

UCLA

Center for the Transformation
of Schools

State of CRISIS

2026

A *Deepening Crisis* of
Students Experiencing
Homelessness Across California

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

03	Acknowledgments
04	Abstract
05	Introduction
07	Glossary of Key Terms
08	Methods
09	Findings
25	Recommendations
28	Conclusion
29	References



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ABSTRACT

298,254

California students
experienced homelessness
during SY 2024–25.

- **↑ 10% since 2018–19**
- **Highest level ever recorded**
- **Equivalent to filling Dodger Stadium more than five times**

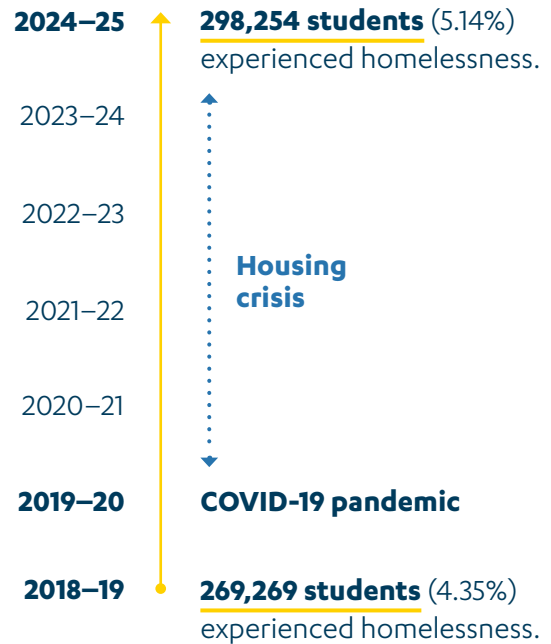
Student homelessness in California has not only persisted, but intensified in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, demanding updated, data-driven analysis to inform policy and practice. This report updates the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools' 2020 *State of Crisis* report, examining trends in student homelessness across California from SY 2017–18 through SY 2024–25 using publicly available administrative data from the California Department of Education (CDE), including homeless student enrollment, suspension, chronic absenteeism, academic achievement, graduation, and college-going indicators. Findings reveal that the number of students experiencing homelessness reached a new peak of 298,254 in SY 2024–25, a 10% increase over the prior peak in SY 2018–19, with Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students experiencing the highest and fastest-growing rates of

homelessness, and geographic concentration most pronounced in Southern California by count and in Central Coast counties by rate. Students experiencing homelessness continue to lag significantly behind their housed peers across all educational outcomes examined, including chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, academic proficiency, graduation, and college-going rates, with most gaps remaining persistent or widening over time. These findings underscore that student homelessness is not merely a housing issue but a complex educational crisis requiring sustained, coordinated public action, including targeted regional investments, dedicated funding streams, strengthened federal protections, and integrated cross-system supports, to ensure that California's housing-insecure students have an equitable opportunity to succeed.

INTRODUCTION

The Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness Across California **Continues to Rise**

The UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools' 2020 *State of Crisis* report sounded an urgent alarm about the scale and consequences of students experiencing homelessness across California, calling attention to the profound educational instability faced by hundreds of thousands of young people. That study helped build broader public understanding of the severity of the issue. The report documented that 269,269 students were experiencing homelessness statewide (Bishop et al., 2020). The report's communications campaign used the visual metaphor that this population of students could fill Dodger Stadium to capacity nearly five times, based on the stadium's seating capacity of approximately 56,000 attendees.



Students experiencing homelessness can now fill **more than five Dodger Stadiums**.

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This 2026 update to *State of Crisis* builds on earlier findings and reveals that the crisis has not only persisted but has intensified, now affecting more than 298,254 young people in California. Today, students experiencing homelessness can now fill five stadiums to capacity—and more than a third of a sixth stadium. This upward trend in California mirrors national patterns: In the 2022–23 school year, approximately 1.37 million students nationwide experienced homelessness, a sharp increase from the prior year and one of the highest totals in the past decade (see **Figure 1**; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2023; Cazares-Minero et al., 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). On the heels of releasing this report, the Governor and legislature included a one-time budget allocation of \$116 million to support the identification and educational success of K-12 students experiencing homelessness, the largest dedicated state funding to prioritize housing insecure youth in the country (National Center on Youth and Law, 2026). This investment shows that lawmakers understand the severity of the issue in California, a pattern this study explores further. Rising numbers are particularly concerning given the extensive evidence documenting the harmful effects of housing instability on children’s development, health, and educational outcomes. Research consistently finds that students experiencing homelessness face higher rates of chronic absenteeism, school mobility, and academic disruption, all of which undermine learning continuity and achievement (Cutuli et al., 2013; Voight et al., 2012). Housing instability is also strongly associated with toxic stress, adverse childhood experiences, and mental health challenges that can impede cognitive development and social-emotional well-being (Sandel et al., 2018; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Longitudinal studies further show that highly mobile students and students experiencing homelessness are significantly less likely to meet grade-level standards and graduate on time compared to their stably housed peers (Herbers et al., 2012; Miller, 2011).

While the original report focused on documenting the scope of the crisis from the early years to college and elevating awareness among policymakers and educators, the 2026 edition aims to deepen

understanding of how the K-12 landscape has shifted in the years since, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising housing costs, and growing economic instability affecting families with school-aged children. We examine trends in student homelessness across regions and student groups and describe how housing instability intersects with academic outcomes, attendance, and school engagement.

Finally, the 2026 report is intended to serve as a roadmap for prevention and systems change. It reaffirms the core message of the original 2020 report:

Student homelessness is not only a housing issue, but a **complex educational and developmental crisis** requiring sustained, coordinated public action.



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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the primary federal law governing the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the United States (42 U.S.C. § 11431–11435). Originally enacted in 1987 and most recently reauthorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act, the education subtitle of the Act ensures that students experiencing homelessness have equal access to free, appropriate public education. Federal guidance further clarifies identification procedures and district responsibilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Cumulative Count

In the Homeless Enrollment context, “cumulative” means the total number of students who were enrolled at any time during the academic year, regardless of how many times they enrolled or moved between schools. Homeless student counts in the same files are unduplicated — each student is counted just once for the year, even if they were experiencing homelessness at multiple points.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fshse.asp>

Chronic Absenteeism

CDE (via California Education Code § 60901 and state attendance guidance) defines a “chronic absentee” as a student who is absent for 10% or more of the instructional days in a school year, regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/ag/ag-terminology-laws.asp>



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METHODS

This brief draws on **publicly available statewide data** from the California Department of Education (CDE) from SY 2017–18 through SY 2024–25.

Data were obtained from the CDE’s DataQuest and downloadable research files, including enrollment of students experiencing homelessness (McKinney-Vento), suspension, chronic absenteeism, assessment outcomes (ELA and mathematics), graduation outcomes, and college-going indicators. These files compile annual student-level and aggregate counts reported by local education agencies (LEAs) across California and represent the most comprehensive statewide administrative data available on K–12 students experiencing homelessness.

Analyses were primarily descriptive and relied on publicly reported subgroup-level administrative data. We examined year-to-year changes in counts and percentages of students experiencing homelessness statewide and by race/ethnicity, region, district, and county. Percentages of students experiencing homelessness by race/ethnicity are reported beginning in SY 2019–20, as the CDE does not provide cumulative counts by race for earlier years. District-level analyses were limited to districts enrolling at least 500 students, and county-level analyses were limited to counties enrolling at least 1,000 students to avoid instability associated with very small denominators. For academic outcomes (ELA and mathematics proficiency), analyses begin in SY 2018–19, the first year for which subgroup data for students experiencing homelessness were available. Suspension, chronic absenteeism, and non-stability rates were compared between students experiencing homelessness and housed students using publicly reported subgroup rates.

- **Enrollment**
- **Suspensions**
- **Chronic absenteeism**
- **Assessment outcomes (ELA and mathematics)**
- **Graduation outcomes**
- **College-going indicators**



No interviews, surveys, or primary data collection were conducted for this report. All analyses rely exclusively on administrative data reported by LEAs to the CDE and made publicly available.

Several limitations should be noted. First, identification of homelessness depends on local reporting under McKinney-Vento and may undercount students due to stigma, mobility, or inconsistent identification practices across districts. Second, pandemic-related school closures and disruptions (SY 2019–20 through SY 2021–22) affected data collection, attendance reporting, assessment participation, and mobility tracking, limiting comparability across those years. Third, the data do not allow for causal inference regarding the relationship between homelessness and student outcomes; analyses are descriptive and do not control for confounding factors such as poverty, disability status, or English learner status. Finally, while district and county comparisons highlight geographic variation, differences in local housing markets, reporting capacity, and demographic composition may influence observed patterns.

