

Student Homelessness in Arizona:

Understanding and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness Beyond the Count

A research brief from the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

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Introduction

14,906

students identified as experiencing homelessness in Arizona,
school year (SY) 2025–26

1.4%

of total statewide enrollment

–8%

decline from SY 2024–25

~3 in 4

students experiencing homelessness in SY 2022–23 were
doubled up or temporarily staying with others.

Student homelessness in Arizona is likely undercounted.

Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, homelessness includes students without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence: those staying in shelters, motels, cars, campgrounds, doubled-up housing, or temporary couch-surfing situations.

Arizona's October 1 enrollment count captures students identified as homeless on a single day and can miss those who become homeless later in the school year. Nearly three in four Arizona students experiencing homelessness in SY 2022–23 were doubled up, an often-hidden form of housing instability.

Source: Arizona Department of Education (n.d.-b); SchoolHouse Connection (n.d.); U.S. Department of Education (2016).

Introduction

Geographic and Regional Disparities

- Student homelessness varies across Arizona counties, shaped by rurality, doubled-up living, and the concentration of Native American and Alaska Native students.
- In Northern Arizona counties—Apache, Navajo, and Coconino—**roughly half of students experiencing homelessness are Native American and Alaska Native**, alongside heavy reliance on doubled-up housing.
- Urban Pima County shows **high doubled-up living (75.2%) among a majority Hispanic/Latine student population**, and Yavapai has the state’s highest overall student homelessness rate (5.3%).

Drivers of Youth Homelessness

- Rising rents and declining housing affordability are key structural drivers of student homelessness in Arizona.
- By 2025, a worker needed more than \$34/hour to afford a modest two-bedroom rental in Arizona, compared with a \$23.89 median hourly wage.
- Arizona has only 26 affordable and available homes per 100 extremely low-income renter* households, ranking fourth worst nationally.

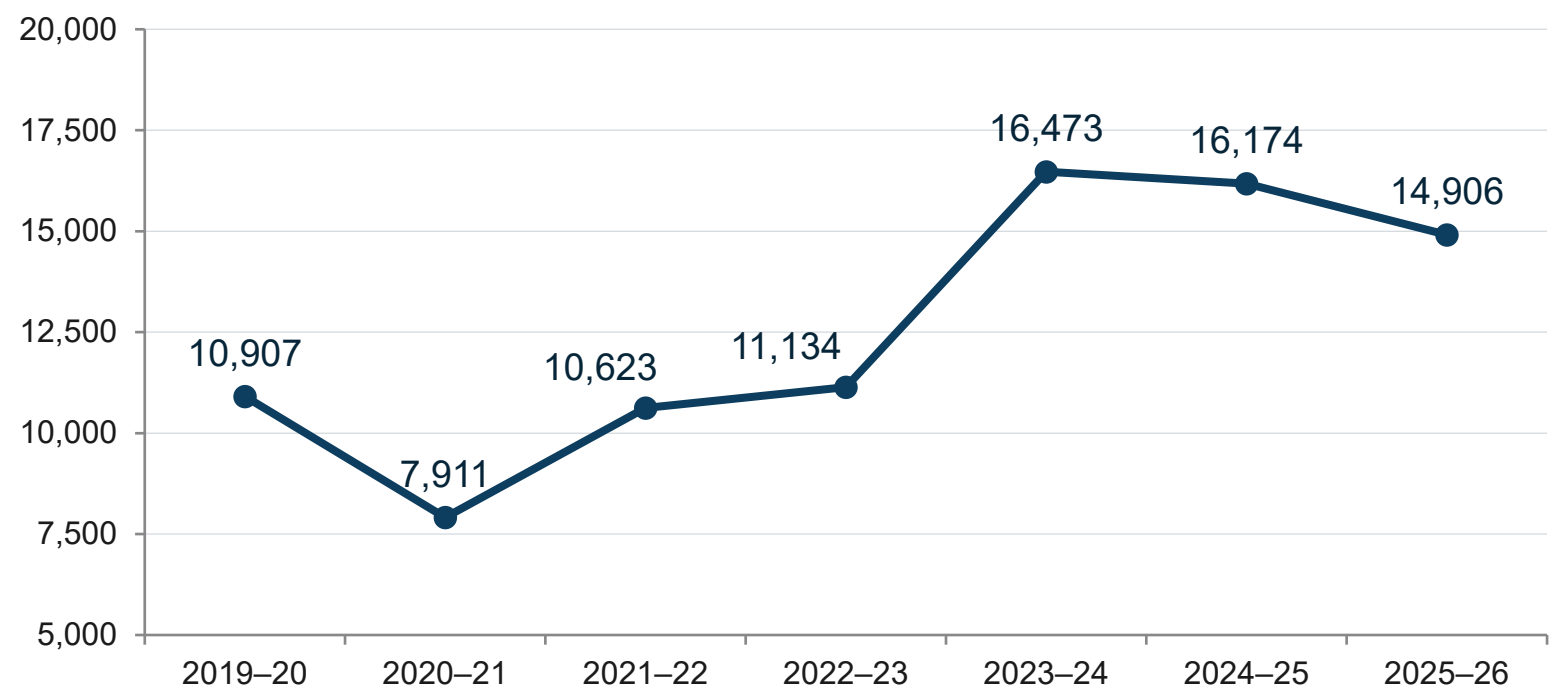
*According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC, 2026), “low-income renters” are defined as households with incomes at or below the federal poverty guideline or 30% of the area median income, whichever is higher. Extremely low-income renters often include seniors and people with disabilities, working adults with low wages, single parents and caregivers, and students and families with unstable incomes.

