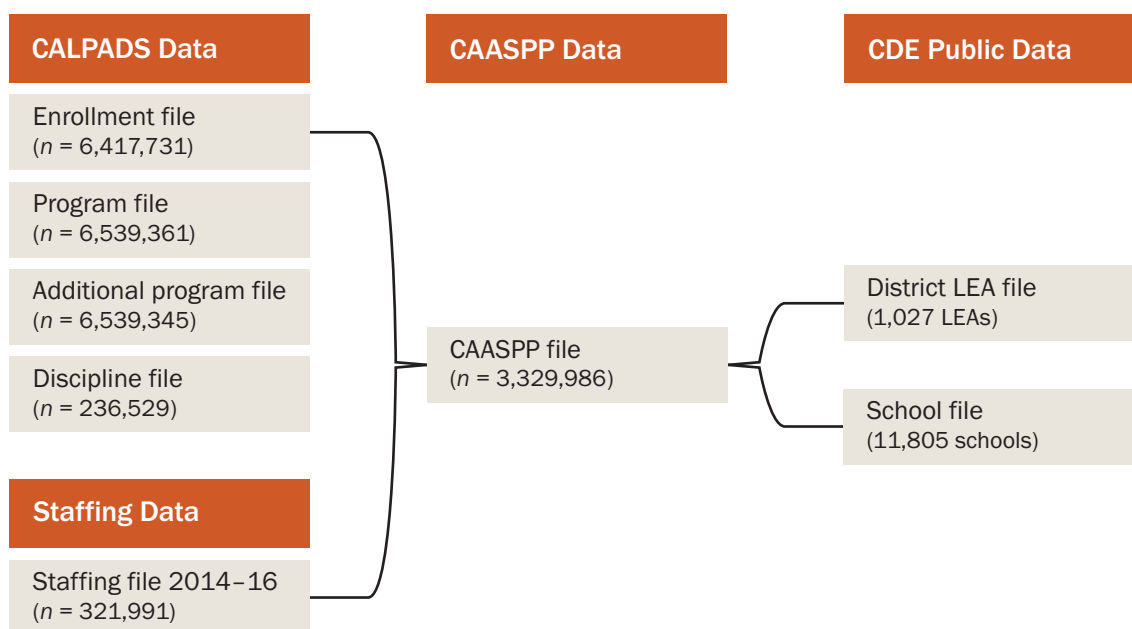
Data for 2018–19 were drawn from publicly available data on CDE’s DataQuest website and from data provided by request from the CDE. These were supplemented with analysis of publicly available cumulative enrollment and unduplicated count data, available from the CDE website.

Data Linking

All CALPADS data sets (enrollment, program, and discipline) were cleaned with the key variables retained, and each was merged with the cleaned CAASPP file using a unique student identifier. We kept all observations in the CAASPP data file while dropping unmatched ones from the merging data sets. This yielded an analytical sample of 3,329,986 student records.

We supplemented our final analytical sample with information from publicly downloadable files, linked using the corresponding school and district identifiers. This information included school- and district-level characteristics, such as student–teacher ratio, school size, and district size. We also used staffing data from 2014–15 to 2015–16 to calculate the proportions of teacher turnover and beginning teachers in a school.

Figure A1
Schematic of Data Set Linkages



Analysis Variables

The final analysis data file contained 3,329,986 unique student records across grades 3–8 and 11. Among these records, 105,143 (3.2%) were for students identified as experiencing homelessness, a sample representing approximately 82% of those who experienced homelessness in grades 3–8 and 11 in 2015–16. The sample also contained 1,953,769 students identified as economically disadvantaged but not experiencing homelessness. As students identified as experiencing homelessness are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, our analysis compared students experiencing homelessness with those economically disadvantaged students not experiencing homelessness.

The main variables for analysis are described below.

Student characteristics

- Age: Defined as student’s age as of September 1, 2015.
- Gender: A binary variable for male and female as identified in the data set.
- Special education status: A binary variable indicating if the student was eligible for special education services as defined under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.

- English learner status: A binary variable indicating whether the student was eligible for English learner services.
- Economically disadvantaged: An indicator of whether a student was eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- Race/ethnicity: Indicates a student's race or ethnicity as one of Native American or Alaskan, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Filipino/a, Latino/a, African American, White, or two or more races.
- Grade tested: The grade level at which a student tested for CAASPP.
- Homelessness status: A student's homelessness status, determined from the CALPADS program variable indicating whether a student has experienced homelessness during the school year and the shelter type for students experiencing homelessness. We included observations in our sample if a student record was present in at least one of these categories.
- Shelter type: Indicates the living arrangement for students experiencing homelessness. As these data are recorded upon enrollment, each record was assigned to the living arrangement associated with enrollment of longest duration. The four shelter categories are hotel or motel; temporary shelter, for students awaiting foster care placement or living in transitional housing; temporarily doubled up, such as staying with friends or relatives; and temporarily unsheltered, including living in abandoned buildings, campgrounds, vehicles, trailer parks, FEMA trailers, or bus or train stations.

