Identified Student Homelessness in Camden City Schools

2019-20

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Executive Summary

Camden City School District is committed to identifying and serving students experiencing homelessness to ensure they receive a free, appropriate public education. This report provides new statistics for the 2019-20 school year, which includes the shift to remote learning. We also consider differences in educational indicators (e.g., attendance, school mobility, graduation) and accessing services and supports. We consider data from students enrolled in district-operated schools at any time during the 2017-18 to 2019-20 school years along with publicly available data from the NJ Department of Education. Our ultimate goal is to innovate new ways of identifying and supporting students who experience homelessness.

In SY 2019-20, identified student homelessness was prevalent though at a lower rate
- About 1 out of every 25 students (3.92%) was identified as experiencing homelessness.
- 9 out of 10 students experiencing homelessness were doubled-up with friends or family.
- Identified student homelessness was higher for Hispanic/Latino students and for female students, and somewhat lower for kindergarteners.
- Schools varied widely in how many students they identified as experiencing homelessness.
- The rate of identified homelessness was under 1.5% at each charter/renaissance agency except for KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy which identified rates of student homelessness comparable to CCSD.

COVID-19 and remote learning interfered with identifying student homelessness
- Identified homelessness rates declined by 21% from SY 2018-19 to 2019-20.
- Declines were pronounced for male students, Hispanic / Latino students, and kindergarteners.
- There were no identified episodes of student homelessness after the switch to remote learning.

Homelessness was often linked to differences in education indicators
- Like in other districts that attempt to address homelessness, students who experienced homelessness in CCSD showed challenges in education indicators.
- Students who experienced homelessness had more absences and increased chronic absenteeism compared to students who were not identified as homeless.
- Students who experienced homelessness were twice as likely to drop out.
- 12th graders who experienced homelessness were less likely to graduate.
- Student homelessness was associated with *lower* likelihood of being suspended.

Homelessness may interfere with receiving some supports and services
- Transportation services were about equally likely among students identified as homeless compared to others in SY 2019-20.
- Individualized education plans were less likely among students experiencing homelessness.
- English language learner participants were more likely among students experiencing homelessness.
- School-based youth services were about equally likely to be used by students experiencing homelessness in SY 2019-20.

Background

This annual report updates metrics related to identified student homelessness in the Camden City School District (CCSD). Our goal is to inform efforts to better recognize student homelessness when it is happening and to respond so that it does not get in the way of education. This report focuses on metrics from the 2019-20 school year compared to the preceding two years. We consider metrics on groups of students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in district-operated schools at any point during these years. All metrics are based on data routinely collected by CCSD for all students, unless otherwise noted. This report follows a previous one focused on earlier school years and other metrics.[1]

Student homelessness and the Camden City School District

The U. S. Department of Education defines homelessness as:
- Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to a lack of adequate housing;
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters or abandoned in hospitals;
- Having a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans;
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- Being migratory and qualifying as homeless due to living circumstances as described above

(42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2))

Nationally for the 2019-20 school year (SY), about 1.28 million students were identified as experiencing homelessness nationwide and 12,741 specifically in New Jersey.[2] Over three-quarters (78%) of students experiencing homelessness in the U. S. were living doubled-up with friends or relatives, 11% were in shelter, 7% in hotels or motels, and 4% unsheltered. Student homelessness was linked to lower proficiency rates on state tests of academic achievement compared to low-income peers, suggesting it is a risk factor for education.

The amount of identified student homelessness declined broadly with COVID-19 restrictions. Federal data suggest a decline of about 8% across the nation from SY 2018-19 to 2019-20 and about a 9% decline in New Jersey (1.0% in SY 2018-19 to 0.9% in SY 2019-20). Preliminary reports from other school districts suggest that an even larger reduction is occurring.[3] Low counts likely persisted at least through the 2020-21 school year as most districts were performing remote learning and less student homelessness came to the attention of teachers and school personnel. It is also possible that local and federal responses to COVID-19 partially reduced student homelessness, such as moratoria on evictions and cash payments to families.

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[1] Cutuli, Cintron, Iko, & Truchil (2020). Identified student homelessness in Camden City Schools. Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jj_cutuli/47/download/

[2] National Center for Homeless Education, (2021). *Student homelessness in America: School years 2017-18 to 2019-20.* UNC Greensboro. Available at: https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Student-Homelessness-in-America-2021.pdf

[3] SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan (2020). Lost in the masked shuffle and virtual void: Children and youth experiencing homelessness amidst the pandemic. Available at: https://schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Lost-in-the-Masked-Shuffle-and-Virtual-Void.pdf

Also, some data elements became unavailable or not meaningful beginning in March 2020, including state mandated academic achievement testing, daily attendance, suspensions, school mobility, and others. We present indicators when available for the portion of SY 2019-20 prior to March 2020, but we remind the reader to compare them to previous school years with great caution.

On average, students in Camden, NJ face high rates of socioeconomic disadvantage, including high rates of poverty (all persons: 36% versus 11% nationally) and low median household income ($27,015 versus $62,843), which tend to involve varied developmental risk factors. Neighborhood and housing factors also reflect disinvestment, such as low rates of owner-occupied housing (39% versus 64%) and low median property value for owner-occupied housing ($84,000 versus $217,500). Meanwhile, Camden City is home to a greater proportion of children and teens (9% under 5 years old versus 6% nationally; 31% under 18 years old versus 22%). This represents an opportunity to promote resilience in development. Nearly all Camden residents identify as Black/African American (41% versus 13% nationally) and/or Hispanic/Latino (51% versus 19%).[4,5]

Camden City School District responds to student homelessness.

Camden City School District (CCSD) proactively seeks out students and families experiencing homelessness to inform them of their rights, ensure those rights are respected, and offer services to support students. The previous annual report noted an increase in student homelessness to around 4 to 5% of students in SYs 2017-18 and 2018-19, considering students who remained enrolled in district-operated schools through the end of the year. The homelessness response for CCSD is centrally coordinated by the Office of Human Services, including the liaison for students experiencing homelessness. Identifying students experiencing homelessness has financial implications for the district: CCSD receives state funding for students from outside New Jersey experiencing homelessness and staying temporarily in Camden, and CCSD receives local funding for students experiencing homelessness from other districts in New Jersey.

Identifying students and families experiencing homelessness is a challenge for all school districts. Some families are unaware that their housing situation grants them special rights and access to supports. Others may avoid being identified as experiencing homelessness because of social stigma, concerns that they will be disqualified from receiving other sorts of aid, concerns about deportation for undocumented immigrants, or other concerns. CCSD is committed to overcoming these challenges and concerns to better-serve students and families who experience homelessness. CCSD continuously looks to improve how to identify and serve families with sensitivity and respect.

CCSD attempts to engage families and understand their housing status in multiple ways. District staff learn about many homeless situations when families enroll in CCSD. Routine enrollment forms ask caregivers **about their family's housing situation at annual or mid**-year registration, when students transfer schools, and when they request a change in transportation. CCSD also collaborates with other agencies that serve students experiencing homelessness, allowing the district to receive referrals and coordinate services (e.g.,

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[4] U.S. Census Bureau. Quick Facts: Camden City, New Jersey. Accessed October 1, 2021, from
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/camdencitynewjersey/POP010220

[5] U.S. Census Bureau. Quick Facts: United States. Accessed October 1, 2021, from
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/POP010220

with the Anna Sample House family shelter and other social service agencies). Referrals also come from teachers and other school staff, trained by the Office of Human Services to recognize when a student or family might be experiencing homelessness.

When a family reports a homelessness situation or a referral is made, caregivers or unaccompanied students complete an interview with school-based Family and Operations Coordinators or staff from the CCSD Office of Human Services. It is preferred if the family/student connects with school-based staff to begin building personal connections and access supports in a single location. Staff responses to homelessness vary based on the different needs of each student or family. Once a student is identified, CCSD promotes equitable access to education through extending rights and supports guaranteed by federal mandate, including waiving most documentation and other enrollment requirements in the short **term, ensuring transportation to a student's school of origin following a residential move, and providing** other services to promote achievement at school (42 U.S.C. § 11424 et seq). These rights and services continue at least through the end of the school year in which the student is identified as experiencing homelessness. CCSD staff can also provide vouchers for school uniforms, shoes, bookbags, toiletries, referrals to be evaluated for other district supports (e.g., Bilingual Program/English as a Second Language; Individualized Education Plan; school-based youth counseling services), and referrals for outside agencies (e.g., food pantries, medical providers, housing services).

Areas of Focus.

This report considers routinely-collected education data from CCSD as well as publicly available aggregate data from the New Jersey Department of Education. Our goal is to describe patterns in student identification and service use to innovate new and better ways of reaching and supporting students experiencing homelessness, especially in light of COVID-19 related prevention strategies. We focus on three school years (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20) which follow a practice change and period of migration that appears to have increased the amount of student homelessness identified in CCSD (see past report[6]). In this report, we update the identification rate of student homelessness and consider differences in education indicators and supports provided. We consider records from all students attending district schools (non-charter, non-renaissance) at any point during school years 2017-18 through 2019-20.

The Data.

We consider education records about each student attending schools operated by the Camden City School District (non-charter, non-renaissance) at any point during each relevant school year. We include information only about students who attended at least 10 days in any district-operated school. We jointly interpret findings, drawing on expertise from CCSD staff, researchers, and data scientists. Additional aggregate information comes from the New Jersey Department of Education via publicly available sources, as noted.

Student and family factors. Demographic information and identified homelessness status are derived from CCSD records. This information is updated at least annually during school enrollment and as part of regular district processes during the year when CCSD staff become aware of **changes in a student's** situation.

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[6] Cutuli, Cintron, Iko, & Truchil (2020). Identified student homelessness in Camden City Schools. Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jj_cutuli/47/download/

Education indicators.

Absence rate and chronic absenteeism. Absence rate is based on student attendance maintained in CCSD records. Absence rate is the difference between days enrolled less days attended and divided by the number of days enrolled in the district. This helps account for instances where students might move into or out of the district during the school year, producing episodes during which their school attendance is not known. A student is considered chronically absent when they miss at least 10 percent of enrolled days in a given year. There is no attendance data available for March through June 2020 because of the sudden switch to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School mobility – Within year. We report the rate at which students change schools during the academic year. This does not include school changes between years nor planned/structural changes due to grade promotion or school closing.