Source: *SchoolHouse Connection (n.d.); NLIHC (2025); NLIHC (2026).*

Finding 1. A recent decline after a post-pandemic surge

In SY 2025–26, Arizona identified 14,906 students experiencing homelessness, an 8% decline from the previous year. Counts remain well above pandemic-era lows.

Number of Arizona Students Experiencing Homelessness



16,473

peak count in SY 2023–24, the highest in recent years

+48%

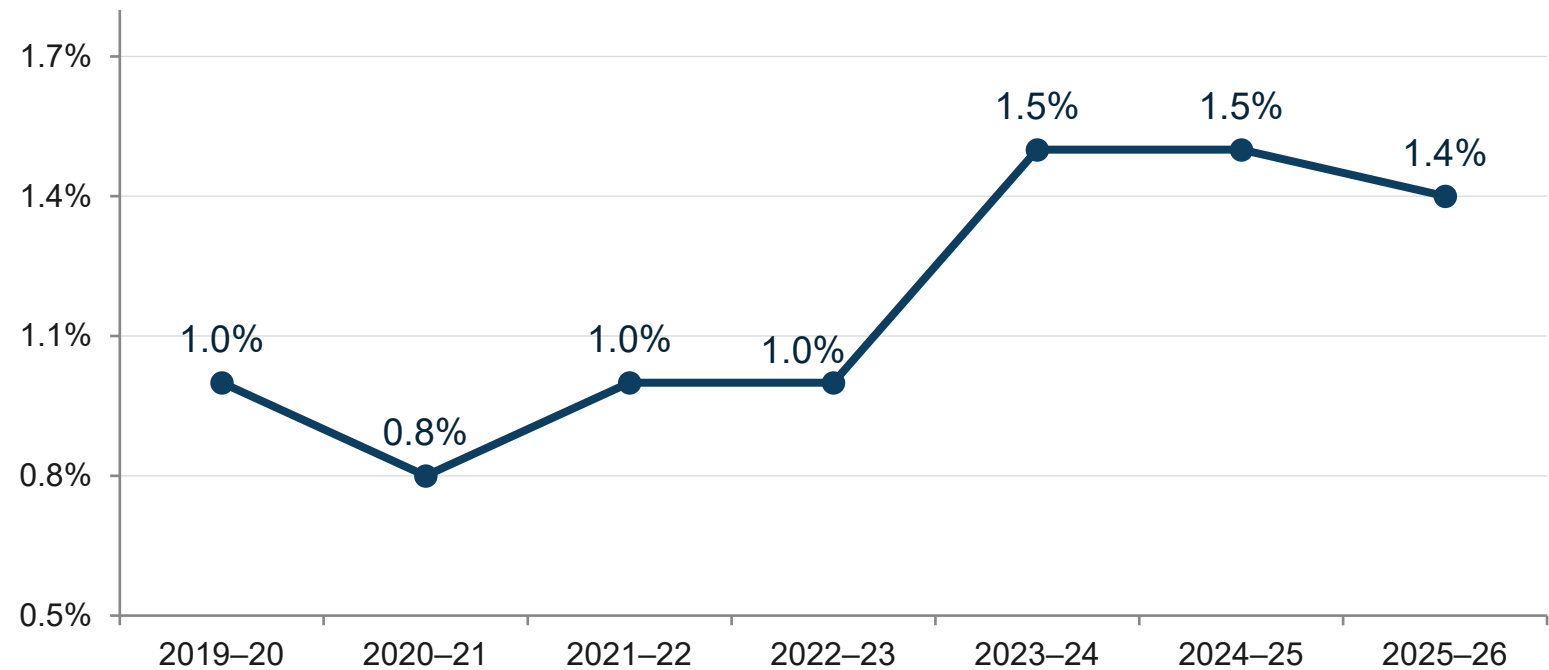
year-over-year jump in SY 2023–24, the largest change in the series