Student discipline variables

- Disciplined: A binary variable indicating whether a student was recorded as having any kind of disciplinary incidents during a school year.
- Disciplinary action taken: Indicates whether a student ever received an in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion as a consequence of a disciplinary incident.

Mobility variable

- School mobility: The number of times a student changed schools during the academic year. We counted primary enrollments of at least 10 days.

District- and school-level variables

School- and district-level variables were mainly drawn from the publicly available data sets. We retained the following variables:

- School enrollment
- Total teachers (full-time equivalent, or FTE)
- Total administrators (FTE)
- Total pupil services staff (i.e., support staff) (FTE)¹⁶⁵
- Student–teacher ratio: computed using school enrollment and total teacher FTE count

- Student–administrator ratio: computed using school enrollment and total administrator FTE count
- Student–support staff ratio: computed using school enrollment and total pupil services staff FTE count
- Teacher turnover rate: the proportion of teachers who left teaching or changed schools from 2014–15 to 2015–16
- Proportion of enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price meals: calculated using total number of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals divided by the total school enrollment
- Proportion of students with disabilities: computed using total number of students with disabilities divided by total number of students
- Proportion of interns, permits, or waivers:¹⁶⁴ computed using the total number of interns, permits, and waivers divided by the total number of teachers
- Charter indicator

We included total district student enrollment as the sole district-level variable.

Achievement variables

The achievement variables used in the analyses include only those for students taking the CAASPP assessments for English language arts and mathematics. Records for students taking alternative or Spanish-language assessments were not included in our analyses.

- **Tested status:** Whether the student did or did not test for CAASPP.
- **Valid CAASPP assessment score:** A binary variable in each of English language arts and mathematics. Indicates whether a student met the required threshold for questions attempted and completed and received a score.
- **Achievement level:** Whether the student exceeded, met, nearly met, or did not meet the state standard for the test in his or her specific grade.
- **Theta scores:** An assigned value for a student’s achievement. Students received separate scores for each of English language arts and mathematics.

Frequency tables

Frequency tables in this section represent the samples used in descriptive analyses for CAASPP grades in 2015–16.

Table A1
Number and Percentage of Students by Student Characteristics
(2015–16)

		All CAASPP grades		ED, not experiencing homelessness		Experiencing homelessness		Unaccompanied	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender	Female	1,627,536	48.9%	956,093	48.9%	51,684	49.2%	1,036	48.1%
	Male	1,702,450	51.1%	997,676	51.1%	53,459	50.8%	1,118	51.9%
	Total	3,329,986	100%	1,953,769	100%	105,143	100%	2,154	100%
Race/ethnicity	African American	193,504	5.8%	136,110	7.0%	8,902	8.5%	285	13.2%
	Asian	299,899	9.0%	109,754	5.6%	2,852	2.7%	46	2.1%
	Filipino/a	83,547	2.5%	28,295	1.5%	1,632	1.6%	‡	‡
	Latino/a	1,789,202	53.7%	1,388,101	71.1%	74,945	71.3%	1,143	53.1%
	Native American/Alaskan	18,427	0.6%	11,528	0.6%	718	0.7%	50	2.32%
	Pacific Islander	16,666	0.5%	10,368	0.5%	707	0.7%	‡	‡
	Two or more	100,677	3.0%	34,734	1.8%	2,303	2.2%	83	3.9%
	White	805,657	24.2%	224,774	11.5%	12,309	11.7%	500	23.2%
	Unknown race	22,407	0.7%	10,105	0.5%	775	0.7%	23	1.07%
	Total	3,329,986	100%	1,953,769	100%	105,143	100%	2,154	100%
Special education	No	2,969,998	89.2%	1,717,452	87.9%	91,360	86.9%	1,850	85.9%
	Yes	359,988	10.8%	236,317	12.1%	13,783	13.1%	304	14.1%
	Total	3,329,986	100%	1,953,769	100%	105,143	100%	2,154	100%
English learner	No	2,705,943	81.3%	1,431,714	73.3%	73,256	69.7%	1,770	82.2%
	Yes	624,043	18.7%	522,055	26.7%	31,887	30.3%	384	17.8%
	Total	3,329,986	100%	1,953,769	100%	105,143	100%	2,154	100%

Notes: ‡ denotes omission of data due to small cell size. ED = economically disadvantaged.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Table A2
Number and Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race/
Ethnicity and Living Arrangement

(2015–16)