Suspensions. Suspension rates refer to the ratio of students who were suspended in any way for at least one day. This includes both in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

Dropout rate. CCSD records include an indicator for all students who leave the district. The indicator reflects what, if anything, is known about why the student is no longer in the district. We consider a student to have dropped out if they left the district for any of the following reasons: physical, mental or emotional disability, dissatisfied with school, economic necessity and/or entered employment, married and/or pregnant, new residence and school status unknown, or reason unknown. Findings based on this indicator should be interpreted with caution given the inherent difficulty of knowing in all cases why a student has left CCSD.

Graduation rate (12th grade). We present single-year high school graduation rates as a ratio of the number of 12th grade students who graduated divided by the number of 12th grade students for each school year.

Education supports.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP). We report the rate of students who have an individualized education plan each school year. Students in CCSD are eligible to receive special education services under an IEP developed through a team-based evaluation. Typically, IEPs support students who have qualified for services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). IEPs and related services are available to all children from 3 to 21 years old. Available services include special education instruction, speech/language therapy, audiological services, behavioral support, psychological services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and vocational services.

English language learning services (ELL). The ELL indicator refers to students who qualify for any English language learner program based on limited English proficiency. CCSD operates a bilingual/English as a second language program to support English Language Learners in grades K through 12th. CSSD operates full time English-Spanish bilingual instruction at six schools in addition to English as a second language programming broadly in addition to English as a Second Language supports.

School-based Youth Services. CCSD provides a variety of health and human services through its School-based Youth Services program. This program is available to all students. This indicator in the health record denotes an involvement in one or more of the following services: Primary and preventative health services, mental health and family services, referral to community-based services, after school and summer programs, family involvement programs, substance abuse services, pregnancy prevention, and healthy youth development programs.

Transportation. CCSD provides transportation to students who live at least 2 miles from their school and to some students experiencing homelessness and in some other situations where transportation can be a barrier to education. Transportation support can involve a school bus or passes for public transportation.

NJ Department of Education homelessness counts. We also report on annual identified student homelessness rates for CCSD and several other New Jersey local education agencies (LEAs) using data from the New Jersey Department of Education.[7] Each LEA is required to report the total number of students identified as experiencing homelessness each year. These are counts of the number of identified cases of student homelessness involved with the LEA at any point during the school year.

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[7] NJ School Performance Report. Accessed October 1, 2021. Available at https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/
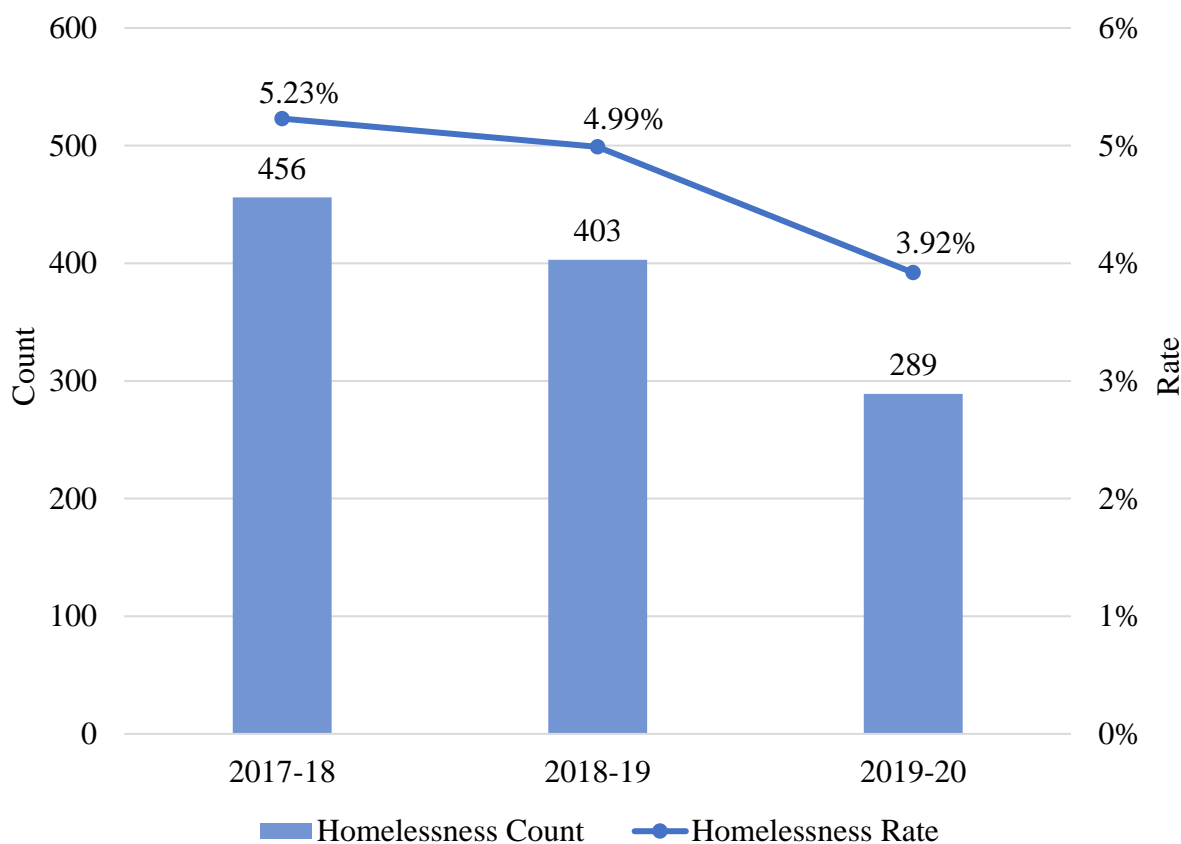
Section 1: Identified Student Homelessness

1.1 Rate of identified student homelessness in CCSD

Identified student homelessness significantly declined in SY 2019-20, from 456 students in SY 2017-18 to 289 students in SY 2019-20. This decline is not due to lower enrollment in CCSD as the rate of identified homelessness also declined from 5.23% to 3.92%. This decline is consistent with concerns that fewer students were identified during the shift to remote learning in March 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic. See Figure 1.1.

The nighttime sleeping arrangements of students identified as experiencing homelessness in SY 2019-20 were overwhelmingly (91.35%) in doubled-up situations sharing housing with friends or extended family for economic reasons. This rate is generally consistent across years (SY 2017-18: 90.79%; SY 2018-19: 87.34%). Also like past years, 4.84% of identified student homelessness involved staying in a shelter and none were unsheltered in SY 2019-20. The rate of student homelessness in a hotel or motel was 3.81% which is a decline from the SY 2018-19 rate of 7.20% and a return to the level of 2017-18 of 3.07%.

Figure 1.1. Rates and counts of students experiencing homelessness by year.
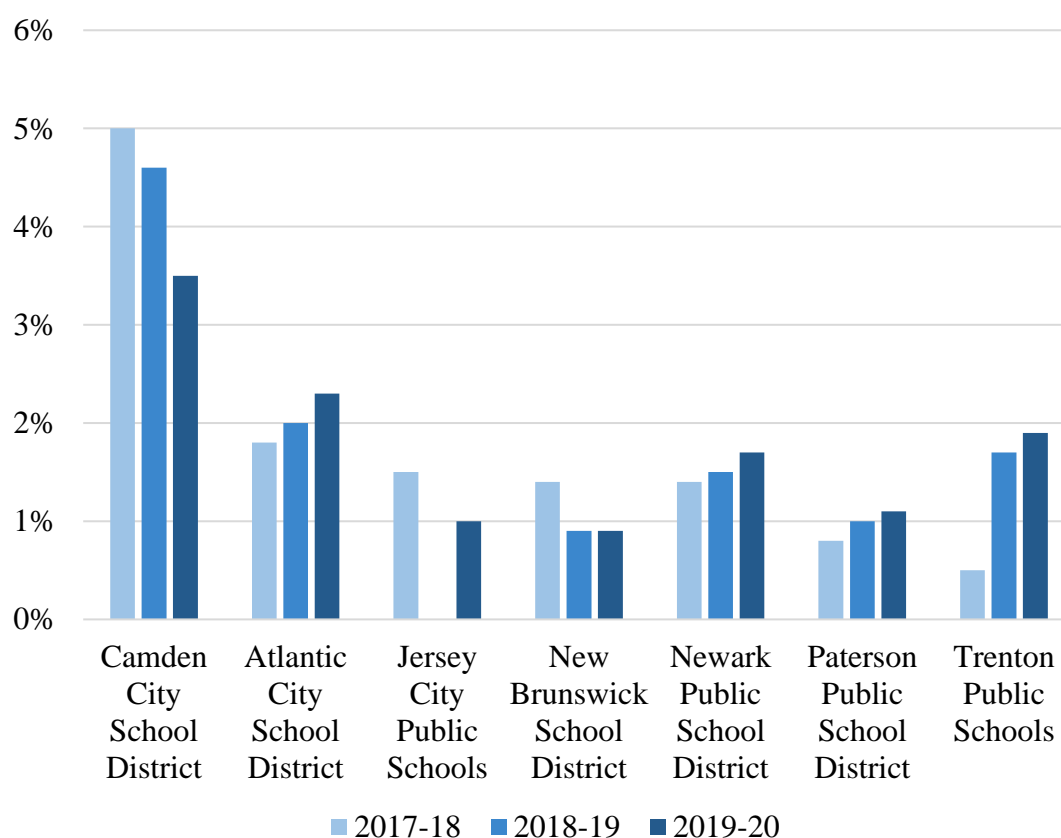
1.2 Differences among NJ districts in identified student homelessness.

CCSD consistently identifies a higher proportion of enrolled students as experiencing homelessness compared to the other districts we consider. Data from the New Jersey Department of Education[8] contextualizes the CCSD rates of identified student homelessness.[9] Figure 1.2 depicts rates for CCSD and five other districts in New Jersey. Overall, CCSD is the only district among these that consistently identified over 3% of students across SYs 2017-18 through 2019-20. Each of the other districts identified around or below 2% of students each year. This pattern underscores concerns that student homelessness is under-identified by New Jersey education agencies, in general.