Note. Data from Arizona Department of Education (ADE, n.d.-b), Enrollment Data, SY 2019–20 through SY 2025–26.

Finding 1. A recent decline after a post-pandemic surge

The share of Arizona students experiencing homelessness reached 1.5% in SY 2023–24 and SY 2024–25 before easing to 1.4% in SY 2025–26, still well above pre-pandemic levels.

Percentage of Arizona Students Experiencing Homelessness



1.5%

peak share of enrollment in SY 2023–24 and SY 2024–25, the highest in recent years

+0.5%

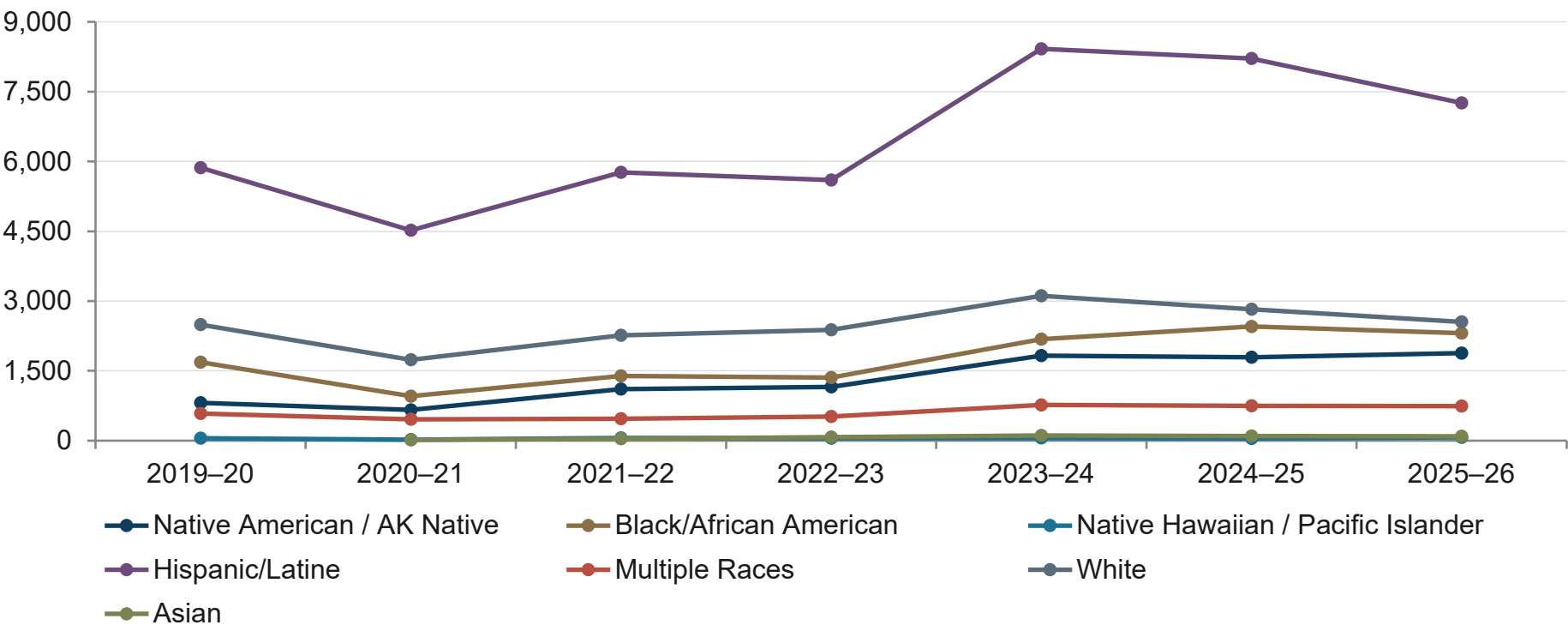
year-over-year jump in SY 2023–24, the largest change in the series