Despite these limitations, the CDE administrative datasets provide the most comprehensive statewide portrait of trends in student homelessness and associated educational outcomes in California. These data allow for an updated assessment of how the scale, distribution, and consequences of student homelessness have evolved in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic.

FINDINGS

1. The number of students experiencing homelessness increased by more than 30,000 from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25.

The number of students experiencing homelessness decreased from 269,269 in SY 2018–19 to 224,191 in SY 2021–22, then increased to 298,254 in SY 2024–25, an increase of nearly 75,000 students from SY 2021–22 (see **Figure 1**). Similarly, the percentage of students experiencing homelessness decreased from 4.35% in SY 2018–19 to 3.77% in SY 2020–21 (see **Figure 2**). The percentage then gradually increased each year to 5.14% in SY 2024–25. The new peak in SY 2024–25 represents a 10% increase over the previous peak in SY 2018–19. Considering the logistical difficulties of identification during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to determine whether the observed decrease in the percentage and count of students experiencing homelessness from SY 2019–20 to SY 2021–22 is accurate. The peak in both the number and percentage of students experiencing homelessness in SY 2024–25 coincides with the post-pandemic period and underscores the continued instability facing these students.

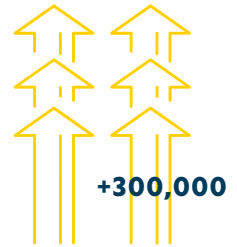
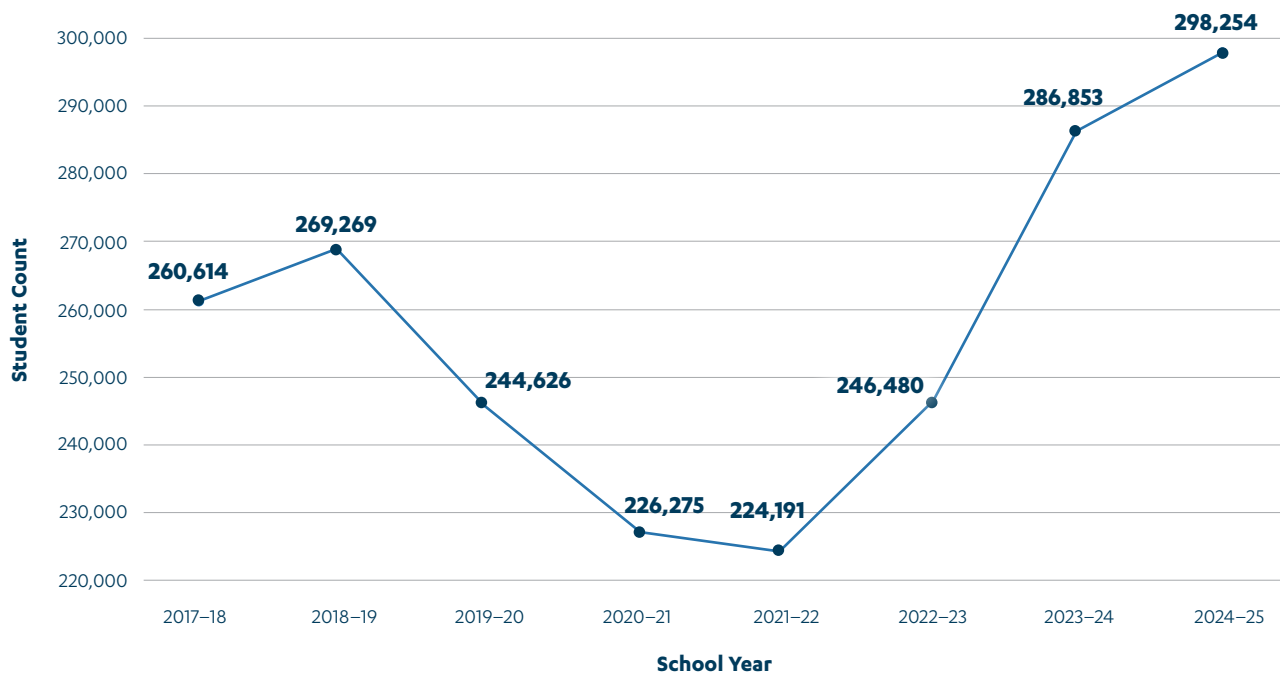
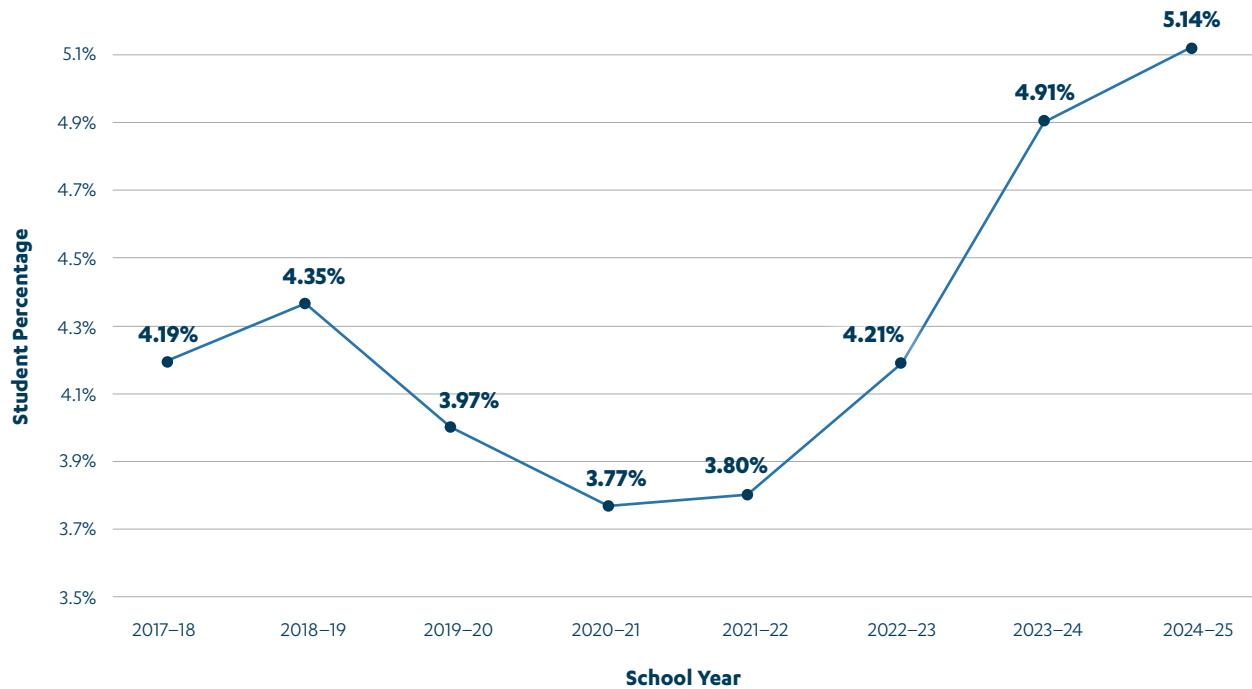


Figure 1. Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25



Note. Data for SY 2019–20 to 2024–25 were retrieved from DataQuest Homeless Student Data, View Row Data as: Academic Year (Multi-Year). Data for SY 2017–18 and 2018–19 were retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/homelessoutcomes1920.asp>.

Figure 2. Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25



Note. Data for SY 2019–20 to 2024–25 were retrieved from DataQuest Homeless Student Data, View Row Data as: Academic Year (Multi-Year). Data for SY 2017–18 and 2018–19 were retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/homelessoutcomes1920.asp>.



Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

2. **Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students** have consistently experienced the highest rates of homelessness. In SY 2024–25, approximately **one in 12** of every Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students experienced homelessness.



The percentages of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students experiencing homelessness have both increased between SY 2019–20 and SY 2024–25 (see **Figure 3**). American Indian/Alaska Native students experienced the largest percentage-point increase among all racial groups during this time, increasing by 1.15%.

3. **Racial disparities** in student homelessness are persistent and have widened over time.

The percentages of Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and Latine students experiencing homelessness remained above 4.5% from SY 2019–20 to SY 2024–25. In contrast, the percentages of Asian, Filipino, and white students experiencing homelessness remained below 2.5% during the same period (see **Figure 3**). Put differently, fewer than 1 in 40 Asian, Filipino, and white students experienced homelessness, compared with more than 1 in 22 Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and Latine students. Thus, students in the latter racial groups experience homelessness at rates more than 1.8 times higher than those in the former groups. Moreover, these racial disparities widened over time, with a 4.54% percentage point difference between Asian and American Indian/Alaska Native students in SY 2021–22 that increased to a 6.64% percentage point difference in SY 2024–25.