Even in SY 2019-20, CCSD identified a higher rate of students experiencing homelessness than the other districts we considered. Other districts did not show a decline in identified student homelessness rates in SY 2019-20, perhaps because their processes were not disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions or because they consistently identified low-rates of homelessness, including during years not affected by COVID-19. In any event, CCSD consistently identified a greater proportion of its students as experiencing homelessness.

Figure 1.2. Identified student homelessness rates in other NJ districts.


1.3 Differences by Camden charter and renaissance agencies in identified homelessness.

More than half of public-school students in Camden City attend a charter or renaissance school. Most of the education agencies that operate these schools in Camden City do not identify many students experiencing homelessness according to data from the NJ Department of Education. Most charter or renaissance agencies in Camden City identified less than 2% of students as experiencing homelessness each year from SY 2017-18 through 2019-20 (Table 1.3 and Figure 1.3). Three agencies did not report any student homelessness. These low rates are consistent with concerns that student homelessness routinely goes unrecognized. KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy is the exception, identifying between 3.6% and 4.4% of students each year. We cannot tell based on available data from the NJ Department of Education whether most charter or renaissance agencies are not identifying or serving many students experiencing homelessness, or whether inaccurate counts of identified students are being received by the state agency.

Table 1.3. Rates of identified student homelessness by public education agencies in Camden.

Education Agency Name	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Camden City School District	5.0%	4.6%	3.5%
Camden Prep (Uncommon)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Camden's Promise Charter	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
ECO Charter School	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Freedom Prep Charter	0.0%	1.2%	1.1%
KIPP Cooper Norcross	3.6%	4.4%	3.9%
LEAP Academy Univ. Charter	0.8%	0.6%	1.0%
Mastery Schools of Camden	1.0%	0.6%	0.5%

Figure 1.3. Identified student homelessness rates for charter, renaissance, and CCSD agencies
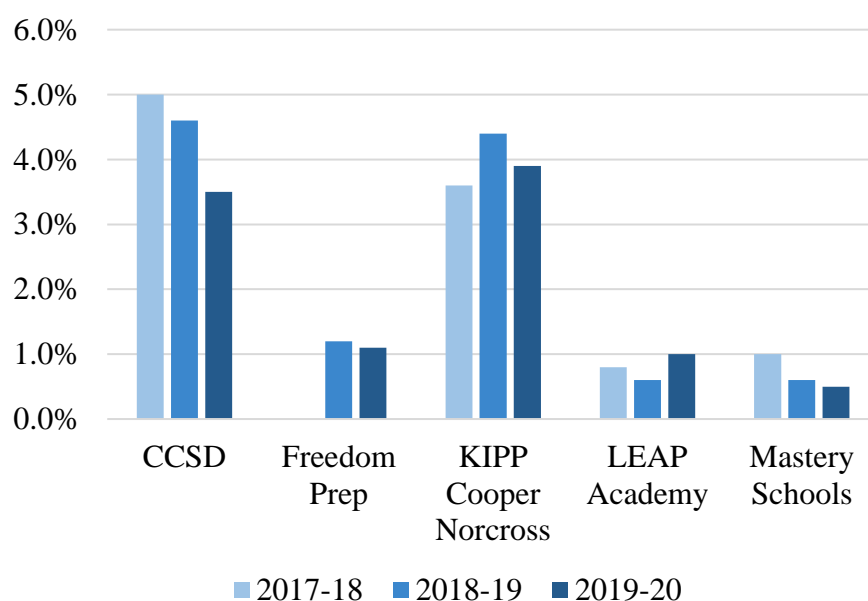

Note: Three charter agencies are not shown because they did not report any student homelessness.

1.4 Differences over time in identified student homelessness start dates.

Student homelessness was much less likely to be identified in CCSD for homeless episodes that began in the final quarter of SY 2019-20, when no in-person education was occurring. Table 1.4 and Figure 1.4 report CCSD education data on the start dates of identified student homelessness across the three focal school years. We also include data here from student homelessness episodes that reportedly began in 2019-20 but were not identified until 2020-21.

The reduced number of identified homeless episodes that began during the final three quarters of 2019-20 does not imply that there was no or less student homelessness at these times. Rather, it is consistent with reports[10] that the move to remote learning made identifying homelessness more challenging. Teachers and school staff had fewer opportunities to recognize concerning student situations. District operations were **simultaneously challenged to reorganize and help meet families'** other basic needs (e.g., providing food to students who lost access to the National School Lunch Program). Other possible contributing factors are the introduction of eviction and foreclosure moratorium in 2020 as well as a general reduction in identified homelessness, enrollments, and transfers during the last quarter of the school year.

Figure 1.4. Counts of identified student homelessness by episode start date.
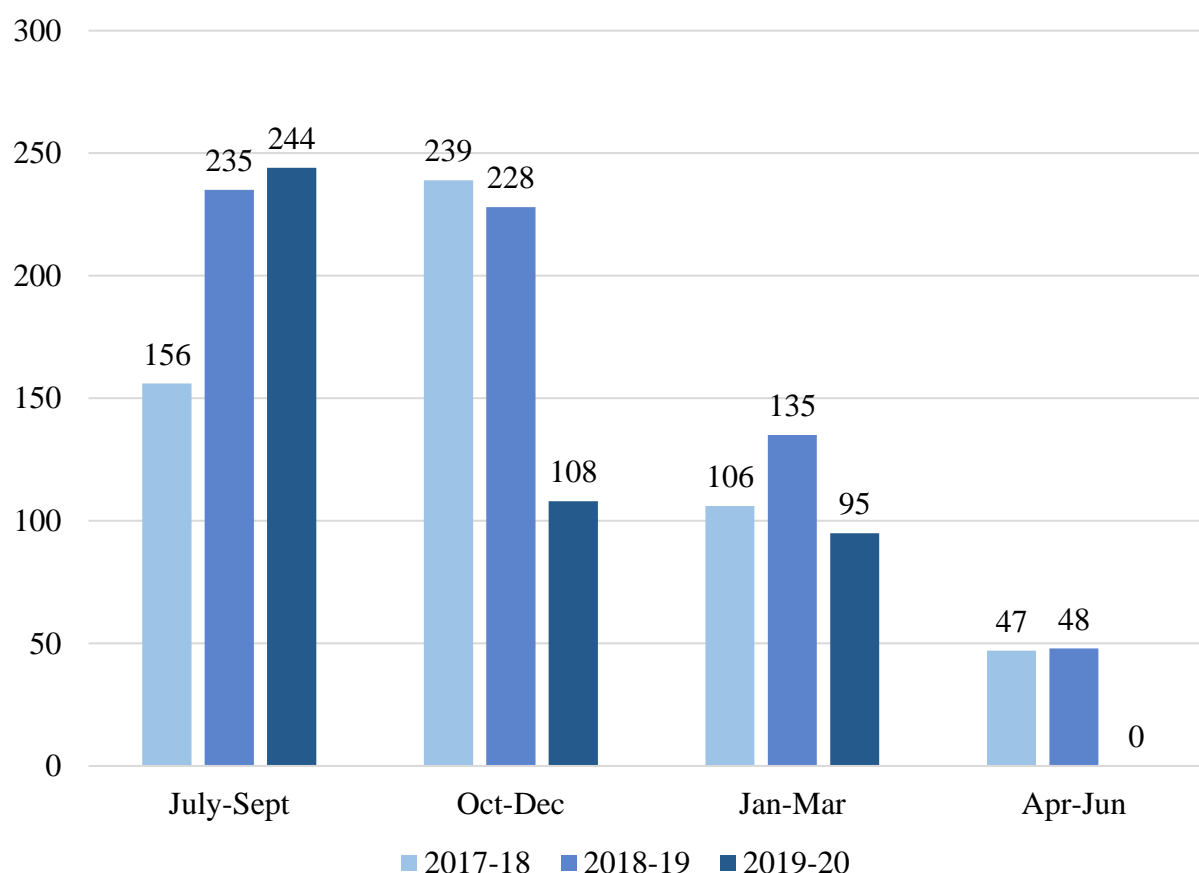
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[10] SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan (2020). Lost in the masked shuffle and virtual void: Children and youth experiencing homelessness amidst the pandemic. Available at: https://schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Lost-in-the-Masked-Shuffle-and-Virtual-Void.pdf

## 1.5 Differences by race/ethnicity in identified student homelessness.

Identified student homelessness differed by race / ethnicity (Table 1.5 and Figure 1.5). Rates and counts of student homelessness declined for Hispanic / Latino students in SY 2019-20 and stayed steady for Black / African American students. These data do not speak to why this difference emerged. It is possible that Hispanic / Latino students experiencing homelessness were more likely to leave CCSD because of changes in family roles and responsibilities with the onset of COVID-19 restrictions, or that these students were more likely to leave Camden City altogether. Alternatively, fewer families and youth may have migrated into Camden and CCSD from other countries in SY 2019-20, especially given the closure of the southern border of the U. S. and related travel restrictions imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. A previous CCSD report documented increases in Hispanic/Latino students experiencing homelessness that corresponded to years following hurricane disasters in Spanish-speaking island nations, presumably because of established Hispanic/Latino communities in Camden City. New national restrictions on migration may have contributed to declines in identified homelessness for Hispanic/Latino students during SY 2019-20, though the current analyses cannot make a definitive conclusion.

Table 1.5. Counts and rates of identified student homelessness by race / ethnicity.

Year	Black / African American		Hispanic / Latino		Other	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
2017-18	125	3.32%	329	6.93%	Suppressed	Suppressed
2018-19	108	3.04%	284	6.55%	11	5.85%
2019-20	101	3.10%	184	4.70%	Suppressed	Suppressed

Note: Counts and rates with less than 10 students are suppressed.