Note. Data from ADE (n.d.-b), Enrollment Data, SY 2019–20 through SY 2025–26.

Finding 2. Racial disparities persist and have widened.

Between SY 2022–23 and SY 2023–24, the number of Hispanic/Latine students identified rose from 5,597 to 8,420.

Count of Arizona Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race

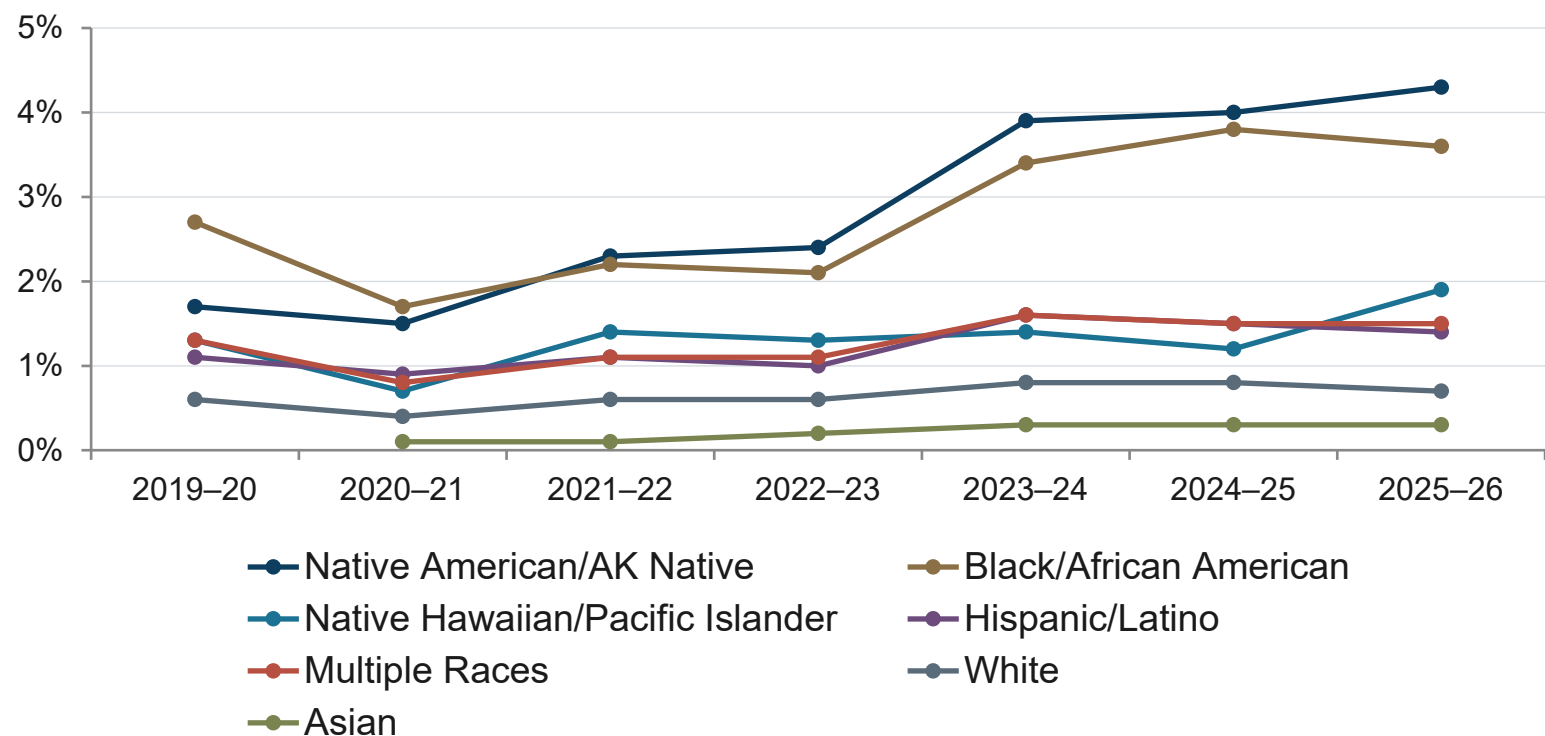


Note. Asian counts for SY 2019–20 not available from ADE. Source: ADE (n.d.-b), Enrollment Data, SY 2019–20 through SY 2025–26.

Finding 2. Racial disparities persist and have widened.

Black/African-American and Native American/Alaska Native students experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness in Arizona.