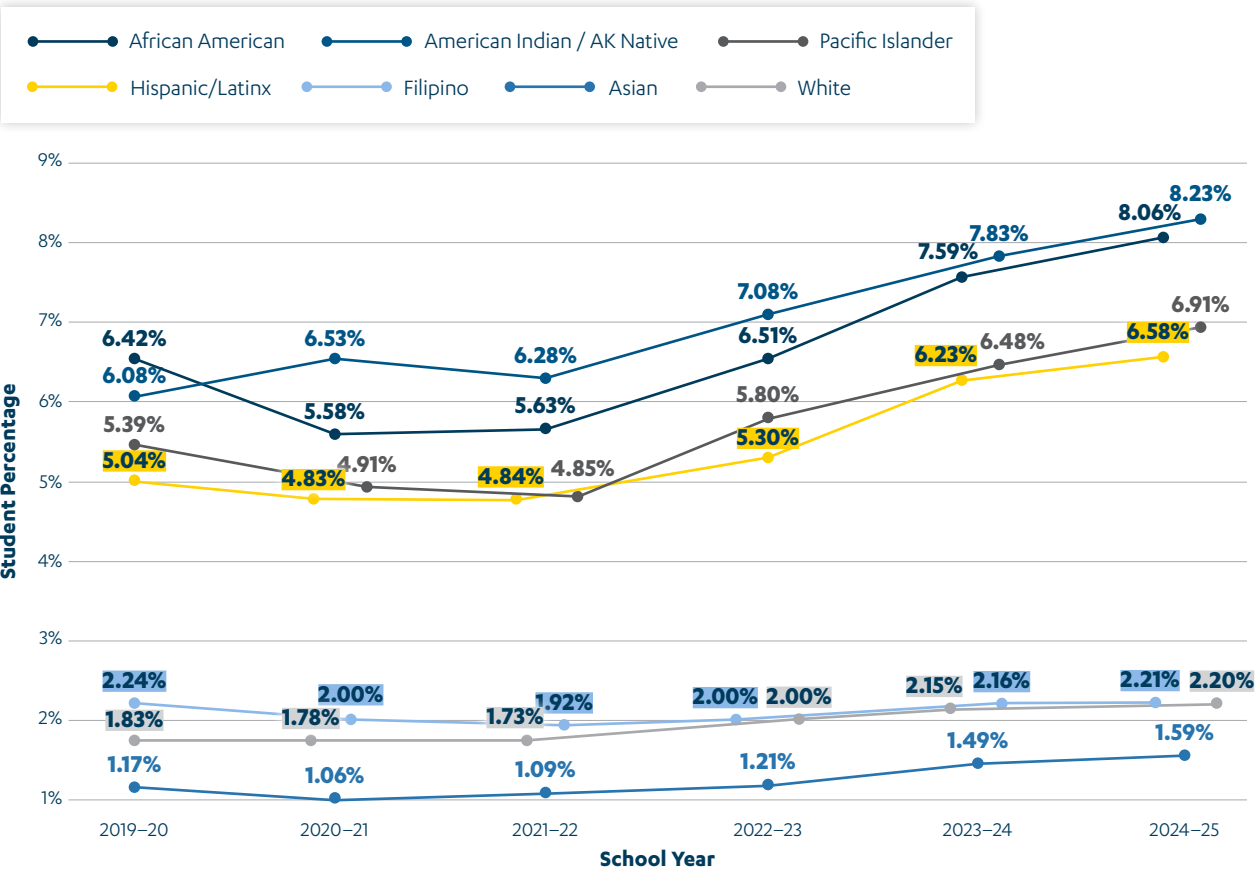


1 in 22

Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and Latine students experienced homelessness.

Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages

Figure 3. Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness by Race from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25



	African American	American Indian / AK Native	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic or Latinx	Pacific Islander	White
2019–20	6.42%	6.08%	1.17%	2.24%	5.04%	5.39%	1.83%
2020–21	5.58%	6.53%	1.06%	2.00%	4.83%	4.91%	1.78%
2021–22	5.63%	6.28%	1.09%	1.92%	4.84%	4.85%	1.73%
2022–23	6.51%	7.08%	1.21%	2.00%	5.30%	5.80%	2.00%
2023–24	7.59%	7.83%	1.49%	2.16%	6.23%	6.48%	2.15%
2024–25	8.06%	8.23%	1.59%	2.21%	6.58%	6.91%	2.20%

Note. Data for SY 2019–20 to 2024–25 were retrieved from DataQuest Homeless Student Data, View Row Data as: Race/Ethnicity.

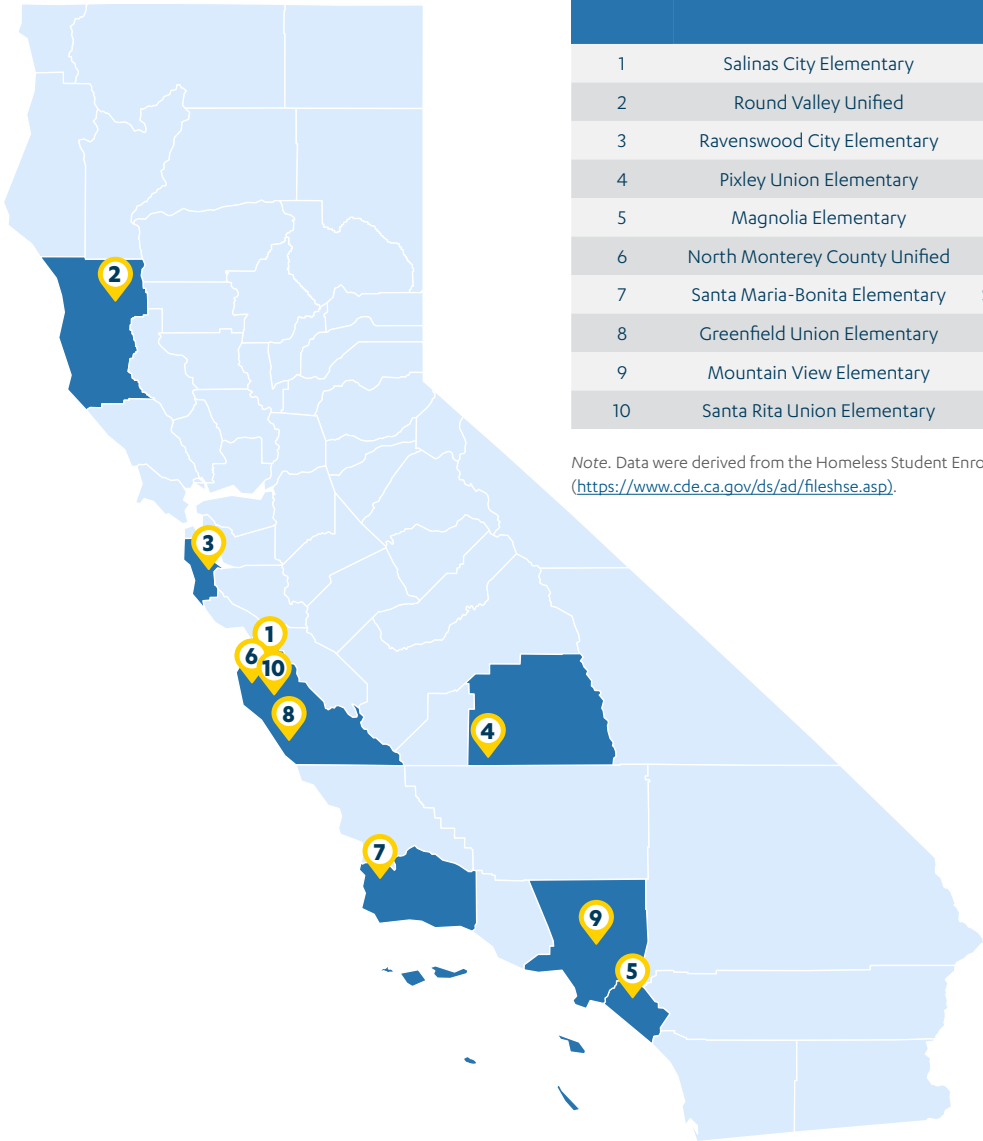
4. **Central Coast elementary districts** account for half of the 10 **school districts** with the highest *rates* of students experiencing homelessness.