Figure 1.5. Identified student homelessness by race / ethnicity.
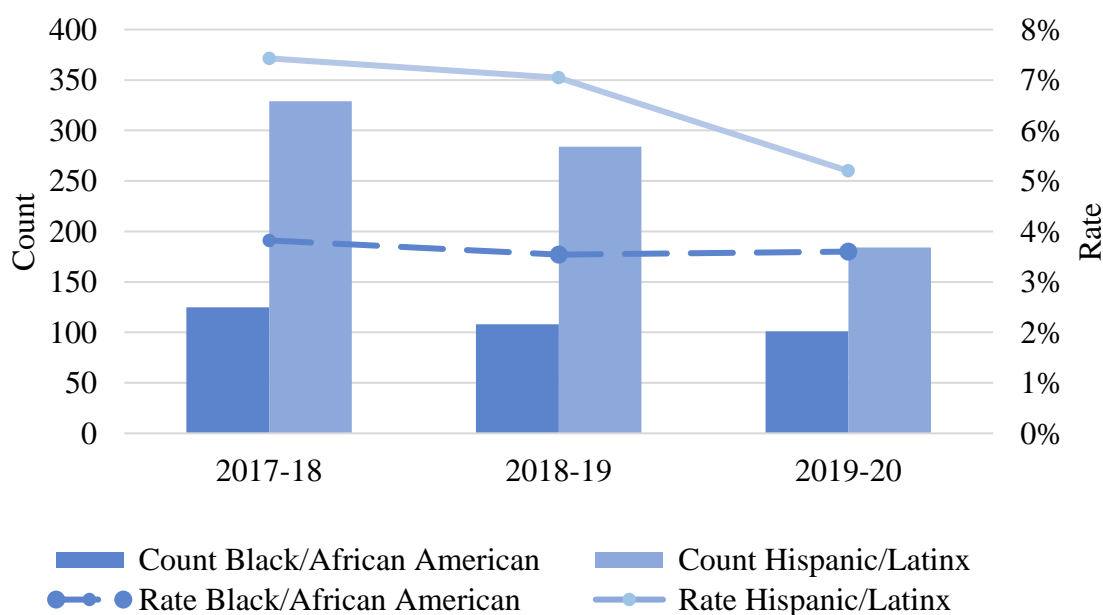
1.6 Student gender differences in student homelessness.

Identified student homelessness also declined more for males than females in SY 2019-20. Rates of identified student homelessness were about equal around 5% in SYs 2017-18 and 2018-19. The rate declines slightly for females to 4.59% in SY 2019-20 but declines more dramatically for males to 3.32%. As noted in the last section, restrictions on migration related to the COVID-19 pandemic may contribute to this difference if males are otherwise more likely to migrate to Camden City and experience homelessness.

Table 1.6. Counts and rates of identified student homelessness by gender.

Year	Female		Male	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
2017-18	210	5.11%	246	5.33%
2018-19	193	5.01%	210	4.97%
2019-20	161	4.59%	128	3.32%

Figure 1.6. Identified student homelessness by gender.
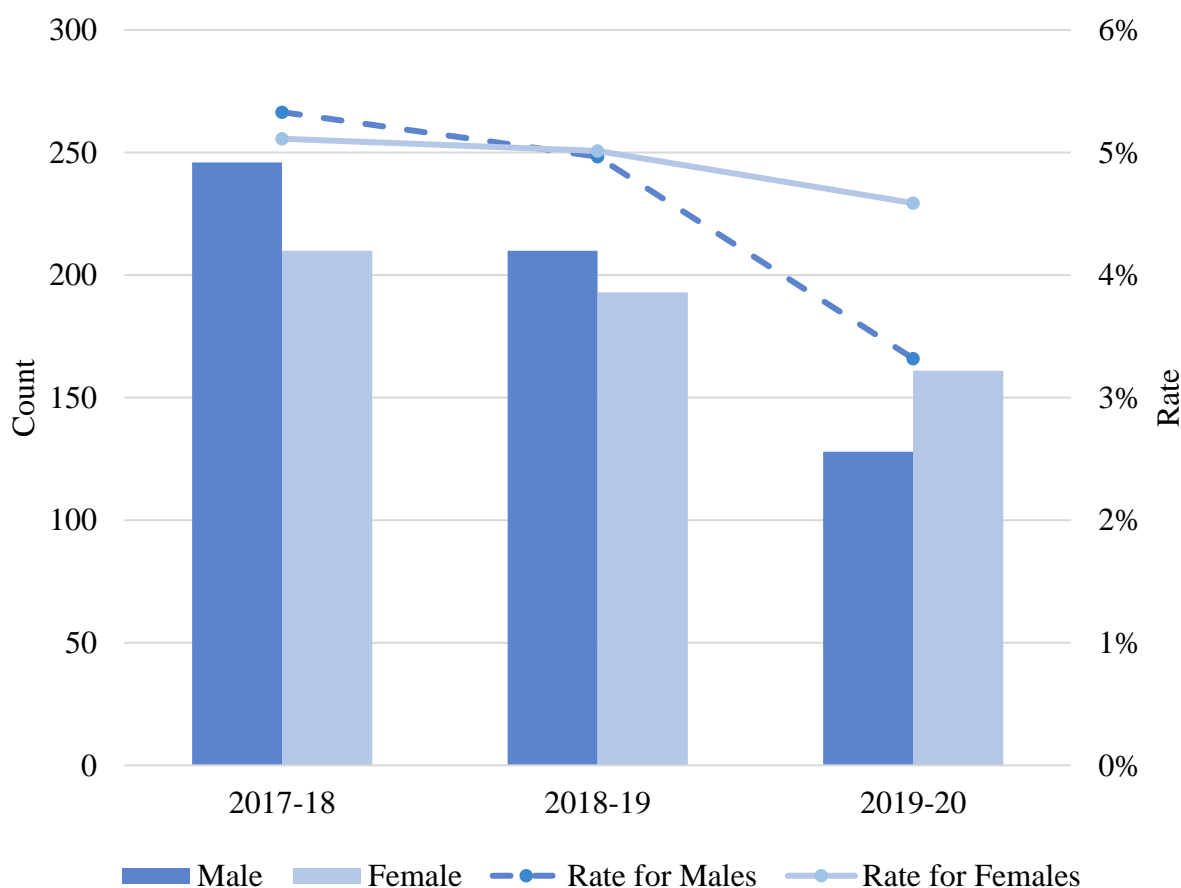
1.7 School differences in identified student homelessness.

Identified student homelessness varied widely by school. Table 1.7 reports counts and rates of identified homelessness, with statistics suppressed when less than 10 students were identified. Trend rates of identified homelessness rates for each school are color coded by the pattern over time: Four schools (in green) identified at least 10 students experiencing homelessness each of the three years; Twelve (in orange) identified at least 10 students one or more years; Three (in red) did not identify at least 10 students during any of the years considered. This variability between schools suggests differences in school-level processes that contribute to whether students are identified and served when homelessness occurs

Table 1.7. Counts and rates of identified student homelessness by school

School	2017-18			2018-19			2019-20			Trend
	Rate	Count	Enrollment	Rate	Count	Enrollment	Rate	Count	Enrollment	
Consistently Identifies over 10										
Cramer Elementary School	13.6%	71	524	10.3%	53	517	6.5%	32	490	
Dudley Family School	7.8%	45	588	9.9%	52	528	11.9%	62	520	
Veterans Memorial Family School	11.9%	66	553	14.4%	73	507	8.5%	34	401	
Woodrow Wilson High School	8.7%	83	954	8.3%	70	845	7.5%	51	683	
Inconsistently identifies over 10										
Camden High School	2.8%	14	502	S	< 10	441	S	< 10	371	
Catto Family School	3.1%	20	650	2.7%	17	620	1.9%	12	644	
Cooper's Poynt Family School	3.8%	17	477	S	< 10	449	2.9%	13	450	
Cream Family School	5.6%	20	358	3.6%	12	332	S	< 10	131	
Creative Arts/Morgan Village	S	< 10	350	S	< 10	315	4.2%	13	312	
Davis Elementary School	3.1%	11	356	S	< 10	358	S	< 10	350	
Early Childhood Develop Center	2.3%	10	429	S	< 10	443	3.9%	12	311	
Forest Hill Elementary School	S	< 10	321	S	< 10	311	3.7%	13	353	
H.B. Wilson Elementary School	S	< 10	659	S	< 10	508	1.9%	11	578	
Sharp Elementary School	4.9%	20	411	5.8%	23	398	S	< 10	364	
Wiggins College Prep Lab School	7.4%	33	449	5.2%	23	443	2.9%	13	447	
Yorkship Elementary School	2.4%	12	501	4.1%	21	511	S	< 10	471	
Identifies under 10										
Big Picture Learning Academy	S	< 10	256	S	< 10	206	S	< 10	184	
Medical Arts High School	S	< 10	212	S	< 10	214	S	< 10	216	
Pride Academy	NA	NA	NA	S	< 10	51	S	< 10	89	

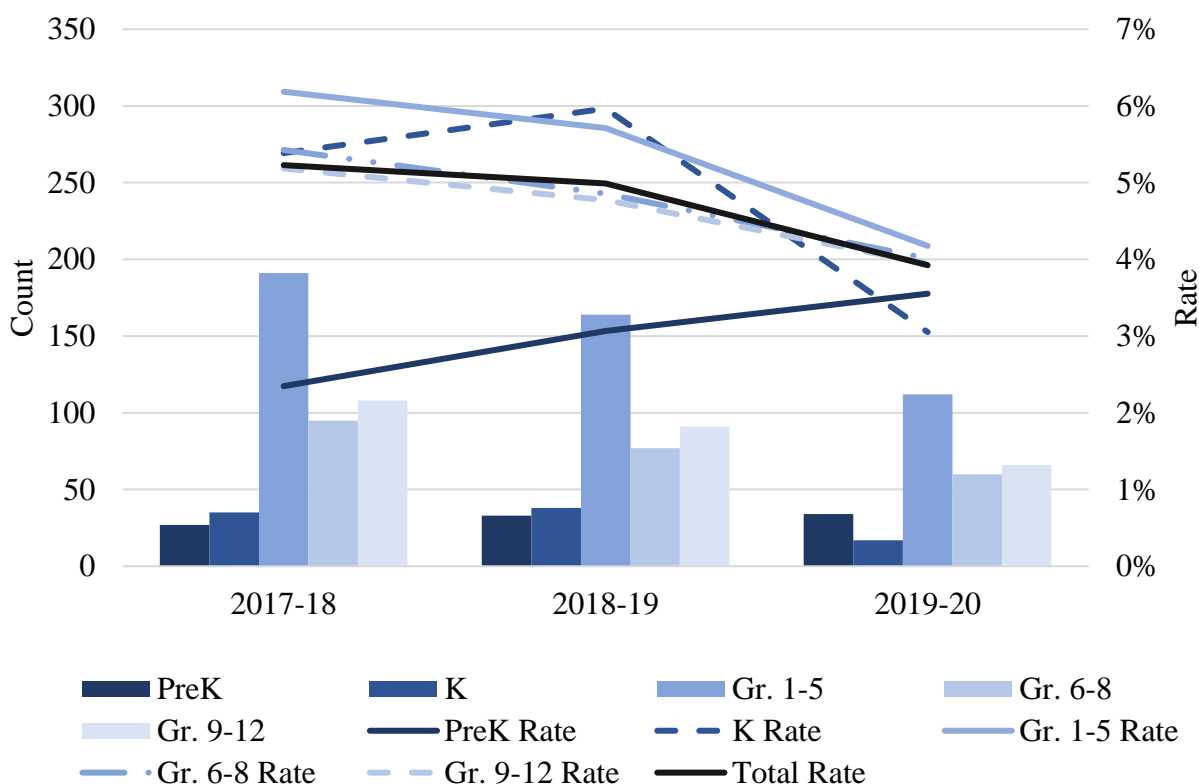## 1.8 Grade differences in identified student homelessness.

