

# THE UNSEEN & UNSUPPORTED STUDENTS IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

AN ANALYSIS OF CHARTER SCHOOL'S STUDENT HOMELESS POPULATIONS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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## Report Overview

Charter schools in Los Angeles County serve over 252,000 students. In the 2018-2019 school year, 4,429 of those students were identified as experiencing homelessness. This brief report offers an analysis of county wide data on charter school students experiencing homelessness.

### Key Findings:

1. In LA County charter schools, the 5-year cohort graduation rates for charter school students experiencing homelessness is 45%, approximately 35 percentage points lower than the graduation rate for students experiencing homelessness in non-charter, public schools.
2. 40% of high school students experiencing homelessness in LA county charter schools were chronically absent and missed 18 or more instructional days in the 2018-19 school year. Moreover, one out of every two Black high school students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent.
3. The homeless liaison is the most important role in supporting students experiencing homelessness as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. In LA County charter schools, this role is often designated to network leadership and school administrators.
4. Homelessness experts assert that typically 10% of economically disadvantaged students experience homelessness. Employing a 10% benchmark in LA county charter schools suggests that in 2018-2019 potentially 6,463 students experiencing homelessness were not identified or served.
5. To ensure that students experiencing homelessness are identified and supported in charter schools, it is critical that schools implement student audits twice a year using a 10% benchmark to identify potential undercounting. Further, schools must designate a homeless liaison capable of fully executing the federal mandates of the position and serving as head of a larger student support team.

# Enrollment and Academic Outcomes for Students Experiencing Homelessness in LA County Charter Schools

Charter schools in Los Angeles County serve over 252,000 students. In the 2018-2019 school year, 4,429 of those students were identified as experiencing homelessness<sup>1</sup>. While charter schools identified 2% of their population as students experiencing homelessness, non-charter schools identified a significantly larger proportion at 5% (Fig. 1). The 5-year cohort graduation rates for charter school students experiencing homelessness is 45%, approximately 35 percentage points lower than graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness in non-charter schools in the county (Fig. 3). 40% of high school students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent and missed over 10% of the school year (Fig. 4). Black students are disproportionately represented in the homelessness population (Fig. 2), and in 2018-2019, 37% of Black students experiencing homelessness graduated from their charter school within 5 years (Fig. 3). One out of every two Black high school students experiencing homelessness in a charter schools in LA County missed 18 or more days of instructions.

**Fig. 1 | Cumulative Enrollment of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Los Angeles County**

EACH SCHOOL YEAR BETWEEN 2016-2019

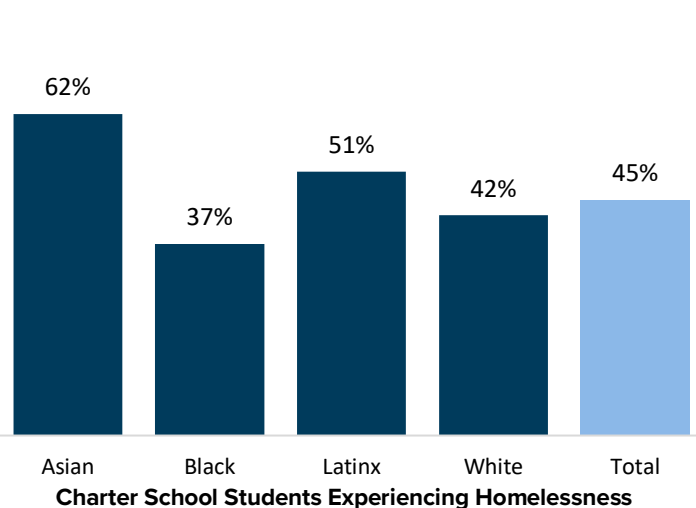
	Non-Charter School	Charter School
2018-19	62,340	4,429
	5% of non-charter population	2% of charter population
2017-18	60,334	5,942
	5% of non-charter population	2% of charter population
2016-17	64,180	5,302
	5% of non-charter population	2% of charter population

Charter schools in Los Angeles County identify a smaller proportion of students experiencing homelessness than non-charter schools.