Race/ ethnicity	Shelter type										Total
	Temporary shelter		Hotels or motels		Temporarily doubled up		Temporarily unsheltered		Unknown		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
African American	1,017	11%	799	9%	6,577	74%	228	3%	281	3%	8,902
Asian	162	6%	121	4%	2,473	87%	33	1%	63	2%	2,852
Filipino/a	75	5%	21	4%	1,480	88%	‡	1%	‡	3%	1,632
Latino/a	3,548	5%	2,170	3%	65,141	87%	2,094	3%	1,992	3%	74,945
Native American/ Alaskan	71	10%	31	4%	565	79%	29	4%	22	3%	718
Pacific Islander	47	7%	63	9%	574	81%	‡	1%	‡	2%	707
White	1,303	11%	791	6%	9,508	77%	397	3%	310	3%	12,309
Two or more	227	10%	193	8%	1,744	76%	69	3%	70	3%	2,303
Unknown	80	10%	52	7%	602	78%	‡	3%	‡	3%	775
All races/ ethnicities	6,530	6%	4,241	4%	88,664	84%	2,886	3%	2,822	3%	105,143

Note: ‡ denotes omission of data due to small cell size.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Table A3
Percentage of Students, by School Mobility

(2015–16)

School mobility	All CAASPP students	ED, not experiencing homelessness	Experiencing homelessness	Unaccompanied
Did not change schools	93.6%	93.0%	79.6%	56.2%
One school move	5.2%	5.7%	15.1%	29.4%
Two school moves	0.7%	0.8%	4.1%	10.3%
Three or more school moves	0.1%	0.2%	1.2%	4.0%
School mobility not known	0.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.1%

Note: ED = economically disadvantaged.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Table A4
Number and Percentage of Students, by School Characteristics
(2015–16)

School percentage of free or reduced-price meal enrollment	All CAASPP students		Not economically disadvantaged		ED, not experiencing homelessness		Experiencing homelessness	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0–20%	456,546	14%	402,791	32%	51,880	3%	1,875	2%
21–40%	517,366	16%	348,324	27%	161,860	8%	7,182	7%
41–60%	520,462	16%	242,595	19%	264,972	14%	12,895	12%
61–80%	692,208	21%	175,519	14%	493,276	25%	23,413	22%
81–100%	1,136,616	34%	98,212	8%	978,760	50%	59,644	57%
Unknown	6,788	0%	3,633	0%	3,021	0%	134	0%
Total	3,329,986	100%	1,271,074	100%	1,953,769	100%	105,143	100%

Note: ED = economically disadvantaged.

Data sources: California Department of Education. (n.d.). Downloadable data files. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/downloadabledata.asp>. Data also provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Table A5
Number and Percentage of Tested Students and Achievement Levels in English Language Arts
(2015–16)

	Eligible CAASPP students		Tested		Valid CAASPP scores		Meeting or exceeding standard		Standard not met		Standard nearly met		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All CAASPP students																
Grade 3	473,451		458,658	97%	457,572	97%	42%	147,957	32%	115,463	25%	93,920	21%	100,232	22%	
Grade 4	488,406		474,588	97%	473,566	97%	44%	169,303	36%	96,884	20%	100,461	21%	106,918	23%	
Grade 5	478,203		465,458	97%	464,396	97%	49%	142,620	31%	95,691	21%	130,755	28%	95,330	21%	
Grade 6	472,957		460,569	97%	459,273	97%	47%	121,383	26%	120,930	26%	141,049	31%	75,911	17%	
Grade 7	472,784		458,910	97%	457,159	97%	48%	127,232	28%	111,394	24%	148,722	33%	69,811	15%	
Grade 8	467,793		452,784	97%	450,556	96%	49%	110,580	25%	120,038	27%	154,699	34%	65,239	14%	
Grade 11	476,352		439,660	92%	434,097	91%	59%	80,706	19%	97,478	22%	144,810	33%	111,103	26%	
Total	3,329,946		3,210,627	96%	3,196,619	96%	48%	899,781	28%	757,878	24%	914,416	29%	624,544	20%	
ED, not experiencing homelessness																
Grade 3	282,922		275,614	97%	274,955	97%	30%	116,323	42%	77,432	28%	49,355	18%	31,845	12%	
Grade 4	293,057		286,190	98%	285,540	97%	31%	132,817	47%	64,511	23%	53,822	19%	34,390	12%	
Grade 5	284,916		278,661	98%	278,012	98%	36%	112,416	40%	65,704	24%	70,976	26%	28,916	10%	
Grade 6	279,166		273,104	98%	272,301	98%	34%	95,908	35%	82,925	30%	72,229	27%	21,239	8%	
Grade 7	276,640		269,435	97%	268,270	97%	34%	100,005	37%	75,888	28%	73,768	27%	18,609	7%	
Grade 8	273,746		265,932	97%	264,414	97%	36%	86,133	33%	81,927	31%	78,449	30%	17,905	7%	
Grade 11	263,296		242,453	92%	238,917	91%	49%	58,066	24%	63,930	27%	78,298	33%	38,623	16%	
Total	1,953,743		1,891,389	97%	1,882,409	96%	36%	701,668	37%	512,317	27%	476,897	25%	191,527	10%	