Among districts with at least 500 students, five of the 10 districts with the highest proportion of students experiencing homelessness are on the Central Coast (Monterey and Santa Barbara counties), and most are elementary districts. Four out of the 10 districts are in Monterey County. The locales of these districts are mixed, including rural, suburban, and urban as well as those that combine areas, and locales that include urban, suburban, and rural settings. In Salinas City Elementary, two out of every five students experienced homelessness in SY 2024–25.

Figure 4. 10 Districts with the Highest Rates of Students Experiencing Homelessness in SY 2024–25

Ranking	District	County	Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness	Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness
1	Salinas City Elementary	Monterey	3,681	42.60%
2	Round Valley Unified	Mendocino	210	38.30%
3	Ravenswood City Elementary	San Mateo	846	31.10%
4	Pixley Union Elementary	Tulare	258	29.50%
5	Magnolia Elementary	Orange	1,461	28.90%
6	North Monterey County Unified	Monterey	1,271	28.00%
7	Santa Maria-Bonita Elementary	Santa Barbara	5,063	28.00%
8	Greenfield Union Elementary	Monterey	962	27.80%
9	Mountain View Elementary	Los Angeles	1,235	26.30%
10	Santa Rita Union Elementary	Monterey	800	24.50%

Note. Data were derived from the Homeless Student Enrollment Data for SY 2024–25 from CDE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fileshse.asp>).



5. **Southern California** contains most of the 10 **school districts** with the highest *counts* of students experiencing homelessness.

Among districts that have at least 500 students, seven of the 10 districts with the highest count of students experiencing homelessness are located in Southern California (districts in Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, and San Bernardino counties), in contrast to the 10 districts with the highest rates of students experiencing homelessness. This makes sense, as Southern California is the most densely populated region in California and the second-largest metropolitan area in the country after the New York metropolitan area (California Transportation Commission, 2025).

Figure 5. 10 Districts with the Highest Counts of Students Experiencing Homelessness in SY 2024–25

Ranking	District	County	Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness	Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness
1	Los Angeles Unified	Los Angeles	21,298	4.00%
2	San Diego Unified	San Diego	10,028	8.40%
3	Santa Ana Unified	Orange	7,845	19.80%
4	San Bernardino City Unified	San Bernardino	5,898	10.90%
5	Twin Rivers Unified	Sacramento	5,690	10.40%
6	Santa Maria-Bonita Elementary	Santa Barbara	5,063	28.00%
7	Long Beach Unified	Los Angeles	4,470	6.80%
8	San Francisco Unified	San Francisco	4,461	7.00%
9	Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified	Orange	4,054	17.40%
10	Capistrano Unified	Orange	3,929	7.90%

Note. Data were derived from the Homeless Student Enrollment Data for SY 2024–25 from CDE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fileshse.asp>).



6. **Northern California and the Central Coast** contain most of the 10 **counties** with the highest *rates* of students experiencing homelessness.

Among counties with at least 1,000 students, six of the 10 counties with the highest rates of students experiencing homelessness are in Northern California (Trinity, Colusa, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, Mariposa) and are mostly rural. Monterey and Santa Barbara counties (Central Coast) have districts that were also included in the 10 districts with the highest rates of students experiencing homelessness.

Figure 6. 10 Counties with the Highest Rates of Students Experiencing Homelessness in SY 2024–25

Ranking	County	Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness	Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness
1	Monterey	13,010	17.50%
2	Santa Barbara	9,783	14.20%
3	Trinity	229	12.90%
4	San Luis Obispo	3,959	11.70%
5	Colusa	519	10.90%
6	Lake	921	8.50%
7	Mendocino	1,059	8.00%
8	Humboldt	1,387	7.80%
9	Mariposa	155	7.80%
10	Ventura	9,594	7.60%

Note. Data were derived from the Homeless Student Enrollment Data for SY 2024–25 from CDE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/files/hse.asp>).



7. **Southern California** contains most of the 10 **counties** with the highest *counts* of students experiencing homelessness.

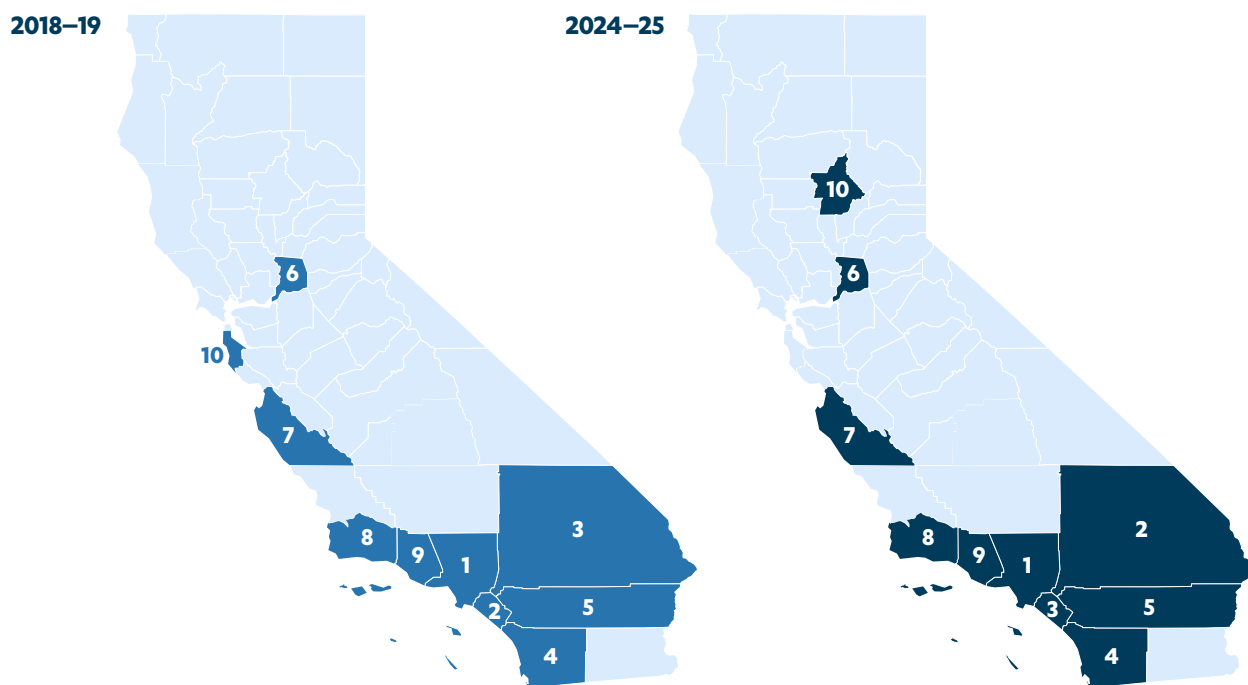
Similar to the 10 districts with the highest counts of students experiencing homelessness, six of the 10 counties with the highest counts of students experiencing homelessness are located in Southern California (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, San Diego, Riverside, Ventura). Although San Francisco and Orange counties had districts with the 10 highest counts of students experiencing homelessness, they were not included in the 10 counties with the highest counts of students experiencing homelessness. Previously, Santa Clara County was not in the 10 counties with the highest counts of students experiencing homelessness in SY 2018–19 (see **Figure 7**). Compared to SY 2018–19, Los Angeles and San Diego counties have seen reductions in the number of students experiencing homelessness, while other counties have all seen increases. Also, counties that rank 6–10 in SY 2024–25 have much higher counts than counties that ranked 6–10 in SY 2018–19.



Figure 7. 10 Counties with the Highest Counts of Students Experiencing Homelessness, SYs 2018–19 and 2024–25

County	2018–19 Ranking	2024–25 Ranking	2018–19 Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness	2024–25 Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness	2018–19 Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness	2024–25 Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness
Los Angeles	1	1	66,566	61,682	4.4%	4.7%
San Bernardino	2	3	31,180	28,164	7.3%	7.4%
Orange	3	2	29,424	32,828	6.0%	6.7%
San Diego	4	4	20,651	24,739	3.9%	5.0%
Riverside	5	5	19,675	17,775	4.4%	4.1%
Sacramento	6	6	10,470	16,417	4.0%	5.9%
Monterey	7	7	9,079	13,010	11.3%	17.5%
Santa Barbara	8	8	8,316	9,783	11.7%	14.20
Ventura	9	9	6,247	9,594	4.5%	7.6%
Butte	10	-	5,638	-	17.0%	-
Santa Clara	-	10	-	8,861	-	3.7%

Note. 2024–25 data were derived from the Homeless Student Enrollment Data for SY 2024–25 from CDE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fileshe.asp>).
 2018–19 data were derived from the [2020 State of Crisis Interactive Map](#) created by the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools.