**Fig. 3 | LA County Charter School 5 Year Cohort Graduation Rate for Students Experiencing Homelessness Compared to Non-Charter Schools**

2018-19 ACADEMIC YEAR

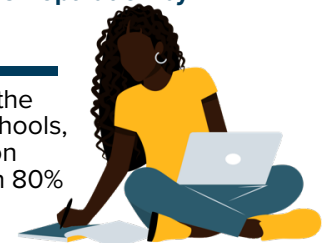
Graduation Rate for Non-Charter School Students Experiencing Homelessness 81%



**Fig. 2 | Cumulative Enrollment in Charter Schools Compared to Student Homeless Population by Race/Ethnicity**

2018-2019 ACADEMIC YEAR

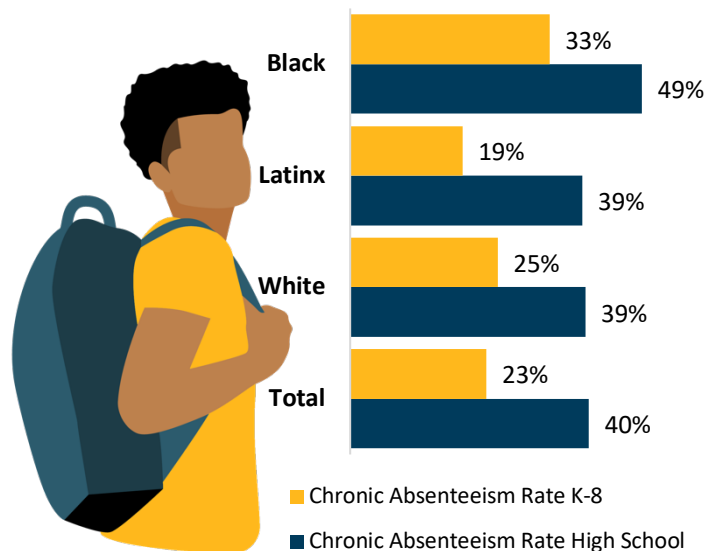
Black students make up 10% of the general population in charter schools, but 18% of the student population experiencing homelessness—an 80% difference in representation.



Race/Ethnicity	Cumulative Enrollment	Homeless Population	Difference
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%	2%	-67%
Black	10%	18%	80%
Latinx	59%	68%	15%
White	18%	7%	-61%
Other	7%	5%	-28%