Rates of identified student homelessness generally decreased in SY 2019-20 across grade-groupings in a manner consistent with the general trend of declining identification in SY 2019-20. There were two notable exceptions. First, rates declined to a greater degree for students in kindergarten from 5.38% in SY 2017-18 to 3.05% in SY 2019-20. In contrast to all other groups, rates continued a trend of increasing for students in PreK programs, going from 2.35% in SY 2017-18 to 3.55% in SY 2019-20. These two exceptions should be interpreted in light of the smaller enrollment sizes of the PreK and kindergarten groups compared to the other groups that combine multiple-grades. Variability is more likely in groups with smaller enrollments.

Table 1.8. Counts and rates of identified student homelessness by grade groupings.

Grade Group	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
PreK	27	2.35%	33	3.07%	34	3.55%
K	35	5.38%	38	5.97%	17	3.05%
Grades 1-5	191	6.19%	164	5.71%	112	4.18%
Grades 6-8	95	5.43%	77	4.85%	60	4.01%
Grades 9-12	108	5.18%	91	4.77%	66	3.95%
Total	456	5.23%	403	4.99%	289	3.92%

Figure 1.8. Identified student homelessness counts and rates by grade groupings.

Section 2: Education indicators

In this second section we describe differences in education indicators (attendance, school mobility, dropout, graduation, and suspensions) comparing students who were identified as experiencing homelessness each year to those who were not. We focus on students in kindergarten through 12th grade, as many of the indicators are less applicable to children in PreK programs.

Sections 2 and 3 need to be interpreted in light of the declines in identified student homelessness in SY 2019-20. Those declines suggest that under identification occurred since we do not have reason to believe that there was any real decline in student homelessness; It is likely that some students who experienced homelessness are included in the not-homeless group since CCSD was unable to identify them. This will reduce any differences in education indicators between groups of students identified as experiencing homelessness and not.

2.1 Absence rate

Student homelessness was associated with higher rates of absenteeism, considering only days in which students were enrolled in CCSD schools. Figure 2.1 describes the average annual absence rates (days absent divided by days enrolled) for students who were and were not identified as experiencing homelessness each school year. This absence rate is consistently higher for students identified as experiencing homelessness. Student homelessness is associated with fewer days in the classroom.

The absence rate appears to decrease for all students in SY 2019-20, but this is likely to be related to the shift to remote learning that occurred in March 2020 and not a true difference. Attendance data is not available for the remote learning period in 2020, and absences are more likely in the final months of any school year based on analyses of CCSD data from past years as well as general trends from other school districts.

Figure 2.1. Absence rate.
Note: Error bars refer to the standard error of the mean.
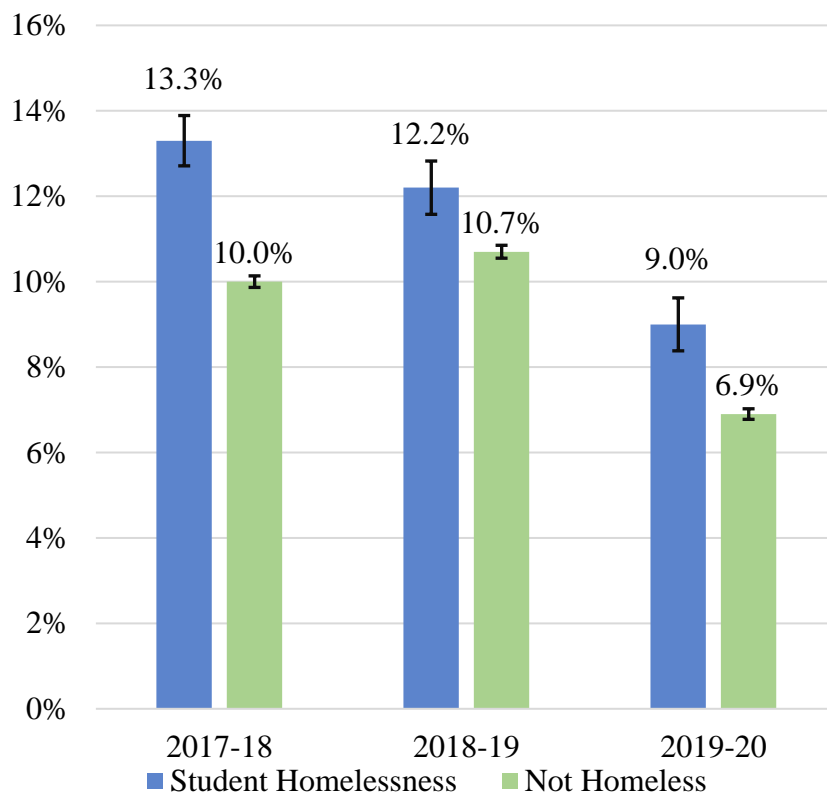
2.2 Chronic absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism refers to students who are absent for at least 10% of enrolled days. The rate of chronic absenteeism is markedly higher for students identified as experiencing homelessness relative to other students in the district, declining from a majority (51.98%) chronically absent in SY 2017-18 to nearly a third (30.20%) in SY 2019-20, again with the qualification that attendance records are not available during remote learning from March through June of 2020. See Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. Chronic absenteeism.
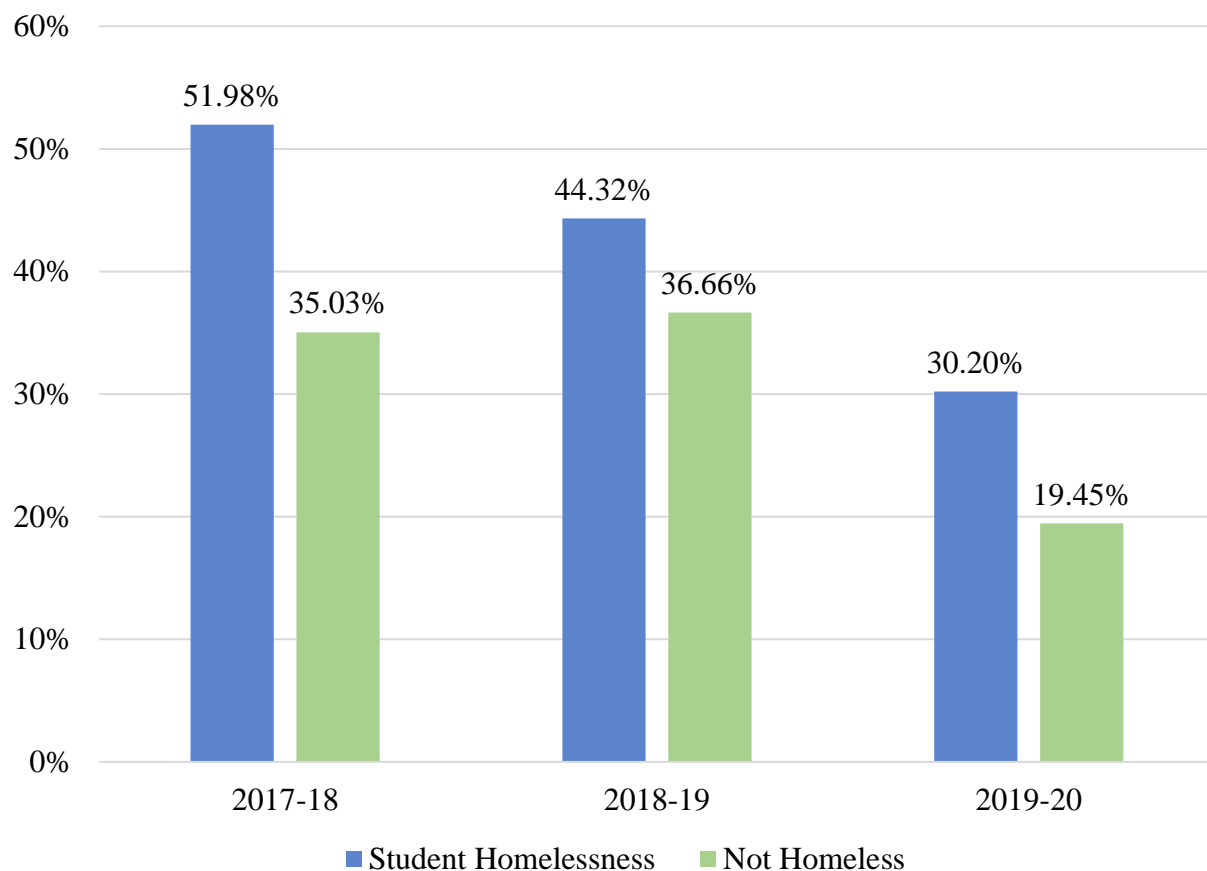
2.3 School Mobility

Student homelessness was associated with higher rates of changing schools during the school year. This difference narrowed from SY 2017-18 through 2019-20, though 2019-20 was a shortened school year for this metric as students did not change schools during remote learning. There was more identified student homelessness and school mobility in SY 2017-18 likely attributable to migration to Camden by families leaving island nations impacted by multiple severe hurricanes. Federal legislation provides the right for students experiencing homelessness to remain in their school of origin if it is in their best interest. Despite this right, students identified as experiencing homelessness had higher rates of school mobility each year.

