



STUDENT HOMELESSNESS: LESSONS FROM THE YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

PART V: MISSING SCHOOL DUE TO SAFETY CONCERNS

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess the health risk behaviors of youth and adults in the United States. For the first time since the survey has been widely administered, the 2017 YRBS optional question list included two questions pertaining to homelessness. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed demographic and risk factor data from the YRBS in 17 statesⁱ, comparing high school students experiencing homelessness and those not experiencing homelessness. This series shares the striking and heartbreaking results of that analysis, with tangible action steps schools can take to promote safety and health for students experiencing homelessness.

Absence from school has dire, long-term consequences for students, including higher rates of dropping out of high school, experiencing poverty, and becoming involved in the criminal justice systemⁱⁱ. All of these factors can lead to continued homelessness in adulthood. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed YRBS

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data to determine how often high school students experiencing homelessness miss school because they feel unsafe at school or on their way to or from school. The data show that more than one in four high school students experiencing

homelessness missed at least one day of school in a single month due to these safety concerns. They were 4.63 times more likely to miss school due to safety concerns compared to stably housed students.



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High school students not experiencing homelessness



4.63 TIMES

High school students experiencing homelessness



28.2%
of homeless high school students missed school due to safety concerns.

Data: Risk and Resilience: Differences in Risk Factors and Health Outcomes Between Homeless and Non-Homeless Students in 2017 YRBS Data
Read the full paper: <http://bit.ly/SHC-YRBS2018>

There are many reasons students experiencing homelessness may feel unsafe. They may have to pass through dangerous neighborhoods on their way to and from school, particularly if they are staying in low-cost motels. A recent study by Johns Hopkins University found that Baltimore City public high school students whose commutes to school force them to walk through or wait in areas with higher violent-crime rates are more likely to miss schoolⁱⁱⁱ.

Students experiencing homelessness sometimes have long commutes when their temporary living situation is far from their original school. As a result, they may leave before sunrise in the morning and return after sunset, forcing them to navigate dangerous neighborhoods in the dark. Research from numerous studies have found human trafficking rates among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness ranging from 19% to 40%^{iv}. In school, students experiencing homelessness are disproportionately bullied. Due to their trauma, they also may be even more vulnerable than other students to anxieties regarding school shootings and violence.

Schools can help students experiencing homelessness feel safe on their way to school and after they arrive, to help increase attendance.

Action Steps for Schools

1. Adopt robust policies and practices to [identify students experiencing homelessness](#). Educate teachers about warning signs that a student is experiencing homelessness or is at risk of becoming homeless. Students must be identified to receive critical supports, such as McKinney-Vento rights and services. These services include: immediate school enrollment, school stability, and transportation.
2. Help students feel safe at school.
 - Provide students experiencing homelessness with peer and adult mentors to help them adapt to a new school environment, make friends, and have a safe adult with whom to share concerns about safety.
 - Ensure students experiencing homelessness have access to school counselors and social workers whenever needed.
 - Provide McKinney-Vento liaisons, teachers, counselors, and social workers with sufficient time to build relationships with students and help address safety concerns.
 - Adopt and implement clear policies against bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
3. Help keep students safe on their commute to and from school.
 - Provide appropriate and safe transportation to and from the school of origin. If students must change buses, set up those connections so that two or more students wait for the connection together.
 - Provide students with safety equipment like reflective clothing and cell phones with data plans and calling minutes.
 - Help connect students to walking buddies and/or adult volunteers so they do not have to walk through dangerous neighborhoods alone.
4. Recognize socio-economic challenges which impact school attendance. Common reasons for homeless students missing school include: mobility and housing instability, transportation problems, taking care of younger siblings or elderly family members, working to help meet basic needs, and physical and mental health issues. Connect students and families with services to mitigate these challenges.

5. Ensure that [school policies and disciplinary procedures](#) do not negatively impact students because of their homelessness. Revise policies which establish severe penalties for tardiness and/or suspension from school as a result of chronic absences.

Resources

ADL, [11 Ways Schools Can Help Students Feel Safe in Challenging Times](#).

National Association of School Psychologists, [Threat Assessment for School Administrators & Crisis Teams](#).

National Human Trafficking Hotline, [Safety tips and red flags for human trafficking](#).

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, [How Teachers Can Help Students Who Are Homeless](#)

YouthTruth, [Spotlight On: School Safety](#)

ⁱ AK, AR, CA, CO, DE, HI, ID, IL, KS, KY, ME, MT, NH, NC, PA, VA, WI.

ⁱⁱ National Center for Homeless Education (2017). *In School Every Day: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Experiencing Homelessness*.

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Burdock-Will, M. Stein, & J. Grigg (2019). *Danger on the Way to School: Exposure to Violent Crime, Public Transportation, and Absenteeism*.

^{iv} National Network for Youth (2018). *Responding to Youth Homelessness: A Key Strategy for Preventing Human Trafficking*.