**Fig. 4 | K-8 and High School Charter School Absenteeism Rates by Race/Ethnicity**

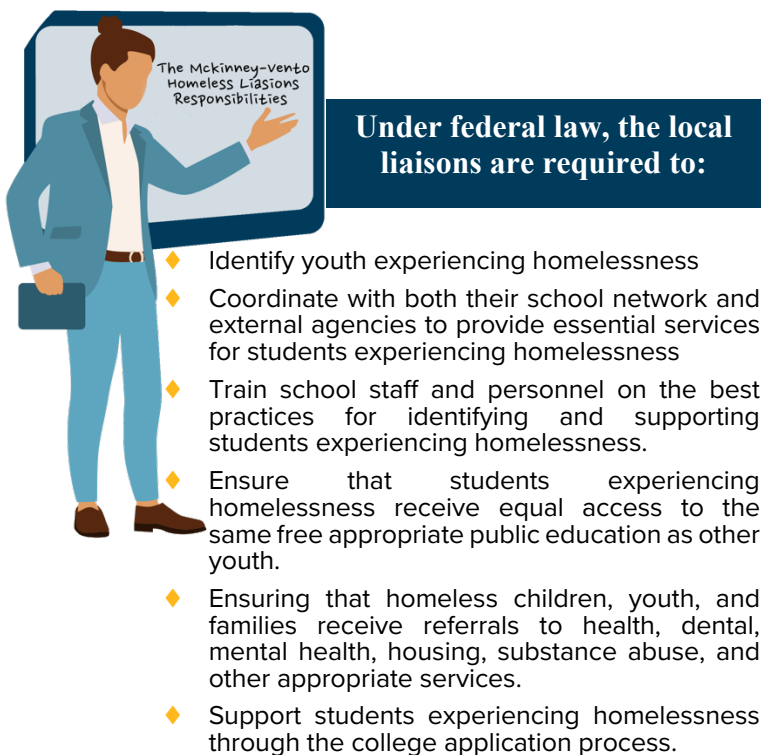
2018-2019 ACADEMIC YEAR



# The Role of the Homeless Liaison in Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires all local educational agencies to have a designated homeless liaison<sup>2</sup>. The homeless liaison works to identify students experiencing homelessness and provides those students the resources and support necessary to access education to the same level as their stably housed peers (Fig. 5). While the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act does not require that homeless liaison be a full-time position, the law does mandate that appointed personnel have the capacity to fulfill all of time intensive responsibilities the position requires. In LA county charter schools, principals and district executive leaders are most commonly listed as school district liaisons (Fig.6). Our analysis also shows that many LA County charter schools often designate operations personnel with little student and family interaction (e.g. a Chief Officer of Operations) as homeless liaisons versus, personnel whose job title requires relationship building with students and families (e.g. school counselor or parent engagement coordinator) (Fig.7).

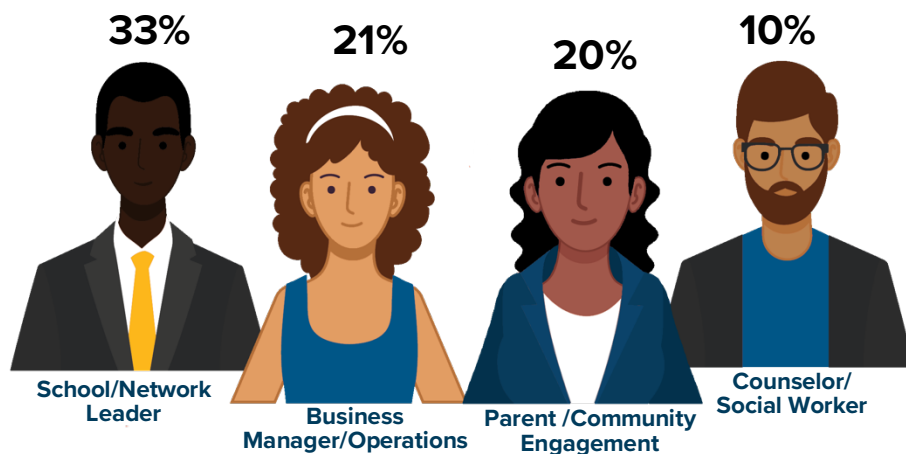
**Fig. 5 | Key Responsibilities of the District Homeless Liaison**  
ACCORDING THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT, 2015



**Fig. 6 | Top 15 Job Titles of School Personnel Serving as Homeless Liaisons in LA Charter Schools in 2019-2020**  
A TOTAL OF 235 CHARTER SCHOOLS WERE ANALYZED IN LA COUNTY

Position	Frequency
Principal	43
Community School Manager	20
District Leader/Executive Director	15
Counselor	13
Chief Operation Officers	13
VP of Operations	11
Regional Manager of Student Services	11
Assistant Principal	11
VP Students and Families Services	8
Office Manager	8
Director of Special Education	8
Community Relations Coordinator	8
Operations Manager	7
Parent Engagement Specialist	6
Director Students and Families Services	6

**Fig. 7 | The Full-Time Roles of Personnel Who Are Commonly Designated as Homeless Liaisons in Charter Schools**  
A TOTAL OF 235 CHARTER SCHOOLS WERE ANALYZED IN LA COUNTY



# Charter Schools Are Potentially Undercounting the Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness in their Schools

Student homelessness research estimates that 5-10% of a school and school district's economically disadvantaged population is experiencing homelessness as defined by the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act<sup>3</sup>. When applying the 10% benchmark, LA County charter schools may have missed over 6,400 students experiencing homelessness in the 2018-19 school year (Fig. 8). After analyzing LAUSD SARC data for 269 charter schools, we found that in 180 schools, economically disadvantaged students made up 80-100% of the student body. Of those 180 schools, 105 reported that less than 1% of their student population experienced homelessness (Fig 9). In 2 LAUSD operated charter schools, the 10% benchmark estimated over 230 potentially unidentified students experiencing homelessness. Identifying students experiencing homelessness is the number one responsibility of the homeless liaisons (Fig. 10).