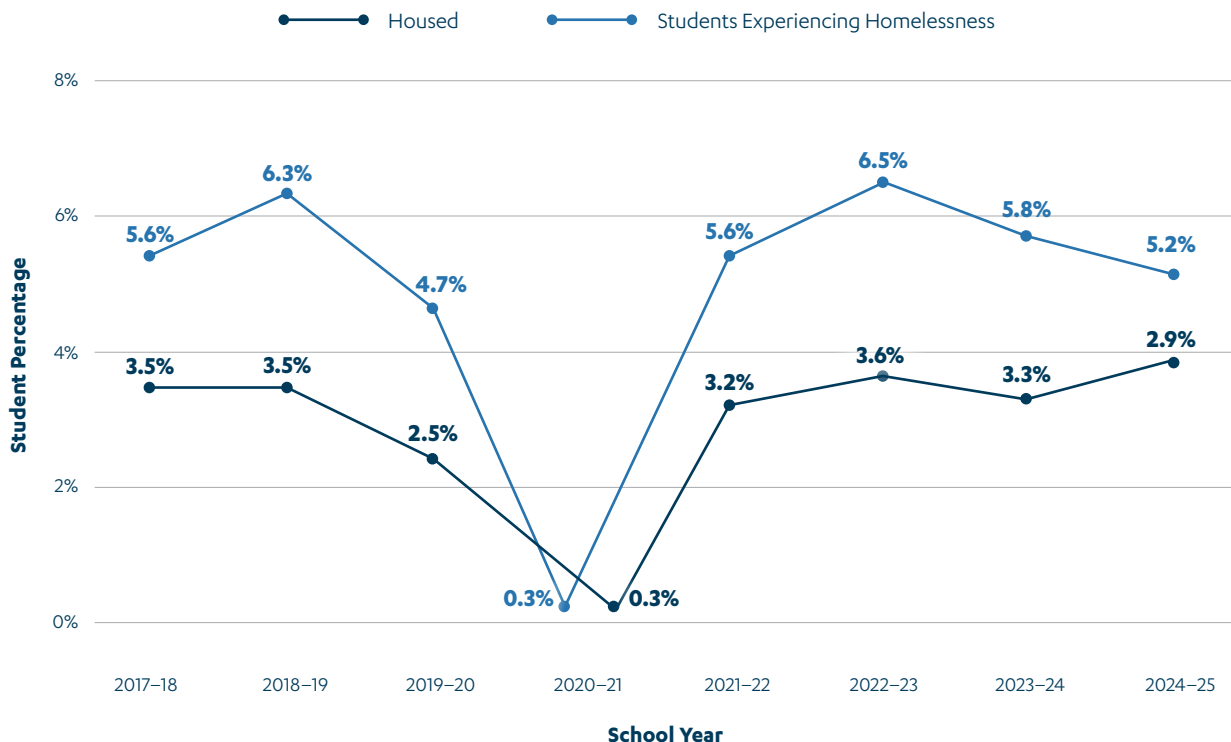
8. **Suspension rates** for all students and students experiencing homelessness peaked in SY 2022–23 and are gradually declining.

The suspension rates for all students and students experiencing homelessness exhibit similar trends, with rates decreasing between SY 2018–19 and SY 2020–21 (most likely due to the pandemic) and increasing between SY 2020–21 and SY 2022–23 (6.5% for students experiencing homelessness and 3.6% for all students), then decreasing again between SY 2022–23 and SY 2024–25 (see **Figure 8**). Suspension rates for students experiencing homelessness were consistently higher than suspension rates for all students. The recent decline in suspension rates coincides with recent policy changes, including California Senate Bill 274, which prohibits suspensions and expulsions for “willful defiance” in grades K–12 effective July 1, 2024 (Cal. Educ. Code §§ 48900(k), 48910, 2025; California Legislature, 2023). Under prior law, suspensions for willful defiance were permitted for grades above 8, but the new law emphasizes in-school interventions and supports, requiring documentation of corrective measures when staff refer students for willful defiance (California Department of Education, 2025).



Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages

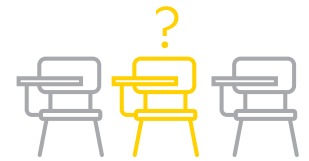
Figure 8. Suspension Rates for All Students and Students Experiencing Homelessness from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25



Note. Data were retrieved from DataQuest Suspension Rate, View Data Row as: Student Group. There was no option to view suspension rates for housed students. During the 2020–21 school year, many schools were in remote or hybrid learning, leading to extremely low suspension rates compared to pre-pandemic years.

9. Chronic absenteeism rates have been higher for both students experiencing homelessness and housed students post-COVID.

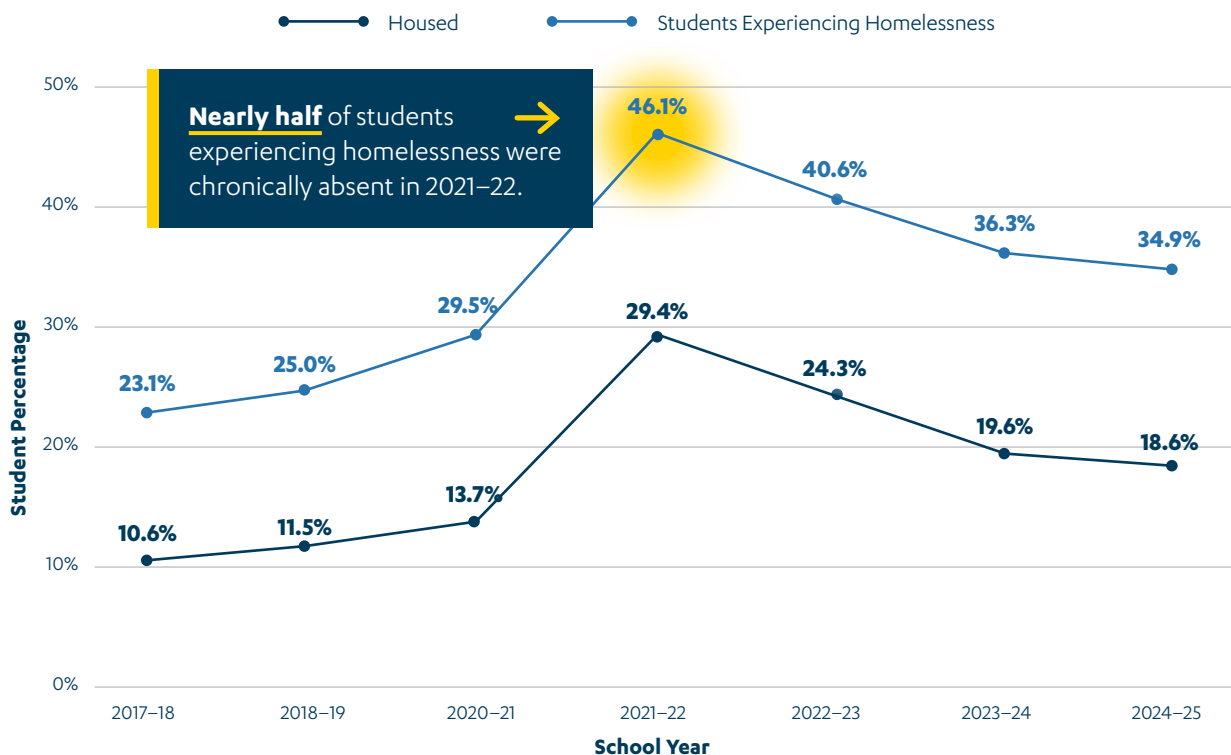
Chronic absenteeism was consistently much higher among students experiencing homelessness compared to housed students (see **Figure 9**). Absenteeism peaked in SY 2021–22 for both students experiencing homelessness and housed students. Among students experiencing homelessness in particular, nearly half were chronically absent. Although rates have declined since that peak, they remain consistently higher compared to pre-pandemic rates.



1 in 3

students experiencing homelessness are chronically absent.

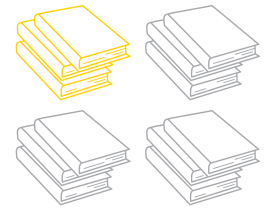
Figure 9. Chronic Absenteeism Rates for Students Experiencing Homelessness and Housed Students from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25



Note. Data were retrieved from DataQuest Chronic Absenteeism Rate, View Data Row as: Academic Year (Multi-Year), Student Group: Homeless. The CDE has determined that absenteeism data are not valid and reliable for the 2019–20 academic year; therefore, the CDE has not processed these data, and they are unavailable for public release. 2020–21 data should be interpreted with caution due to widespread implementation of distance learning during that year.