Eligible CAASPP students	Tested		Valid CAASPP scores		Meeting or exceeding standard		Standard not met		Standard nearly met		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Experiencing homelessness														
Grade 3	17,684	95%	16,736	94%	16,659	24%	8,131	49%	4,496	27%	2,469	15%	1,563	9%
Grade 4	17,503	96%	16,719	95%	16,655	26%	8,819	53%	3,529	21%	2,729	16%	1,578	9%
Grade 5	15,860	95%	15,115	95%	15,040	30%	7,021	47%	3,530	23%	3,263	22%	1,226	8%
Grade 6	14,542	95%	13,812	94%	13,724	29%	5,770	42%	4,024	29%	3,132	23%	798	6%
Grade 7	13,914	94%	13,111	93%	12,998	28%	5,776	44%	3,548	27%	3,061	24%	613	5%
Grade 8	12,707	93%	11,881	92%	11,743	30%	4,604	39%	3,634	31%	2,934	25%	571	5%
Grade 11	12,931	86%	11,181	84%	10,921	39%	3,551	33%	3,104	28%	3,000	27%	1,266	12%
Total	105,141	94%	98,555	93%	97,740	29%	43,672	45%	25,865	26%	20,588	21%	7,615	8%
Unaccompanied youth														
Total	2,154	81%	1,741	79%	1,693	25%	825	49%	440	26%	328	19%	100	6%

Notes: Grade-level findings for unaccompanied youth are not shown due to small cell size in some grades. ED = economically disadvantaged.
Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Table A6
Number and Percentage of Tested Students and Achievement Levels in Mathematics
(2015–16)

	Eligible CAASPP students		Tested		Valid CAASPP scores		Meeting or exceeding standard		Standard not met		Standard nearly met		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All CAASPP students																
Grade 3	473,447		461,013	97%	459,701	97%	45%	132,819	29%	117,765	26%	128,168	28%	80,949	18%	
Grade 4	488,399		476,795	98%	475,530	97%	38%	135,085	28%	158,603	33%	109,034	23%	72,808	15%	
Grade 5	478,203		467,426	98%	466,182	97%	33%	181,636	39%	130,597	28%	75,044	16%	78,905	17%	
Grade 6	472,954		462,433	98%	460,881	97%	35%	161,517	35%	136,104	30%	83,796	18%	79,464	17%	
Grade 7	472,771		460,645	97%	458,472	97%	36%	156,387	34%	135,649	30%	88,669	19%	77,767	17%	
Grade 8	467,794		454,150	97%	451,673	97%	36%	175,342	39%	115,145	25%	76,165	17%	85,021	19%	
Grade 11	476,321		438,518	92%	432,383	91%	32%	185,976	43%	106,628	25%	85,536	20%	54,243	13%	
Total	3,329,889		3,220,980	97%	3,204,822	96%	37%	1,128,762	35%	900,491	28%	646,412	20%	529,157	17%	
ED, not experiencing homelessness																
Grade 3	282,920		276,872	98%	276,023	98%	33%	104,636	38%	80,361	29%	67,029	24%	23,997	9%	
Grade 4	293,051		287,430	98%	286,634	98%	25%	107,746	38%	106,991	37%	52,579	18%	19,318	7%	
Grade 5	284,916		279,835	98%	279,029	98%	20%	141,794	51%	81,761	29%	34,770	12%	20,704	7%	
Grade 6	279,165		274,166	98%	273,151	98%	22%	126,071	46%	86,710	32%	39,504	14%	20,866	8%	
Grade 7	276,633		270,501	98%	269,035	97%	23%	121,461	45%	86,375	32%	41,352	15%	19,847	7%	
Grade 8	273,746		266,729	97%	265,044	97%	23%	132,456	50%	71,885	27%	36,548	14%	24,155	9%	
Grade 11	263,266		241,726	92%	237,896	90%	21%	127,956	54%	59,564	25%	36,656	15%	13,720	6%	
Total	1,953,697		1,897,259	97%	1,886,812	97%	24%	862,120	46%	573,647	30%	308,438	16%	142,607	8%	

Eligible CAASPP students	Tested		Valid CAASPP scores		Meeting or exceeding standard		Standard not met		Standard nearly met		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Experiencing homelessness														
Grade 3	17,683	16,957	96%	16,863	95%	27%	7,576	45%	4,748	28%	3,417	20%	1,122	7%
Grade 4	17,503	16,902	97%	16,823	96%	20%	7,452	44%	5,924	35%	2,579	15%	868	5%
Grade 5	15,860	15,283	96%	15,212	96%	16%	8,701	57%	4,135	27%	1,521	10%	855	6%
Grade 6	14,541	13,977	96%	13,876	95%	17%	7,396	53%	4,109	30%	1,619	12%	752	5%
Grade 7	13,910	13,266	95%	13,136	94%	18%	6,842	52%	3,992	30%	1,698	13%	604	5%
Grade 8	12,707	11,994	94%	11,855	93%	18%	6,719	57%	3,000	25%	1,363	11%	773	7%
Grade 11	12,931	11,184	86%	10,906	84%	16%	6,838	63%	2,363	22%	1,270	12%	435	4%
Total	105,135	99,563	95%	98,671	94%	19%	51,524	52%	28,271	29%	13,467	14%	5,409	5%
Unaccompanied youth														
Total	2,154	1,791	83%	1,732	80%	12%	1,139	66%	383	22%	160	9%	50	3%