Figure 2.3. School mobility rates.

Student Homelessness ■ Not Homeless
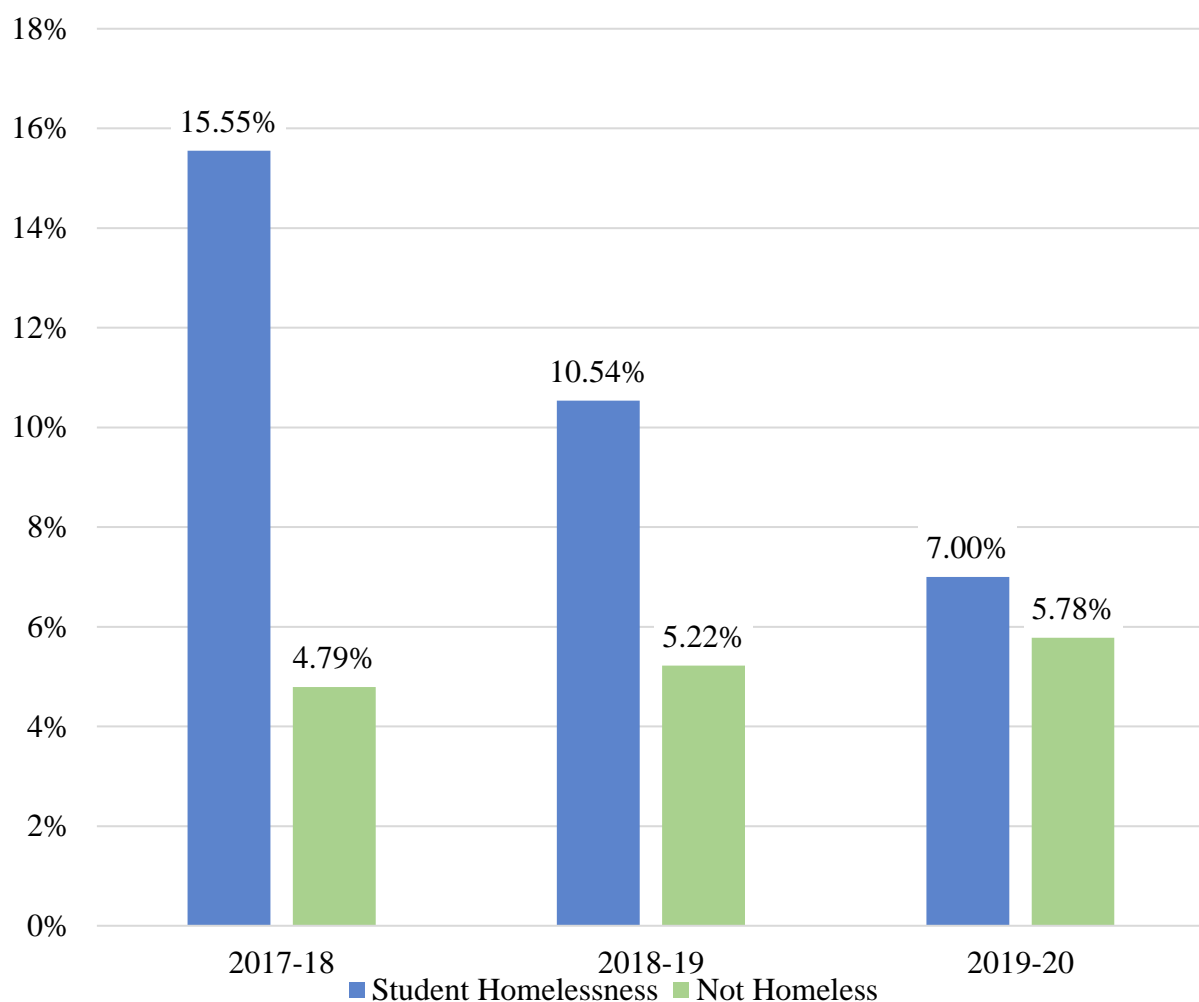
2.4 Suspensions.

Students identified as experiencing homelessness were less likely than other students to be suspended for at least one day during SY 2018-19 and 2019-20. Students were not suspended during remote learning beginning in March 2020. Suspension rates were similar between those identified as experiencing homelessness and other students during SY 2017-18.

Figure 2.4. Suspensions.
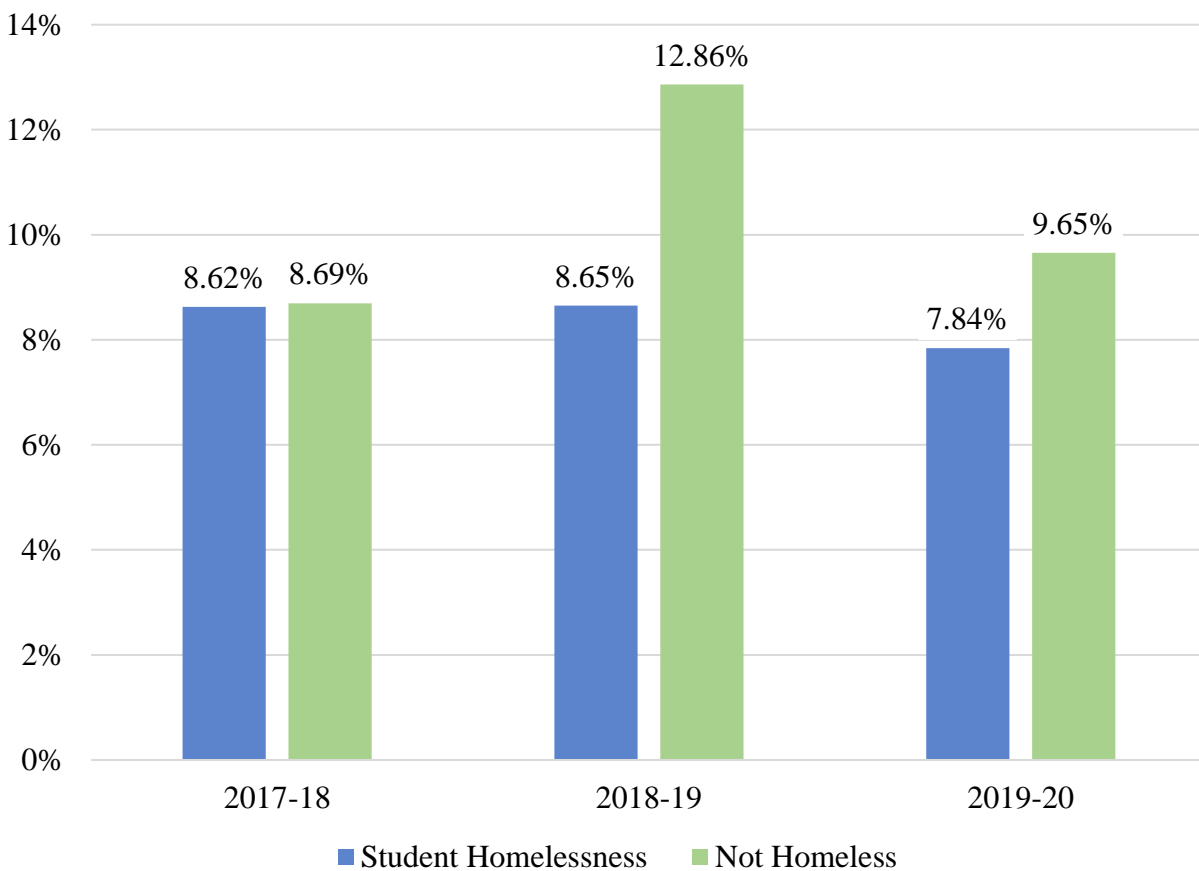
2.5 Student dropout.