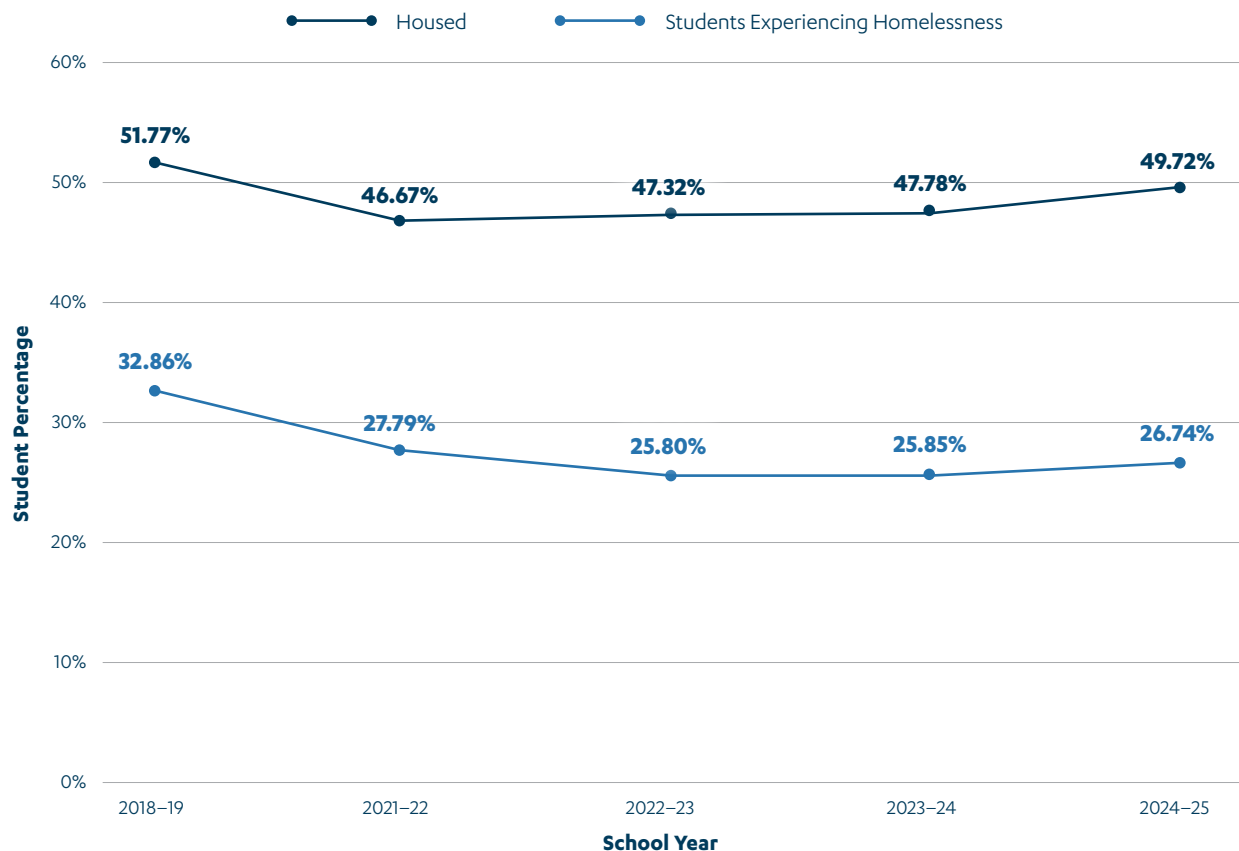
10. The percentage of students experiencing homelessness meeting or exceeding **English Language Arts** standards lags behind housed students by about 20 percentage points.

Housed students consistently outperformed students experiencing homelessness, with proficiency rates roughly 20 percentage points higher across most years (see **Figure 10**). There is no data for both groups in SY 2019–20, most likely due to pandemic-related testing disruptions. The gap in SY 2018–19 and the gap from SY 2020–21 to SY 2024–25 remained largely unchanged over time. The relative stability of this disparity indicates that, despite overall improvement, ELA gains for students experiencing homelessness have not kept pace with those of their housed peers.



1 in 4
students experiencing homelessness are meeting ELA standards.

Figure 10. Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness and Housed Students Meeting or Exceeding ELA Standards from SY 2018–19 to SY 2024–25



Note. Data were retrieved from DataQuest CAASPP Test Results, English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, Student Group: Homeless Status.

According to CDE, due to factors surrounding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, testing participation in 2020–21 varied (417 districts completed SBAC testing in 2020–21). Care should be used when interpreting results.

Data for the student group of Homeless Status is only available beginning with the 2018–19 administration year.

11. The percentage of students experiencing homelessness meeting or exceeding **Mathematics** standards lags behind housed students by about 20 percentage points.

Across all years analyzed, students experiencing homelessness consistently exhibited substantially lower rates of meeting or exceeding math standards compared to housed students (see **Figure 11**).

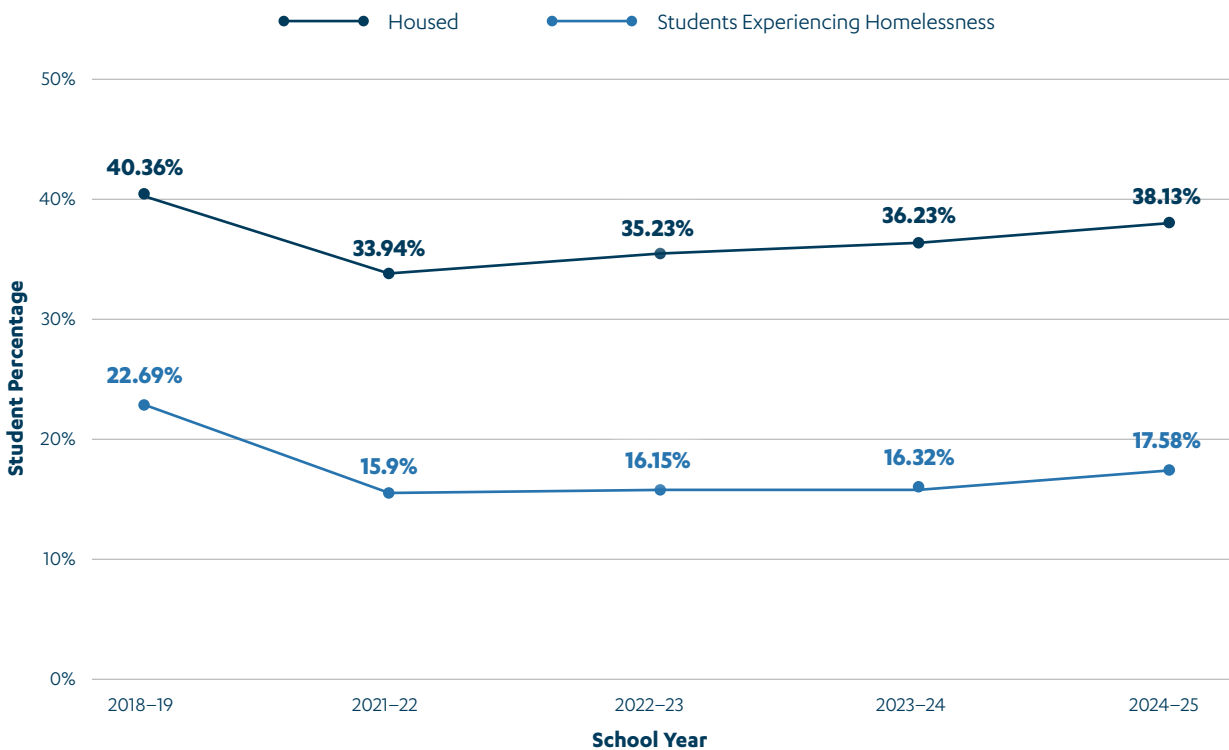
Percentages meeting or exceeding math standards have not recovered to pre-COVID percentages yet, with SY 2018–19 showing the highest percentages for both students experiencing homelessness and housed students at 22.69% and 40.36%, respectively. There is no data for both groups in SY 2019–20, most likely due to pandemic-related testing disruptions. While housed students' math proficiency rates are in the mid-to-high 30% range by SY 2024–25, rates for students experiencing homelessness remained below 18%.



1 in 5

students experiencing homelessness are meeting math standards.

Figure 11. Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness and Housed Students Meeting or Exceeding Mathematics Standards from SY 2018–19 to SY 2024–25



Note. Data were retrieved from DataQuest CAASPP Test Results, English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, Student Group: Homeless Status.