Notes: Grade-level findings for unaccompanied youth are not shown due to small cell size in some grades. ED = economically disadvantaged.
Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Regression Model

We used a multiple linear regression model to investigate the effect of homeless status; shelter type; school mobility; discipline; and other individual-, school-, and district-level variables on student academic outcome. Regression analysis predicts values of a continuous response variable using one or more explanatory variables.¹⁶⁵ The outcome measures were student theta scores on CAASPP assessments in each of English language arts and mathematics. We included several school-level variables and one at the district level, and we adjusted standard errors by clustering at the school level.¹⁶⁶

The linear regression for the full model takes the following form:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + X_{ij}\beta + Z_j\Pi + \varepsilon_{ij} + u_j$$

Where,

- Y_{ij} is the estimated average English language arts or math score for a particular student i in school j ;
- X_{ij} is a matrix of variables that vary at the individual level; for the full model, these include student gender, race/ethnicity, grade, English language and special education status, number of school moves, and living arrangement if the student experienced homelessness;
- Z_j is a matrix of variables that vary at the school and district levels; these include variables for teacher turnover, teacher credentials, student–staff ratios, and district size; and
- ε_{ij} and u_j are random error terms.

We ran four models, with variables as follows:

- **Model 1:** Student homeless shelter type and grade level. Reference group was students not experiencing homelessness.
- **Model 2:** Adds to Model 1 variables for the number of school moves, and a variable for having ever been suspended.
- **Model 3:** Adds to Model 2 variables for student race and ethnicity, gender, English learner status, and if a year older than the mean age for that grade level.
- **Model 4:** Adds to Model 3 school-level variables for the proportion of teacher turnover and underprepared teachers, proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, proportion of students eligible for special education services, student–staff ratios (one each for teachers, administrators, and support staff), and controls for school and district size.

We ran the model first for all students and then among only the subset of students experiencing homelessness. We clustered errors at the school level to account for the nature of the data (students nested within schools). Output from models for English language arts for all students are shown in Table A7, and for mathematics in Table A8. Findings for the models run only for students experiencing homelessness are not shown.

Table A7
Results of Linear Regression Model for Predictors of Student Achievement
in English Language Arts

(2015–16)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Grade 4	0.469*** (0.004)	0.474*** (0.004)	0.450*** (0.003)	0.457*** (0.004)
Grade 5	0.947*** (0.004)	0.955*** (0.004)	0.885*** (0.004)	0.896*** (0.005)
Grade 6	1.224*** (0.012)	1.253*** (0.011)	1.136*** (0.007)	1.127*** (0.008)
Grade 7	1.482*** (0.016)	1.530*** (0.015)	1.373*** (0.009)	1.372*** (0.009)
Grade 8	1.689*** (0.015)	1.739*** (0.015)	1.563*** (0.009)	1.561*** (0.009)
Grade 11	2.159*** (0.018)	2.209*** (0.017)	1.989*** (0.012)	1.943*** (0.020)
Temporary shelter	-0.636*** (0.020)	-0.427*** (0.020)	-0.277*** (0.018)	-0.191*** (0.017)
Hotels/motels	-0.665*** (0.020)	-0.454*** (0.019)	-0.332*** (0.017)	-0.252*** (0.020)
Temporarily doubled up	-0.516*** (0.009)	-0.418*** (0.009)	-0.176*** (0.006)	-0.123*** (0.007)
Temporarily unsheltered	-0.656*** (0.026)	-0.527*** (0.026)	-0.243*** (0.021)	-0.186*** (0.023)
Shelter unknown	-0.490*** (0.039)	-0.336*** (0.035)	-0.158*** (0.028)	-0.089** (0.033)
Moved once		-0.480*** (0.010)	-0.378*** (0.008)	-0.319*** (0.009)
Moved twice		-0.659*** (0.012)	-0.565*** (0.010)	-0.477*** (0.011)
Moved three times		-0.801*** (0.025)	-0.730*** (0.021)	-0.589*** (0.025)
Moved four or more times		-1.048*** (0.048)	-0.937*** (0.045)	-0.745*** (0.049)
Ever suspended		-0.933*** (0.007)	-0.626*** (0.005)	-0.565*** (0.005)
English learner			-0.900*** (0.004)	-0.839*** (0.005)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Male			-0.202*** (0.001)	-0.211*** (0.002)
Special education (eligible)			-0.936*** (0.004)	-0.968*** (0.004)
Native American/ Native Alaskan			-0.183*** (0.017)	-0.217*** (0.018)
Asian			0.864*** (0.010)	0.613*** (0.007)
Pacific Islander			-0.027* (0.011)	-0.097*** (0.011)
Filipino/a			0.594*** (0.007)	0.417*** (0.007)
White			0.451*** (0.006)	0.211*** (0.006)
African American			-0.327*** (0.007)	-0.318*** (0.007)
Two or more races			-0.019** (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)
More than 1 year older than grade median			-0.649*** (0.021)	-0.538*** (0.021)
Proportion of teacher turnover (per 10%)				-0.040*** (0.004)
Proportion of interns, permits, and waivers (per 10%)				-0.029** (0.009)
Proportion of school enrollment eligible for free or reduced-price meals (per 10%)				-0.082*** (0.001)
Proportion of school enrollment eligible for special education services (per 10%)				-0.028*** (0.008)
Charter school				0.046* (0.020)
School size (per 100 students)				0.002 (0.001)
Student-teacher ratio (per 10 students)				0.002 (0.005)
Student-administrator ratio (per 100 students)				0.001 (0.001)
Student-support staff ratio (per 100 students)				-0.000*** (0.000)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
District size (per 1,000 students)				0.000 (0.000)
Constant	-1.076*** (0.008)	-1.039*** (0.007)	-0.784*** (0.005)	-0.128*** (0.020)
Observations (N)	3192136	3189461	3171658	2320926
Adjusted R-squared	0.264	0.294	0.509	0.526
Log likelihood	-4959928	-4890729	-4285912	-3089490