Percentage of Arizona Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race



2.5x higher

The rate of Native American/Alaska Native students experiencing homelessness rose from 1.7% in SY 2019–20 to 4.3% in SY 2025–26.

1.3x higher

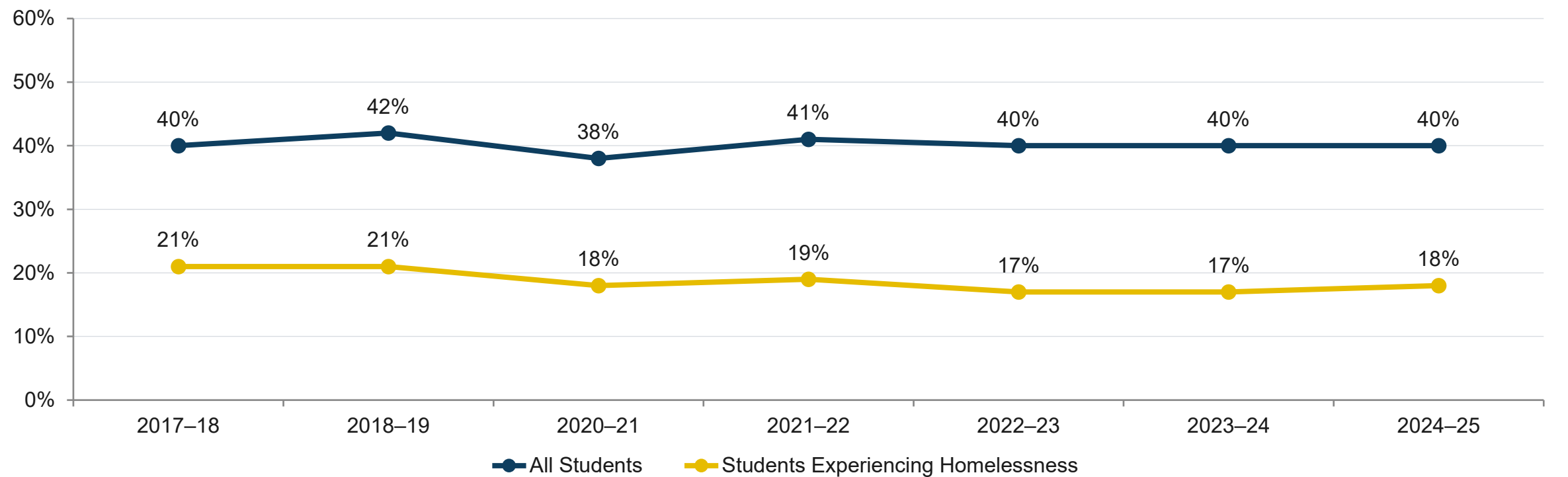
The rate of Black/African-American students experiencing homelessness rose from 2.7% in SY 2019–20 to 3.6% in SY 2025–26.

Note. Asian counts for SY 2019–20 not available from ADE. Source: ADE (n.d.-b), Enrollment Data, SY 2019–20 through SY 2025–26.

Finding 3a. A 22-point achievement gap in ELA

Since the pandemic, students experiencing homelessness have trailed their housed peers by roughly 22 to 23 percentage points in meeting English language arts (ELA) standards.