Note. According to CDE, due to factors surrounding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, testing participation in 2020–21 varied (417 districts completed SBAC testing in 2020–21). Care should be used when interpreting results.

Data for the student group of Homeless Status is only available beginning with the 2018–19 administration year.

12. Students experiencing homelessness exhibit **lower rates in all four categories of graduation** compared to their peers (graduating, meeting UC/CSU requirements, earning a Seal of Biliteracy, and earning a Golden State Seal Merit Diploma).

The proportion of students meeting various graduation categories is relatively steady for both students experiencing homelessness and housed students. During the years analyzed, the cohort graduation rate of housed students ranged from 84% to 89% (see **Figure 12**), while the cohort graduation rate of students experiencing homelessness ranged from 69% to 76% (see **Figure 13**). Students experiencing homelessness exhibited higher year-to-year increases in graduation rates. The percentage of housed graduates meeting UC/CSU requirements ranged from 51% to 56%, and the percentage of students experiencing homelessness meeting such requirements ranged from 28% to 30%. Housed graduates earning a Golden State Seal Merit Diploma ranged from 23% to 34%, while students experiencing homelessness ranged from 10% to 15%. Housed graduates earning a Seal of Biliteracy ranged from 12% to 17%, and students experiencing homelessness earning a Seal of Biliteracy ranged from 7% to 10%. Graduates earning a Seal of Biliteracy show the smallest gap at less than 10% across all years, and graduates meeting UC/CSU requirements show the largest gap at more than 20% across all years.

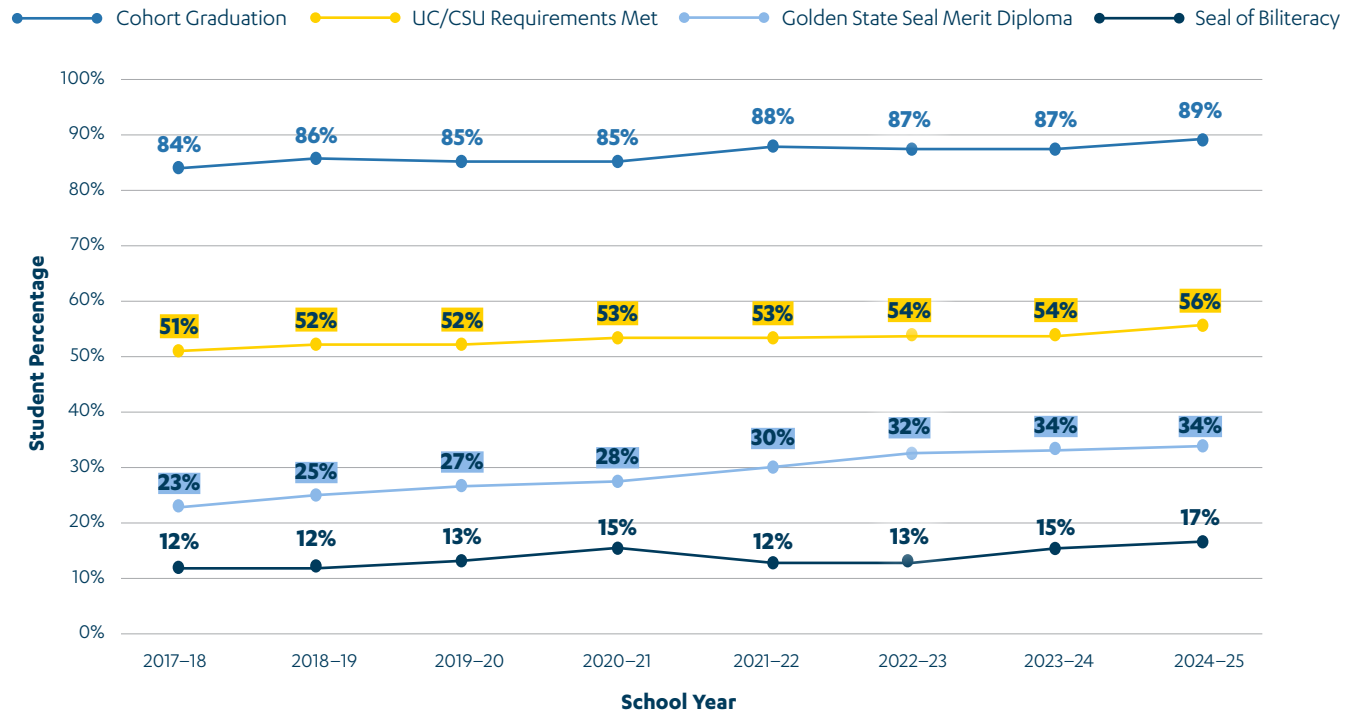


1 in 3

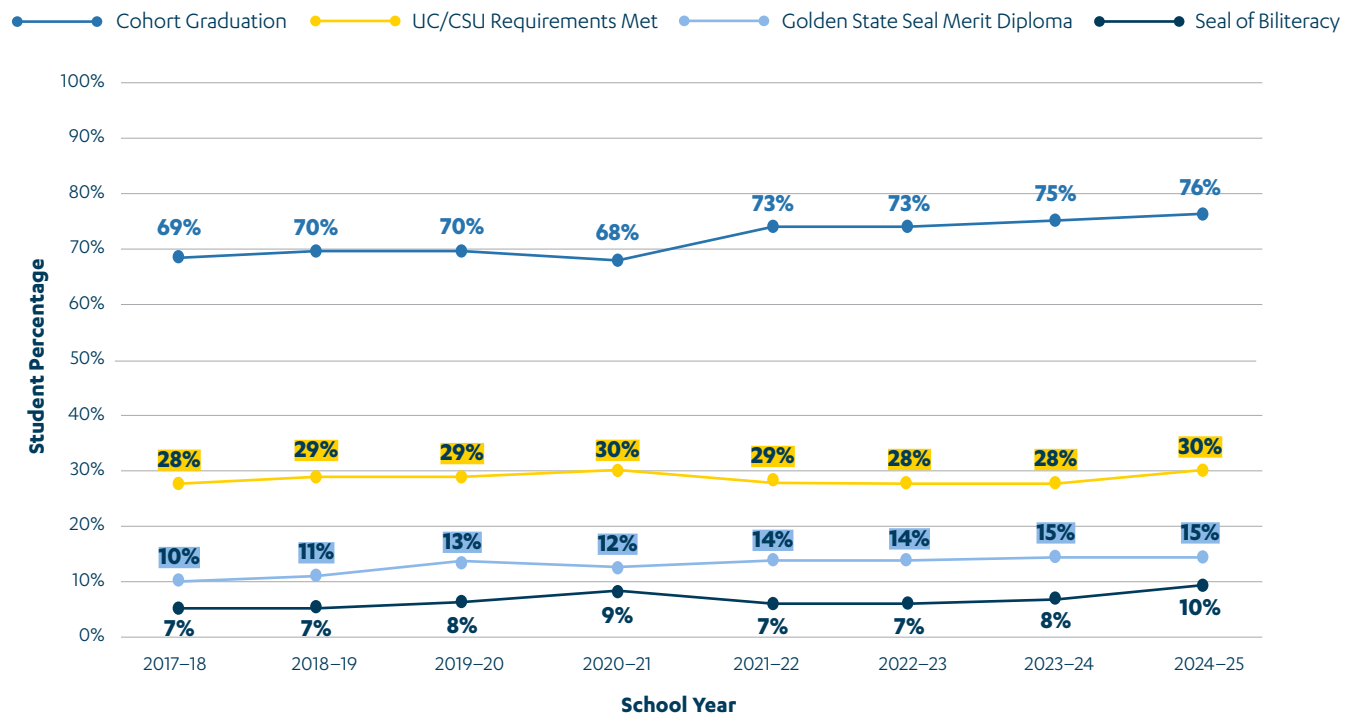
students experiencing homelessness are UC/CSU-eligible.



Photo by Caleb Woods

Figure 12. Graduation Rates for Housed Students from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25

Note: Data retrieved from DataQuest, Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, View Data Row as: Academic Year, Program Subgroups: Homeless.

Figure 13. Graduation Rates for Students Experiencing Homelessness from SY 2017–18 to SY 2024–25

Note: Data retrieved from DataQuest, Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, View Data Row as: Academic Year, Program Subgroups: Homeless.

13. College-going rates for students experiencing homelessness have decreased from SY 2017–18 to SY 2021–22 and rebounded in SY 2022–23.