Notes: Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Asterisks denote p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Reference categories for categorical variables were “3” for grade; “not homeless” for living arrangement; “no moves” for school mobility; “no disability” for special education status; “no” for English learner status; “female” for gender; “no” for year above grade-age; “Latina” for race/ethnicity; “no” for suspended; and “no” for charter school.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Table A8
Results of Linear Regression Model for Predictors of Student Achievement in Mathematics

(2015–16)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Grade 4	0.451*** (0.004)	0.456*** (0.004)	0.436*** (0.003)	0.441*** (0.005)
Grade 5	0.760*** (0.005)	0.769*** (0.005)	0.707*** (0.004)	0.726*** (0.006)
Grade 6	1.054*** (0.014)	1.086*** (0.014)	0.977*** (0.009)	0.975*** (0.010)
Grade 7	1.261*** (0.019)	1.313*** (0.019)	1.167*** (0.011)	1.165*** (0.012)
Grade 8	1.463*** (0.021)	1.517*** (0.020)	1.355*** (0.013)	1.353*** (0.013)
Grade 11	1.800*** (0.024)	1.857*** (0.022)	1.645*** (0.015)	1.574*** (0.028)
Temporary shelter	-0.719*** (0.023)	-0.472*** (0.022)	-0.280*** (0.019)	-0.188*** (0.020)
Hotels/motels	-0.770*** (0.024)	-0.520*** (0.023)	-0.349*** (0.020)	-0.263*** (0.024)
Temporarily doubled up	-0.574*** (0.011)	-0.459*** (0.010)	-0.172*** (0.007)	-0.098*** (0.008)
Temporarily unsheltered	-0.738*** (0.026)	-0.588*** (0.025)	-0.255*** (0.023)	-0.193*** (0.026)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Shelter type unknown	-0.564*** (0.042)	-0.382*** (0.039)	-0.155*** (0.031)	-0.080* (0.036)
Moved once		-0.590*** (0.012)	-0.466*** (0.010)	-0.391*** (0.011)
Moved twice		-0.818*** (0.013)	-0.688*** (0.011)	-0.567*** (0.012)
Moved three times		-0.965*** (0.027)	-0.859*** (0.024)	-0.694*** (0.027)
Moved four or more times		-1.183*** (0.051)	-1.047*** (0.050)	-0.782*** (0.054)
Ever suspended		-1.025*** (0.009)	-0.737*** (0.006)	-0.664*** (0.006)
English learner			-0.824*** (0.005)	-0.757*** (0.006)
Male			0.068*** (0.002)	0.059*** (0.002)
Special education (eligible)			-1.084*** (0.005)	-1.145*** (0.006)
Native American/ Native Alaskan			-0.120*** (0.019)	-0.167*** (0.018)
Asian			1.282*** (0.016)	1.007*** (0.012)
Pacific Islander			0.045*** (0.012)	-0.035** (0.012)
Filipino/a			0.730*** (0.009)	0.530*** (0.009)
White			0.593*** (0.008)	0.317*** (0.007)
African American			-0.361*** (0.008)	-0.353*** (0.008)
Two or more races			0.552*** (0.010)	0.297*** (0.009)
More than 1 year older than grade median			-0.747*** (0.029)	-0.573*** (0.029)
Proportion of teacher turnover (per 10%)				-0.051*** (0.005)
Proportion of interns, permits, and waivers (per 10%)				-0.030** (0.011)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Proportion of school enrollment eligible for free or reduced-price meals (per 10%)				-0.103*** (0.002)
Proportion of school enrollment eligible for special education services (per 10%)				-0.075*** (0.010)
Charter school				-0.011 (0.028)
School size (per 100 students)				0.003 (0.002)
Student-teacher ratio (per 10 students)				-0.008 (0.007)
Student-administrator ratio (per 100 students)				-0.000 (0.001)
Student-support staff ratio (per 100 students)				-0.000* (0.000)
District size (per 1,000 students)				0.000*** (0.000)
Constant	-1.115*** (0.008)	-1.071*** (0.007)	-1.039*** (0.005)	-0.168*** (0.029)
Observations (N)	3200420	3197750	3178572	2325865
Adjusted R-squared	0.164	0.198	0.433	0.462
Log likelihood	-5391191	-5321869	-4738403	-3458828

