In 2017-2018, public schools identified and enrolled 1.5 million homeless students. This represents an 11% increase over the previous year, and the highest increase on record. Thirty-three states experienced a growth in their identified homeless student populations.

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that 1.4 million children under the age of six experienced homelessness in 2017-2018, but that only 9% were enrolled in federally-funded early childhood programs.

Homelessness creates barriers to education access and success, including being unable to meet enrollment requirements; high mobility resulting in lack of continuity and absenteeism; lack of transportation; lack of supplies and clothing; poor health, fatigue, and hunger; and emotional crisis/mental health issues.

As a result of these barriers, homeless children and youth struggle in school, and are more likely to drop out. Based on data from 44 states, the 2016-2017 national average graduation rate for homeless students was 64%. This is 14% below other low-income students (78.3%) and 20% below all students (84.6%).

Federally-funded research shows that youth without a high school diploma are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness later in life. In its Voices of Youth Count report, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found that the top three risk factors for experiencing homelessness as a young adult were: 1) lack of a high school diploma or GED; 2) having a child; and 3) having an annual household income of under $24,000. Education plays a key role in early intervention and prevention of future homelessness.

The McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, recently reauthorized and strengthened by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), removes barriers to school enrollment, attendance, and success caused by homelessness. Local liaisons help identify homeless children and youth, ensure their school access and stability, provide them direct support service, and coordinate with community agencies to meet basic needs.

School district EHCY programs face significant costs in meeting the needs of homeless children and youth. Those costs include:

- **Transportation.** Transportation is an important requirement of the McKinney-Vento Act, allowing children and youth to maintain stability and regular school attendance. ESSA amendments expanded this requirement to include children in LEA-administered preschools. However, transportation can be expensive, especially for school districts that do not receive McKinney-Vento subgrants.

- **Staff time to identify students and leverage services.** ESSA requires that liaisons be “able” to carry out ten specific legal duties, including ensure that homeless students are identified. HCY liaisons are adept at collaborating with community agencies, including relief and charitable agencies, to ensure quick and efficient use of donations and other resources to meet identified needs. However, the EHCY program is often under-staffed, with many competing demands.

- **The demand for other educational and related services,** such as school supplies, clothing, increased health and mental health needs is significant and cannot be met through charitable donations alone. In many rural area schools are the hub for social service provision, with many schools housing food pantries, clothes closets and basic hygiene items.

Only 24% of local educational agencies receive EHCY subgrants. Lack of funding limits the ability of schools to identify homeless students, ensure their access to school, and connect them to community supports. EHCY subgrants are used for outreach and identification, enrollment assistance, transportation, school records transfer, immunization referrals, tutoring, counseling, school supplies, professional development for educators and community organizations, and referrals for community services.