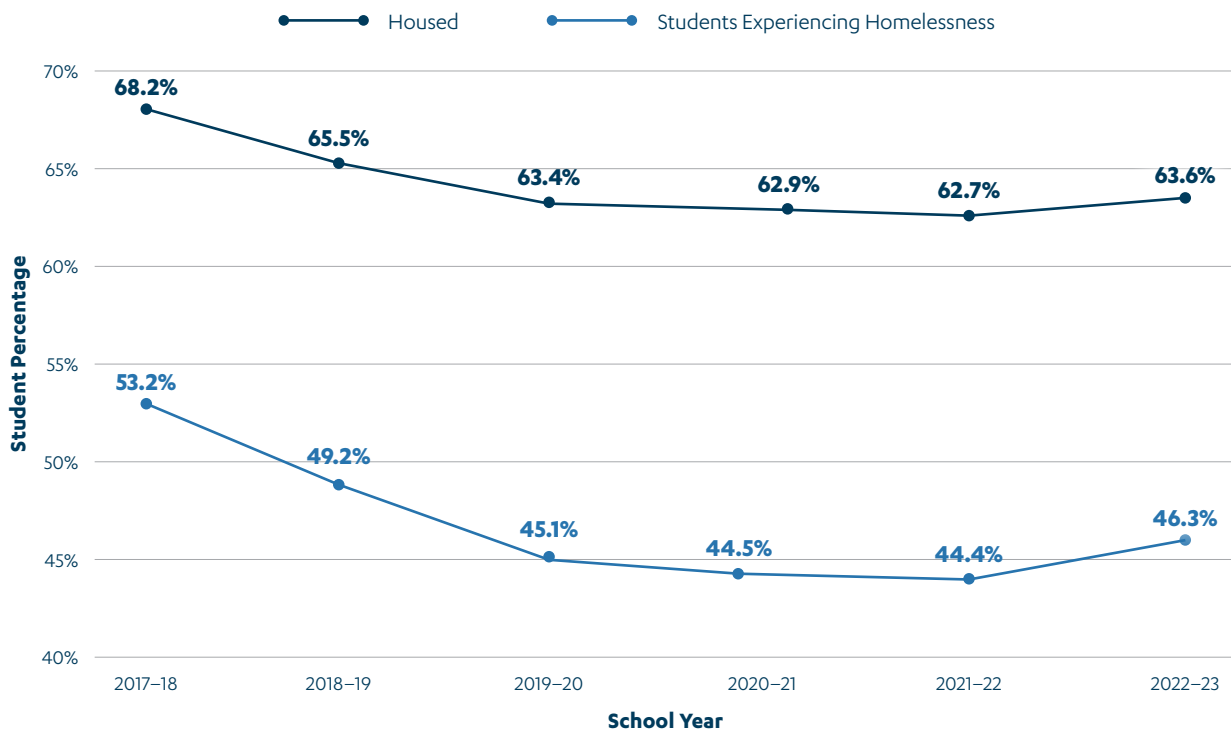
The college-going rates of students experiencing homelessness and housed students exhibit similar trends, peaking in SY 2017–18, decreasing up to SY 2021–22, and rebounding in SY 2022–23 (see **Figure 14**). The college-going rate of housed students ranged from 62.7% in SY 2021–22 to 68.2% in SY 2017–18, while the college-going rate of students experiencing homelessness ranged from 44.4% in SY 2021–22 to 53.2% in SY 2017–18. While the COVID pandemic years exhibit the lowest college-going rates for both students experiencing homelessness and housed students, there was already a decreasing trend in the college-going rates of all students from SY 2017–18 to SY 2018–19.



1 in 3

students experiencing homelessness attend college.

Figure 14. College-Going Rates for Students Experiencing Homelessness and Housed Students from SY 2017–18 to SY 2022–23



Note. Data retrieved from DataQuest, College-Going Rate for CA High School Students, View Data Row as: Multi-Year, Other Student Groups: Homeless.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the trends documented in this report, California faces an urgent need to address student homelessness through targeted, coordinated, and systemic interventions. The following recommendations are designed to guide state policymakers, local education agencies (LEAs), and community partners toward actionable solutions:

1. **Prioritize targeted regional interventions using new state investments** in parts of the state with high rates and numbers of young people experiencing homelessness.

California should prioritize resources and interventions in areas with the highest numbers and rates of students experiencing homelessness, using the state's historic three-year, \$116 million investment. Southern California counties, including Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, San Bernardino, Ventura, and Riverside, have the highest counts of unhoused students, while Central Coast districts in Monterey and Santa Barbara counties show the highest rates, with Salinas City Elementary reporting that 2 out of every 5 students experienced homelessness in SY 2024–25. Targeted interventions should include housing supports, transportation assistance, mental health services, and partnerships with local community-based organizations, adapted to the specific needs of urban, suburban, and rural locales.



2. **Adopt, strengthen, and extend federal policy protections** for students experiencing homelessness in California.

The state should work to extend and strengthen the implementation of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have consistent access to free, appropriate public education. Existing targeted state funding, technical assistance, and accountability measures can support LEAs in identifying and serving unhoused students, particularly in districts with high counts or rates of homelessness. Aligning these efforts with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act can further efforts to support academic programming and meaningful accountability measures for school systems committed to the success of students experiencing homelessness.



Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

3. **Establish a dedicated funding stream** for districts statewide serving both the highest rates and counts of students experiencing homelessness.

A one-time \$116 million investment is an encouraging signal of support from state lawmakers. However, California should create a dedicated, weighted funding stream for school districts serving the highest rates and numbers of students experiencing homelessness, modeled after the state's Equity Multiplier framework.

While the Local Control Funding Formula provides supplemental and concentration grants for high-need student groups, it does not adequately account for the intensity of the crisis, mobility of students experiencing homelessness, and service coordination required to support students experiencing homelessness. Districts with large concentrations of housing-insecure youth face disproportionate costs related to transportation, case management, cross-system coordination, attendance recovery, credit recovery, mental health supports, and family stabilization. These costs are ongoing and structural, not episodic.

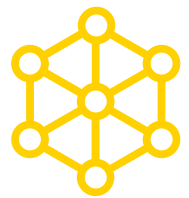
A **Homeless Student Stability and Equity Multiplier** would:

- Provide additional per pupil funding to districts exceeding a defined threshold of homeless student enrollment, based on both rate and total count.
- Be allocated as ongoing, formula-based funding rather than through competitive grants.
- Support evidence-based strategies such as school stability protections, transportation to school of origin, integrated student supports, attendance stabilization, and housing navigation partnerships.
- Require transparent reporting on how funds strengthen educational stability and reduce mobility-related disruptions.



4. **Create stable, integrated systems of support** for housing-insecure young people.

Stable systems that connect education, housing, social services, and public health agencies are essential to mitigate the effects of housing instability on student outcomes. California can expand investments to professional development for educators and school staff to recognize and respond to the social-emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students experiencing homelessness. Programs that stabilize enrollment, such as transportation supports, automatic school transfers, and continuity in academic programming, can reduce mobility, chronic absenteeism, and academic disruption.



5. **Monitor and address racial disparities** among students experiencing homelessness.

Racial disparities in student homelessness are pronounced. In SY 2024–25, more than two of every 25 Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students experienced homelessness, compared to fewer than one in 40 Asian, Filipino, or white students. Continuous monitoring of these disparities is necessary, alongside equity-focused interventions to address barriers disproportionately affecting historically marginalized students.



6. **Support academic recovery and postsecondary success** for students experiencing homelessness.

Students experiencing homelessness continue to lag behind their peers academically, with proficiency rates approximately 20 percentage points lower in both ELA and mathematics across all years from SY 2018–19 to SY 2024–25. Supplemental academic supports, tutoring, and enrichment programs should be prioritized, alongside college readiness initiatives, mentorship programs, and access to financial aid. In SY 2022–23, the college-going rate for students experiencing homelessness rebounded to 46.3%, compared to 66.4% for housed students, highlighting the need for continued support to ensure equitable postsecondary outcomes.



Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages



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CONCLUSION

This report underscores a troubling reality: Student homelessness in California has not only persisted but intensified in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. With nearly 300,000 young people affected and pronounced disparities across racial groups and geographic regions, the educational and developmental consequences of housing instability remain profound.

Addressing student homelessness requires more than reactive measures; it demands a coordinated, systemic response that combines targeted state and local interventions, extension of federal protections, and integrated supports across education, housing, and social services. Prioritizing stability, equity, and access to high-quality education is critical to ensure that students experiencing homelessness can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. By strategically focusing resources where they are most needed and strengthening the systems that support students, California has the opportunity to turn the tide of this crisis and provide all children and youth with a fair and equitable chance to succeed.



Photos by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

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