Notes: Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Asterisks denote p-values: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. Reference categories for categorical variables were “3” for grade; “not homeless” for living arrangement; “no moves” for school mobility; “no disability” for special education status; “no” for English learner status; “female” for gender; “no” for year above grade-age; “Latina” for race/ethnicity; “no” for suspended; and “no” for charter school.

Data source: Data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request.

Interpreting regression coefficients

The outcome variable in each regression model was the student “theta” score, an estimate of student achievement based on the specific questions answered and their relative difficulty.¹⁶⁷ Theta scores are those later transformed to the more familiar scale scores that are reported to schools and parents. Theta scores were provided in the CAASPP data set. In English language arts, theta scores ranged from -4.59 (the lowest obtainable score in grade 3) to 3.34 (the highest obtainable score in grade 11); in mathematics, these ranged from -4.11 to 4.38. (See Table A9.)

Although theta scores are typically described in terms of standard deviations of the whole population, for CAASPP assessments, these standard deviations differ across grades. A table of average theta scores for each grade is shown in Table A9 and provides a guideline for the relative size of regression coefficients. Thus, a coefficient of 0.5 units is equivalent to 0.48 standard deviations (i.e., 0.5/1.05) in grade 3 English language arts and 0.32 standard deviations in

grade 11 mathematics (i.e., 0.5/1.58). Using a table of z-scores, we can compare this value to a standard distribution. The above values (0.48 and 0.32) are equivalent to a move from the 50th percentile to the 68th and 63rd percentiles, respectively. A coefficient of size 0.25 is equivalent to a movement from the 50th percentile to the 59th and 56th percentiles in grade 3 English language arts and grade 11 mathematics, respectively.¹⁶⁸

Table A9
Mean Theta Scores in English Language Arts and Mathematics
 (2015–16)

Grade	Mean ELA Theta Score	Standard Deviation	Min.	Max.	Mean Math Theta Score	Standard Deviation	Min.	Max.
3	-1.10	1.05	-4.59	1.34	-1.14	1.03	-4.11	1.33
4	-0.63	1.12	-4.40	1.80	-0.69	1.05	-3.92	1.82
5	-0.15	1.13	-3.58	2.25	-0.37	1.16	-3.73	2.33
6	0.13	1.13	-3.48	2.51	-0.08	1.35	-3.53	2.95
7	0.39	1.16	-2.91	2.75	0.13	1.41	-3.34	3.32
8	0.60	1.16	-2.57	3.04	0.33	1.51	-3.15	3.63
11	1.07	1.29	-2.44	3.34	0.67	1.58	-2.96	4.38

Data source: California Department of Education. (2017). *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress: Smarter Balanced technical report 2015–16 administration*. California Department of Education Assessment Development and Administration Division. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/sb16sbtechrpt.pdf> (accessed 10/30/20).

Study Limitations

This study has several key limitations. These relate primarily to data collection, availability, and quality. As some reports have noted, many schools and districts may not have the capacity to identify students experiencing homelessness.¹⁶⁹ We recognize the many challenges involved in data collection and maintenance and acknowledge the considerable work of CDE staff in making these available.

Our data did not permit analysis of the duration of homelessness, which some studies have found is correlated with educational outcomes.¹⁷⁰ Our analysis was thus restricted to students who were identified as having experienced homelessness at least once during the school year, but it did not examine the transitory and recurrent nature of homelessness and its implications for student learning. Our data also did not permit us to analyze attendance. Given that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be chronically absent from school, this is an important avenue for future research.

While a strength of this report is the use of CAASPP data to investigate the correlates of student achievement in the tested grades 3–8 and 11, inconsistency in some CALPADS variables limited the extent to which we were able to study the student population in the non-tested grades. For similar data quality reasons, we restricted our analyses to the 2015–16 school year.

Future studies may link data sets over multiple years to examine recurrent or long-term homelessness. In addition, longitudinal data could allow examination of the growth trajectories of students experiencing homelessness, how homelessness relates to learning outcomes in later years, disaggregation by district, and improved understanding of the factors associated with stronger educational outcomes and resiliency.