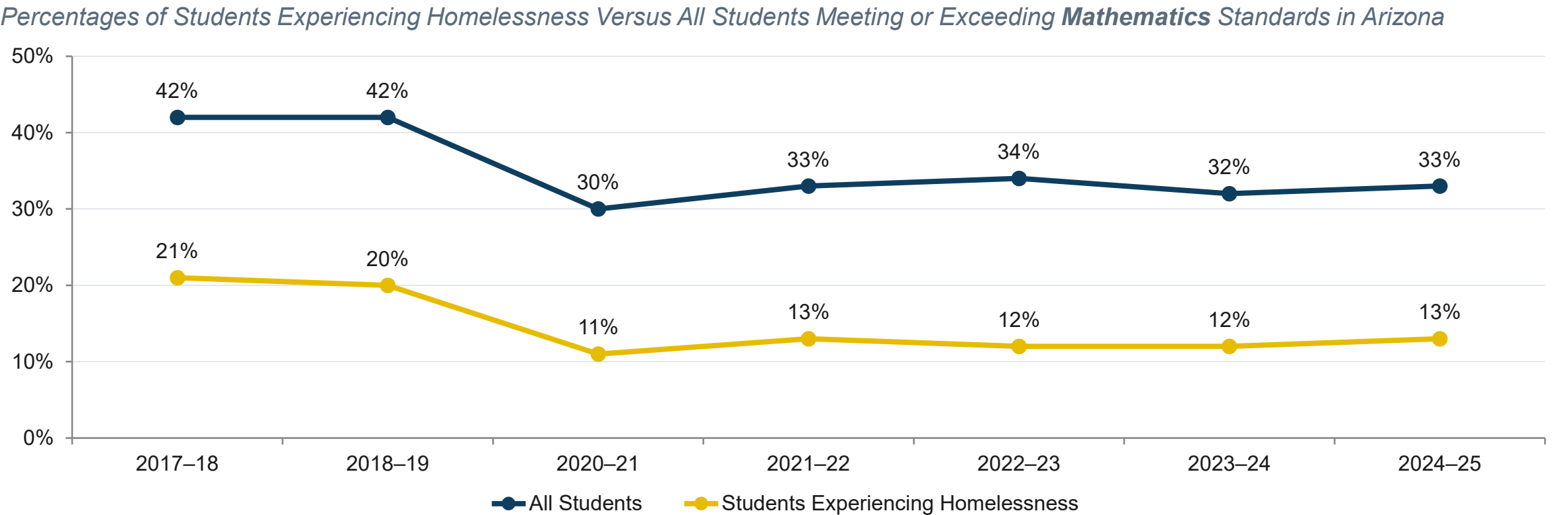
Percentages of Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students Meeting or Exceeding *ELA* Standards in Arizona



Note. Data for SY 2019–20 unavailable due to COVID-19. Source: ADE (n.d.-a), Student Achievement, Trend Data for ELA.

Finding 3b. A 20-point achievement gap in math

In mathematics, both groups saw notable post-pandemic declines. For all students, proficiency fell to the mid-30% range. Among students experiencing homelessness, one in 10 is proficient.