CCSD tracks students who do not complete the year without transferring to another school. This circumstance is considered dropping out. Students experiencing homelessness showed lower rates of dropping out during SY 2017-19 and 2018-19, but higher rates during 2019-20. Additional analyses (not presented) demonstrated that these drop-out cases during 2019-20 occurred before March 2020, meaning that these instances of dropout are not attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic and that CCSD operations were unable to document drop-outs during this period.
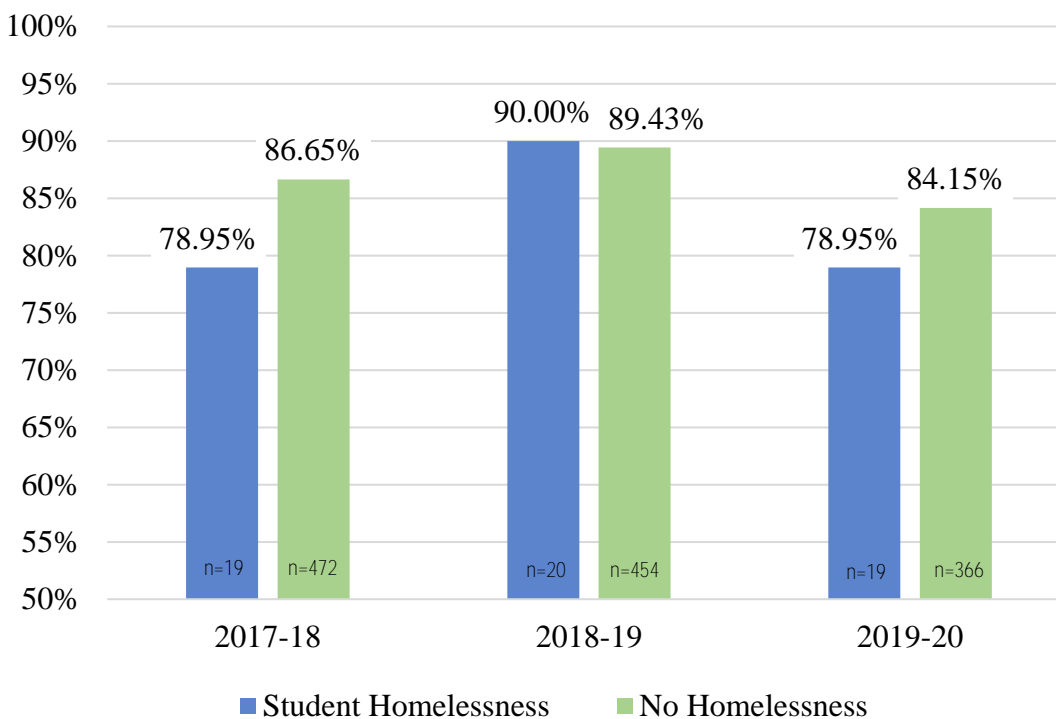
Figure 2.5. Dropout rate.
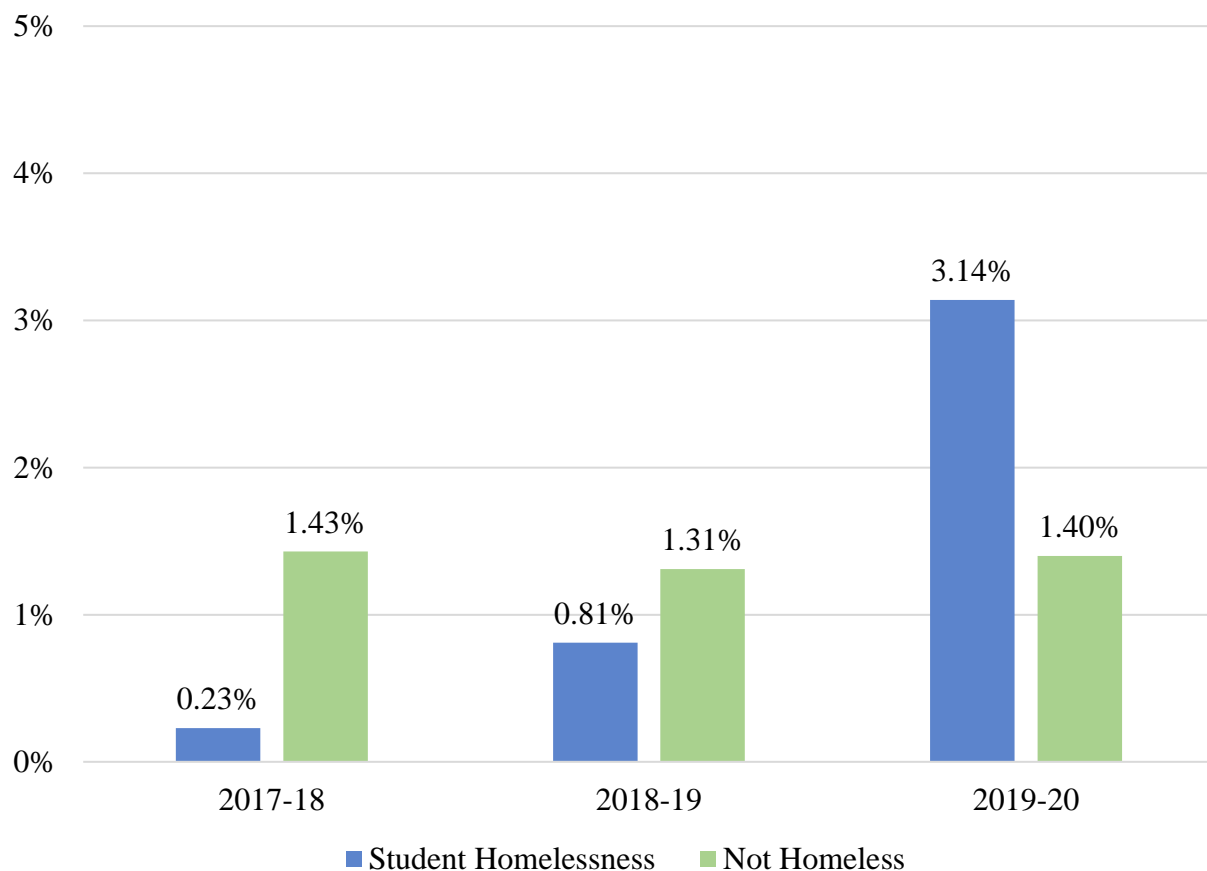
2.6 High School Graduation.

Students identified as experiencing homelessness in 12th grade were less likely than other students to graduate in SY 2017-18 and 2019-20 when under 80% completed high school but were about as likely to graduate in 2018-19. Ninety percent of 12th grade students identified as experiencing homelessness graduated in SY 2018-19. Graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness were lower in 2017-18 and 2019-20. Please note that state requirements for graduation were different in SY 2019-20 during COVID-19 restrictions (e.g., no standardized testing). Even so, graduation rates declined relative to SY 2018-19 and were approximately similar to 2017-18. SY 2017-18 and SY 2019-20 were similar in that both **involved disasters that represented major disruptions in many students' lives: severe hurricanes and** COVID-19 pandemic, respectively.

These results were also based on relatively few students in each group, since they consider only 12th graders. Only 19 or 20 12th grade students were identified as experiencing homelessness. Increased variability is likely when groups contain fewer students.

Figure 2.6. Twelfth grade graduation rate.

Legend: Student Homelessness (blue), No Homelessness (green)

|	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Student Homelessness	78.95% (n=19)	90.00% (n=20)	78.95% (n=19)
No Homelessness	86.65% (n=472)	89.43% (n=454)	84.15% (n=366)

Section 3. Education supports

Consistent with McKinney-Vento provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act, CCSD extends special rights and services to help ensure that students experiencing homelessness have access to a free and appropriate education. For example, students experiencing homeless are entitled to transportation to their school of origin if it is in their best interest to continue there. These rights and services are in addition to services routinely provided to students regardless of homelessness, like Individualized Education Plans/Special Education Services, English Language Learning Programs, and others. In this section we compare students experiencing homelessness to other students on the rates of qualifying for different education supports within CCSD. These comparisons should be interpreted while recognizing that students who experience homelessness tend to also experience other adversities (e.g., deep poverty, trauma) that may interfere with education and development over years, even preceding the identified homeless episode. Students experiencing homelessness may qualify for additional supports as a result.

3.1 Transportation.

Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to receive transportation supports in SY 2017-18, though this difference narrowed in 2018-19 and disappeared in 2019-20 which was shortened by the switch to remote learning. Transportation supports include both receiving a school bus or district-provided bus tickets for public transportation to travel to and from school. This narrowing raises the possibility that more students identified as experiencing homelessness might be able to benefit from receiving transportation services in the future.

Figure 3.1. Transportation service by identified student homelessness status.
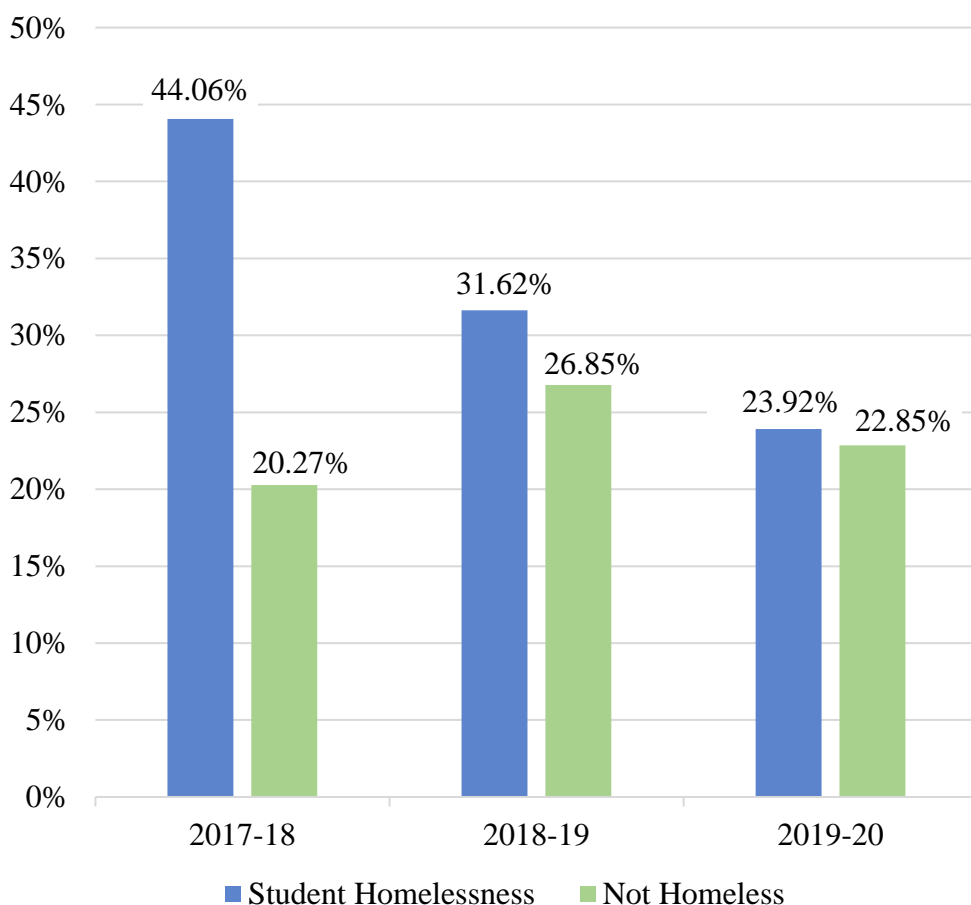
3.2 Other education supports.

Students identified as experiencing homelessness were sometimes more likely to receive education supports, sometimes less likely, and sometimes just as likely. Figure 3.2 depicts rates of obtaining an individual education plan (IEP) for special education services, qualifying for English Language Learner (ELL) services, and participating in any of a variety of school-based youth services. CCSD data does not allow specific school-based youth services to be disaggregated.