**Fig. 8 | Los Angeles County Charter School Cumulative Enrollment Compared to Projected Homeless Count**  
2018-2019 ACADEMIC YEAR



## 6,463 Students

Are estimated to have been unidentified by their charter school as students experiencing homelessness

Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	Actual Homeless Count	Projected Homeless Count*
87,083	2,245	8,708

\*The projected homeless count for LA County is 10% of the county's economically disadvantaged students.

**Fig. 9 | LAUSD Charter School Reports of Student Homelessness**

2018-19 SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARD DATA



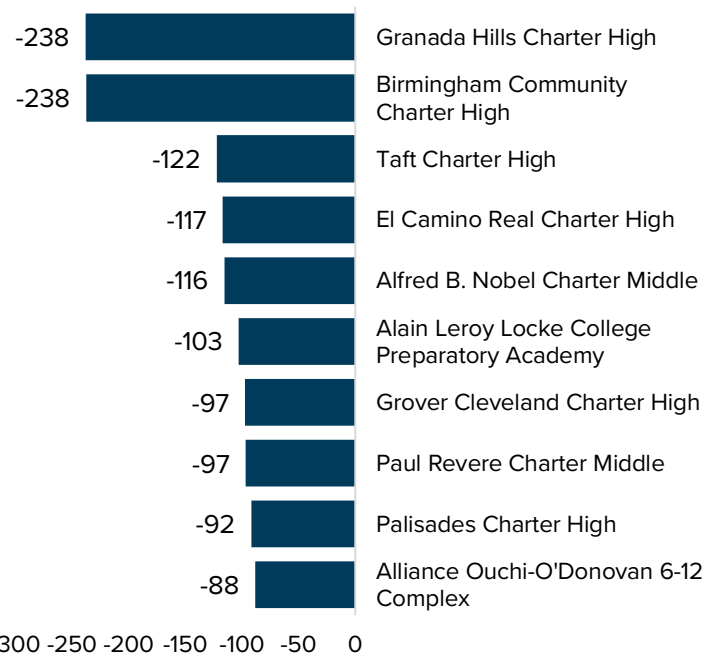
In 180 LAUSD charter schools, over 80% of the student body is economically disadvantaged. Of those schools

# 105

reported that less than one percent of their students experienced homelessness

**Fig. 10 | Estimated Number of Unidentified Students Experiencing Homelessness in LAUSD Largest Charter Schools**

2018-19 SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARD AND CDE 2018-19 ENROLLMENT DATA



## Review of Network Affiliated Charter Schools

In Los Angeles County, several charter schools are affiliated with a charter school network meant to provide an additional layer of administrative, academic, and social support for students. Often charter school networks share handbooks and website templates for consistency within their network. We conducted an online audit of the 15 largest charter school networks in LA County (1 school per network) and found that only 2 schools listed the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness on their school website. Also, 5 of the 15 charter network schools mentioned the education rights of families experiencing homelessness in their family/student handbook. The lack of information distributed to students and families via online resources and in policy handbooks creates barriers for self-advocacy and to disclosing their homeless status.

**Fig. 11 | Online Audit of Network Affiliated Charter Schools in LA County**

A TOTAL OF 235 CHARTER SCHOOLS WERE ANALYZED IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Charter Network and School Name	Homeless Liaison Full-Time Position	Identified Students Experiencing Homelessness In 2018-19 SY	*Projected Homeless Population in 2018-19 SY	Educational rights of youth experiencing homelessness on website?	Family Handbook Cites McKinney-Vento?	Family Handbook States Students Rights?
<b>Alliance</b> Alliance Judy Ivie Burton Technology Academy	Assistant Principal	2	60	No	Yes	No
<b>Green Dot Public Schools</b> Animo Ellen Ochoa Charter Middle	Community School Mgr.	25	33	No	No	No
<b>Aspire</b> Aspire Centennial College Prep. Academy	Regional Mgr. of Student Services	5	50	No	Yes	No
<b>Bright Star</b> Bright Star Secondary Charter Academy	VP of Student and Family Services	2	48	No	No	No
<b>Camino Nuevo Charter</b> Camino Nuevo Charter Academy	Director of Whole Child	2	56	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Puc Schools</b> Community Collaborative Charter	Co-Founder	1	21	No	No	No
<b>Da Vinci</b> Da Vinci Rise High	Director of Special Education	2	10	No	Yes	No
<b>Fenton Public Charter</b> Fenton Avenue Charter	Principal	20	67	Yes	No	No
<b>ICEF Public Schools</b> ICEF Innovation Los Angeles Charter	Community Relations Coordinator	0	20	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>iLead School</b> iLead Hybrid	Not Listed	14	78	No	No	No
<b>Ingenium Schools</b> Ingenium Charter Middle	Director of Student Services	1	22	No	Yes	Yes
<b>ISANA Academies</b> ISANA Cardinal Academy	National Vice President	0	34	No	No	No
<b>KIPP LA Schools</b> KIPP Los Angeles College Preparatory	Office Manager	2	47	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Magnolia Educational</b> Magnolia Science Academy 1	Principal*	7	52	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Palisades Charter</b> Palisades Charter High	Not Listed	6	98	No	No	No