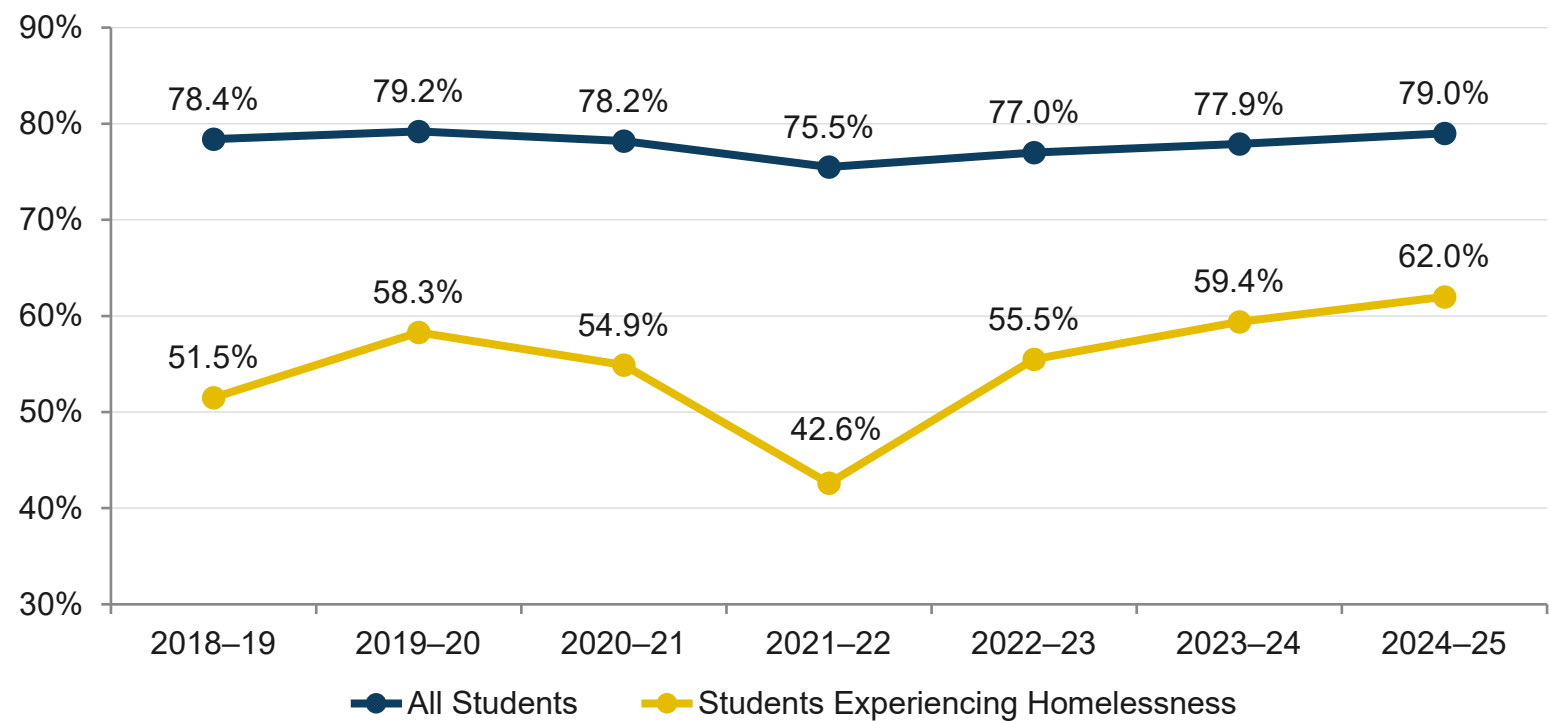


Note. Data for SY 2019–20 unavailable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: ADE (n.d.-a), Student Achievement, Trend Data for Math.

Finding 4. Strong post-pandemic graduation gains

Graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness rebounded from a pandemic low of 43% to 62% in SY 2024–25, surpassing prepandemic levels. This graduation rate remains lower than the national rate of 69%.

High School Graduation Rates for Arizona Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students



+10.5 pts

gain in the homeless graduation rate from SY 2018–19 (51.5%) to SY 2024–25 (62.0%) for students experiencing homelessness