Students identified as experiencing homelessness were generally less likely to have an IEP despite widespread recognition that homelessness and deep poverty is a threat to education and outcomes. Rates of having an IEP were similar in SY 2017-18 among students experiencing and not experiencing homelessness, but gaps emerged in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Students experiencing homelessness were much more likely to qualify for ELL services during each school year compared to students not identified as experiencing homelessness. This difference is consistent with previously reported migration patterns and changes in practice that led to more Hispanic / Latino students being identified in SYs 2017-18 and 2018-19 following hurricanes that destroyed basic infrastructure in many Spanish-speaking island nations.[11] This difference persists for identified student homelessness in SY 2019-20.

Students experiencing homelessness were less-likely to participate in any school-based youth services during SYs 2017-18 and 2018-19 relative to other students but were about-as-likely in 2019-2020. While CCSD data is unable to consider individual school-based services, this indicator includes important health and prevention services (e.g., primary health care, pregnancy prevention) as well as mental health supports and a variety of other programs that target negative outcomes associated with student homelessness.[12] While it is promising that students experiencing homelessness are accessing school-based services at similar rates as other students in SY 2019-20, the overall participation rate is low, around 15%.

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[11] Cutuli, Cintron, Iko, & Truchil (2020). Identified student homelessness in Camden City Schools. Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jj_cutuli/47/download/

[12] Hatchimonji, D. R., Flatley, C. A., Treglia, D., Cutuli, J. J. (2021). High school students experiencing homelessness: Findings from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). https://www.nemours.org/content/dam/nemours/shared/collateral/community-reports/yrbss-2019-high-school-homelessness-report.pdf

Table 3.2. Rates of education supports by identified student homelessness.

Year	Individualized Education Plan		English Language Learning		School-based Youth Services	
	Student Homelessness	Not Homeless	Student Homelessness	Not Homeless	Student Homelessness	Not Homeless
2017-18	14.22%	14.90%	38.00%	10.98%	10.02%	21.04%
2018-19	8.65%	16.01%	44.59%	13.18%	8.11%	18.24%
2019-20	10.98%	17.23%	42.75%	14.01%	14.12%	15.70%

Figure 3.2. Education supports received by students each year.
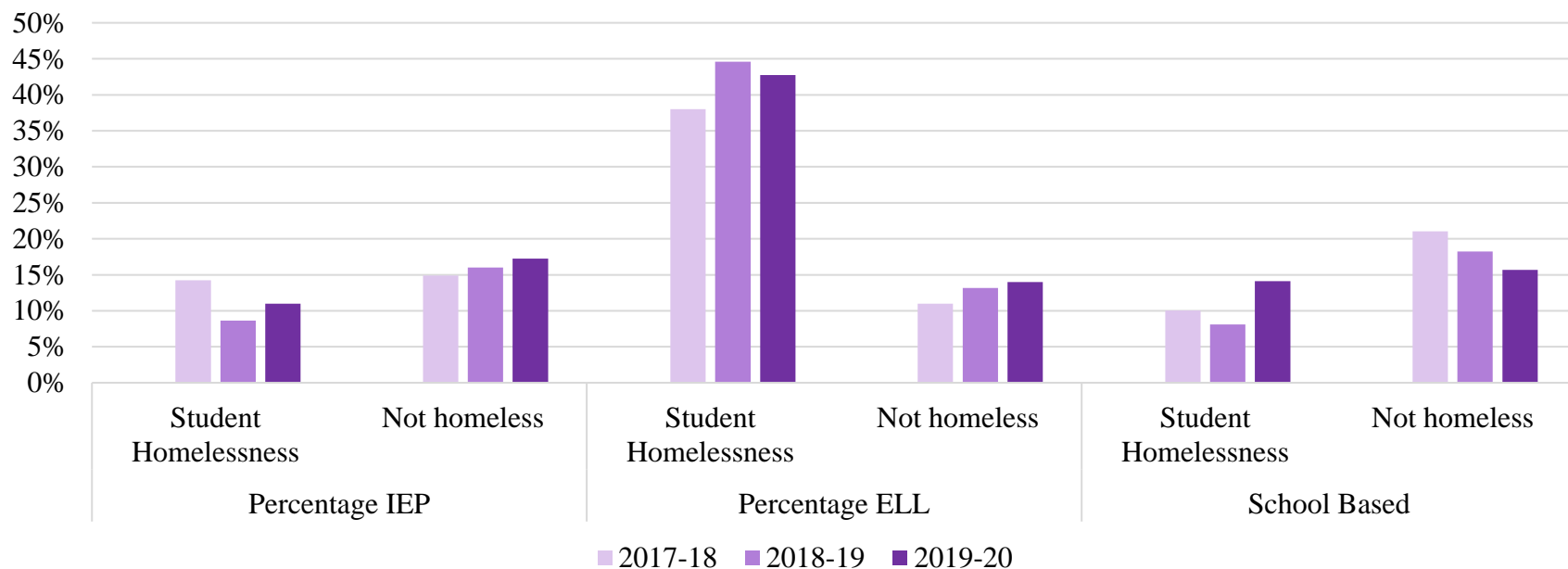
Summary

The rate of identified student homelessness decreased in CCSD operated schools during SY 2019-20, likely as a function of increased challenges associated with the shift to remote learning in March 2020. The decline in identified student homelessness was especially pronounced for students who were male, Hispanic / Latino, or in kindergarten. Even so, CCSD showed higher rates of identified student homelessness than similar LEAs in New Jersey and compared to most charter and renaissance agencies in Camden City. KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy was an exception as staff identified a considerable percentage of their students as experiencing homelessness.

Students who experienced homelessness were at-risk for poor educational indicators. Generally, students who experienced homelessness had higher absence rates and were more likely to be chronically absent, more likely to change schools, more likely to drop out, and less likely to graduate (among 12th graders) compared to students who were not identified as homeless. Student homelessness appeared related to a lower likelihood of being suspended.

We considered four important student support services. Students identified as experiencing homelessness in SY 2019-20 were about as likely as other students to receive transportation. Student homelessness was linked to a lower likelihood of having an individualized education plan required to receive special education services and a somewhat lower likelihood of receiving any school-based youth services (e.g., preventative health services, mental health supports, family supports). These students were more likely to qualify for English Language Learning programs, reflective of differences in home language and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

Recommendations

1) CCSD should work closely with the NJ Department of Education to plan for and use funds provided by the American Rescue Plan (ARP) specifically allocated for identifying and responding to student homelessness. The ARP acknowledges the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to student homelessness and it makes funds available explicitly to help districts like CCSD surmount those challenges. These challenges are already evident in data from SY 2019-20 and the approved New Jersey ARP State Plan outlines funds and activities aimed at addressing those challenges.[13] Those funds and supports should be made available to CCSD.

2) CCSD must continue to innovate more effective ways to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Recovery and increased risk for student homelessness will likely extend past the end of COVID-19 restrictions. Efforts should especially consider ways to engage male students and students who are Hispanic / Latino, given recent declines in identification rates in SY 2019-20. Efforts might include:

   a) Special trainings and communications to teachers and school personnel in recognizing signs of student homelessness and other concerns during the varied crises that accompany economic and social challenges of this moment in history.

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[13] U.S. Department of Education (April, 2021). State Plan for the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. Available at https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/08/New-Jersey-ARP-ESSER-State-Plan-Final.pdf

b) Information campaigns to inform families and students about their rights and CCSD services when they experience housing instability and homelessness.

c) Proactively asking about housing status on all student and family surveys beyond just enrollment and changes in status. These might include school climate surveys, vaccine status surveys, and other correspondence.

d) Deeper engagement and collaboration with charter and renaissance agencies in Camden City on strategies, resources, and obligations to serve students and families experiencing homelessness. This is especially noteworthy given the low rates of identified student homelessness in these agencies, with the exception of KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy. It is possible that students are being identified and served but not communicated to the NJ Department of Education. Annual trainings with these agencies would help establish effective procedures that ensure required data are provided to the NJ Department of Education for planning and oversight.

e) All efforts to identify and engage students and families experiencing homelessness must continue to be multilingual given the large percentages of Hispanic/Latino students who are identified as experiencing homelessness as well as the large numbers that qualify for ELL programs.

f) Migration into Camden City from other states, territories, and countries may contribute to student homelessness in CCSD. Many families may move into homelessness situations (e.g., doubled-up) **when they first arrive in Camden. This underscores the importance of asking about each student's** previous school district, language, and country of origin at enrollment. Close collaboration between the enrollment team and the CCSD Office of Human Services can help ensure that migrant students experiencing homelessness are identified early and served comprehensively.

3) CCSD should examine routinely offered supports for ways to increase access and engagement for students and families experiencing homelessness. Students identified as experiencing homelessness were less likely to show good education outcomes across most indicators. They were also less likely to be involved with some educational supports available at CCSD.

a) Students who were identified as experiencing homelessness were not more likely to receive transportation services, which may contribute to higher rates of school mobility and other problems. **Emphasizing the benefits of remaining at a student's school of origin, and providing augmented** transportation for students experiencing homelessness, will help increase stability and offset problems associated with moving farther away from school and school mobility. Providing transportation via bus routes for students experiencing homelessness may be especially challenged by ongoing shortages of school bus drivers. Even so, innovating effective ways to ensure homeless and mobile students have transportation is needed to promote school attendance, engagement, and educational success.

b) Identified student homelessness was linked to lower rates of having an IEP and, presumably, receiving special education services. Mobility represents a series of challenges to the process of obtaining an IEP, beginning with recognizing that a referral for special education services might be warranted, engaging parents and the student to complete an evaluation, and establishing a workable support plan once needs are well-defined. CCSD should consider ways to prioritize

students experiencing homelessness through every step of this process, including efforts to screen students for referral, acting on referrals more swiftly for this mobile group, and ensuring that supports are appropriate and available to meet potential complex and diverse needs.

c) School-based youth services are an important set of supports for students experiencing homelessness. These services should be made broadly available and supported at a level appropriate for serving the CCSD student body, given the overall low rates of utilization in SY 2019-20. CCSD leadership would also be well-served by changes to how administrative records are maintained for different school-based youth services. Currently records indicate student involvement of a wide breadth of services, spanning health, mental health, family services, out-of-school time activities, prevention, reproductive health and others. Detailed records can help CCSD leadership direct, evaluate, reinforce, and innovate specific services to better serve all students, especially students experiencing homelessness who are more likely to have complex needs.

Acknowledgements