\*The projected homeless count for each school is 10% of their economically disadvantaged students.

# Recommendations for Charter Schools on Improving the Effectiveness of Identifying and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness

1. **Ensure that you appoint homeless liaisons who work closely with students and families in their full-time positions, and that they have the time to fulfill all of the federally mandated responsibilities of a homeless liaison.**

If the homeless liaison is not a fulltime position, the liaison responsibilities should be embedded within the appointed personnel's full-time job description. A school's homeless liaison should not be a school principal or a network leader. This position should be reserved for personnel who work closely with students and families in their full-time position. Such personnel are better positioned to build relationships with families and to establish the trust needed to counsel, serve, and advocate for them.

2. **Charter schools should implement student homeless audits at least biannually and establish a percentage benchmark to assess potential undercounting.**

Student housing questionnaires should be distributed twice a year. Also, charter schools should use enrollment numbers for economically disadvantaged students to establish a benchmark metric that estimates the number of students experiencing homelessness. If the number of students identified as homeless is below the benchmark, homeless liaisons should be required to explain their recruitment approach and offer a rationale for why the numbers are low. The audit process should not be evaluative, but rather a formative mechanism to ensure that all kids experiencing homelessness at the school are being identified and served. A similar recommendation was provided to all schools in California by the California State Auditor Office in 2019.

3. **All charter schools should explicitly state the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness, and make contact information for the homeless liaison readily available on school websites and in policy handbooks**

A school's website and a charter school parent handbook are two of the few resources that parents can use to gather school information independently—it unacceptable for these resources to lack critical information for supporting some of the most vulnerable families. Birmingham Community Charter School's [website](#) provides a model for how schools can communicate students experiencing homelessness' educational rights.

4. **Develop a support team to create strategies and harness resources to meet the specific needs of individual students and families experiencing homelessness at your school.**

Create a strategic support team designed to fill academic, social, and material gaps of students experiencing homelessness. The team should be led by the homeless liaison and could include teachers, counselors, parents, county departments, community partners, and other school personnel.



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**Methodology.** The base data for this brief was retrieved from California Department of Education's Data Quest, Homeless Liaisons Information List, and CDE School Academic Report Card retrieved on July, 8th 2020. A detailed methodology breakdown for each figure can be found [here](#). This brief was updated on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## References.

1. The dataset uses the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's definition of student homelessness which includes students living in motels and students who are temporarily living in another person's residence due to a lack of stable housing. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. 2015. Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act. 42 US Code § 11431-11435.
2. School House Connection. "The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Quick Reference." Retrieved on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/The-McKinney-Vento-Act-Quick-Reference.pdf>
3. Howle, E.M. Youth experiencing homelessness: California's education system for K–12 inadequately identifies and supports these youth. 2019. California State Auditor Office. Sacramento, CA. Retrieved on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2019-104/summary.html>

**Acknowledgements:** The inquiry for this brief was informed by community listening sessions hosted by Dr. Tunette Powell of UCLA Parent Empowerment Project and Charles Evans of School on Wheels, Inc in August and September, 2020. At the sessions, parents voiced concerns about navigating charter schools while experiencing homelessness. The parent's advocacy for their children inspired our research team to explore the topic of homelessness and charter schools more deeply."

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