17-pt gap

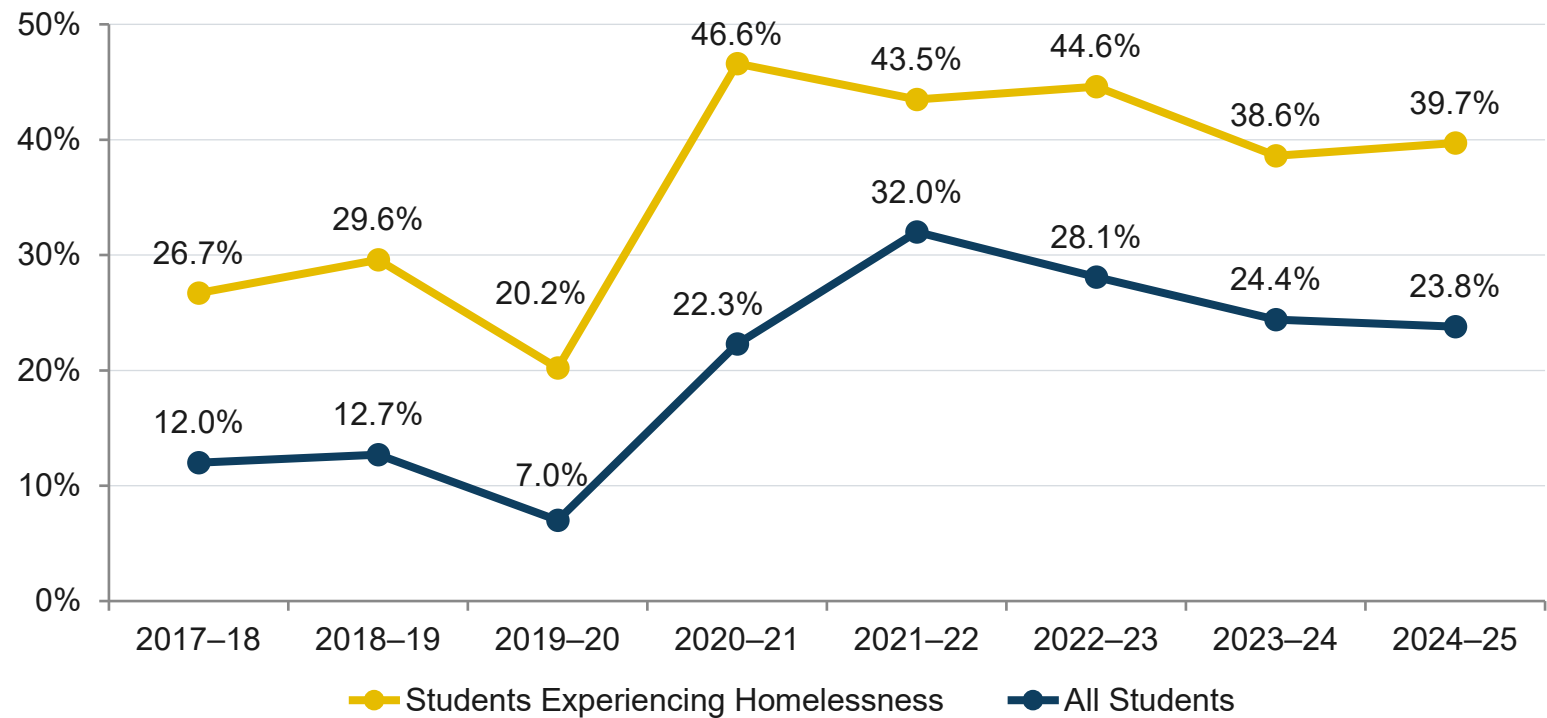
between all students (79%) and students experiencing homelessness (62%) in SY 2024–25

Source: ADE (n.d.-a), Four-Year Graduation Rate, Trend.

Finding 5. Chronic absenteeism remains elevated.

Chronic absenteeism among students experiencing homelessness peaked at nearly 47% during the pandemic and remains close to 40%, roughly 16 percentage points higher than among housed peers.

Chronic Absenteeism Rates for Arizona Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students



SY 2024-25

39.7%

students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent in SY 2024-25.

23.8%

all students

Peak

46.6% of students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent in SY 2020-21.

Source: ADE (n.d.-a), Chronic Absenteeism, Trend.

Considerations for policymakers and practitioners

Five priorities emerged from the analysis to strengthen supports for Arizona students experiencing homelessness:

1

Align counting methodologies

Foreground cumulative annual McKinney-Vento counts alongside Arizona's October 1 point-in-time count in public reporting.

2

Strengthen cross-sector collaboration

Improve identification and service delivery, including meaningful partnership with Tribal communities and Native American-serving organizations.

3

Improve local and state data collection

Expand publicly reported data on school instability, suspensions, and grade-level distribution for students experiencing homelessness.

4

Expand McKinney-Vento capacity

Align housing services with education systems to better reach doubled-up families and highly mobile students.

5

Strengthen transportation and targeted supports

Fund transportation to schools of origin, tutoring, credit recovery, and mental health supports to improve stability and outcomes.

References

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Read the full brief:

Download the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools factsheet on student homelessness in Arizona.

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