Finally, our analytical approach used descriptive statistics and correlational methods such as regression analysis. Future research may seek to use quasi-experimental methods to enable causal inferences.

Endnotes

1. Data includes students in grades pre–k to 12. National Center for Homeless Education. (2021). *Federal data summary: School years 2016–17 through 2018–19: Education for homeless children and youth*.
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4. This reflects the number of students experiencing homelessness as defined under the McKinney-Vento Act. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses a different definition of homelessness that does not capture individuals living doubled up or in motels. These groups account for over 80% of those experiencing homelessness as defined under McKinney-Vento.
5. California State Auditor. (2019). *Youth experiencing homelessness: California’s education system for k–12 inadequately identifies and supports these youth* [No. 2019–104]. <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2019-104.pdf> (accessed 10/28/20).
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7. Bishop, J., Camargo Gonzalez, L., & Rivera, E. (2020). *State of crisis: Dismantling student homelessness in California*. Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.
8. These analyses use data provided by the California Department of Education through a special request. The 2015–16 school year was chosen for reasons of data quality. These 2015–16 data represent a time before amendments to the federal McKinney-Vento Act, enacted as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, went into effect.
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105. Economically disadvantaged students are defined as students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, including categorically eligible students, such as students from migrant families, students in foster care, and students experiencing homelessness. In contrast, socioeconomically disadvantaged students (the term used in the preceding section) are defined as economically disadvantaged students or students who have parents who did not graduate from high school.
106. For the purposes of this report, we counted only primary enrollments. We counted returns to a previous school only when the period of enrollment was longer than 10 days. This approach yields a conservative estimate, and the total number of school moves may be higher.
107. We define a full school year as one in which students are enrolled in school both on September 1, 2015, and during CAASPP testing at their school site.

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117. In 2015–16, 38,772 students, or around 1.5% of all students, took the California Alternative Assessments.
118. The proportion of students meeting or exceeding standards varies across grades. Achievement data show that grades 5 and 11 are those in which fewest students met or exceeded standards.
119. The pattern of student achievement varies across grade level among English language arts and mathematics for all students, including those experiencing homelessness. The proportion of students meeting or exceeding state standards is greater in middle school and grade 11 for English language arts; in mathematics, these proportions are lower. Additional data are shown in the appendix.
120. Where a student record was associated with more than one type of living arrangement, the record was assigned to that of longest duration.
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122. The CAASPP assessments are computer adaptive, in which students answer different questions based on their responses to earlier questions. The term “theta score” comes from item response theory and here refers to an estimate of a student’s achievement on a particular set of competencies based on the specific questions answered. See: California Department of Education. (2017). *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress: Smarter Balanced technical report, 2015–16 administration*. California Department of Education Assessment Development and Administration Division <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/sb16sbtechrpt.pdf> (accessed 10/30/20).
123. Movements from the 50th percentile are calculated from a table of z-scores and assume a normal distribution of the outcome variable. Theta scores are approximately normally distributed by grade, although the tails of the distribution are truncated by a lowest obtainable and highest obtainable score in each grade.
124. While theta scores are commonly centered with a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1, the nature of the vertical calibration of the CAASPP assessments means these statistics differ across grades. We therefore refer more generally to “theta units.” Comparisons with means and standard deviations within grades provide a practical interpretation of the magnitude of the coefficients in the regression model.

125. The reference group for these analyses is students not experiencing homelessness who are English-only speakers, are female, are Latina, did not change school, are in 3rd grade, are not eligible for special education services, were not suspended, are not more than a year older than the median age for a given grade level, and are enrolled in a traditional (non-charter) school.
126. Regression analysis indicates the average association of several predictors with student achievement after accounting for all other factors, but it does not permit us the assertion of a causal relationship between a predictor and the outcome.
127. When clustering errors by school code and running the model for students experiencing homelessness only, the negative association with an increased proportion of underprepared teachers held for English language arts but was not statistically significant, at the 0.05 threshold, for mathematics.
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164. Interns, permits, and waivers are defined according to the type of credential issued to the staff member by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Interns include university intern and district intern; permits include provisional internship permit and limited assignment teaching permit. Waivers are requested by an employer on behalf of an individual when the employer is unable to find credentialed teachers or individuals who qualify for an emergency permit. See also: California Department of Education. (n.d.). File structure: Staff credential record. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/df/fsstaffcred12.asp> (accessed 10/28/20).
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167. The CAASPP assessments are computer adaptive, in which students answer different questions based on their responses to earlier questions. The term "theta score" comes from item response theory and here refers to an estimate of a student's achievement on a particular set of competencies based on the specific questions answered. See: California Department of Education. (2017). *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress: Smarter Balanced technical report, 2015–16 administration*. California Department of Education Assessment Development and Administration Division. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/sb16sbtechrpt.pdf> (accessed 10/30/20).
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