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Identified Student Homelessness in Camden City Schools

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2014-15 through 2018-19



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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. It considers data from students enrolled in district schools at the conclusion of each of the 2014-15 to 2018-19 school years as well as publicly available data from other local education agencies in Camden. We hope that this report offers insights into patterns of student homelessness. Our ultimate goal is to innovate new ways of identifying and supporting students who experience homelessness.

Identified homelessness demonstrated that housing problems were prevalent in 2018-19.

- About 1 out of every 20 (4.59%) students was identified as experiencing homelessness.
- Nine out of ten (90.41%) of these students were staying doubled-up.
- Most (58.89%) students experiencing homelessness were enrolled in four district schools.
- Homelessness rates were about the same for each grade, though lower for preschool.

Annual rates of identified homelessness increased over time but are likely undercounts.

- Rates increased markedly in SY 2017-18 and stayed around this level in 2018-19.
- This increase coincides with students entering the district affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria as well as a relevant change in district practice to improve capacity.
- This increase was not evident for students in district preschool programs.
- Some homeless situations (staying in hotels/motels, shelter) were less prevalent in recent years, suggesting an undercount.

Hurricane Maria's impact elsewhere contributed to increases in student homelessness.

- Students affected by hurricanes accounted for the increase in homelessness in 2017-18
- Homelessness nearly doubled for Hispanic and Latino students in 2017-18 while homelessness increased by only about 10% for African American students.
- Homelessness more than doubled (146% increase) in schools with bilingual programs during 2017-18 while homelessness decreased in schools without a bilingual program.

Homelessness was sometimes linked to differences in educational functioning.

- The average absence rate was higher most years for the homelessness group.
- Students experiencing homelessness were less likely to be proficient in standardized tests.
- Homelessness appears unrelated to out-of-school suspensions in recent years.

Student homelessness may be underreported in most charter and renaissance agencies.

- No consistent pattern of student homelessness was evident across the 9 Camden education agencies from 2014-15 to 2017-18.
- Four agencies (44.44% of city education agencies) did not report any homelessness.
- Two agencies reported persistent annual homelessness rates under 2%.

Introduction

This report describes the rate of students identified as experiencing homelessness in the Camden City School District (CCSD) and several indicators of their educational wellbeing. We attempt to inform two questions relevant to better-serving children and families who experience homelessness: First, what factors might influence the rate of identified homelessness, and, second, are there apparent differences in educational functioning for students identified as experiencing homelessness. Most of this report focuses on students in district schools from school year (SY) 2014-15 through 2018-19 from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade using statistics based on routinely collected CCSD data. We also provide an additional section describing aggregate rates of homelessness for CCSD and charter local education authorities based on publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Education.

Student homelessness and the Camden City School District: Background and context

The Camden City School District is committed to providing a free and appropriate education for students experiencing homelessness. The U. S. Department of Education adheres to legislation included in the Every Student Succeeds Act that 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))

Prior to 2016, the homelessness definition also included children awaiting foster care placement.

Across the country more student homelessness is being identified than ever before. Over 1.5 million students in the United States experienced homelessness and were identified by school districts in SY 2017-18, a 15% increase from SY 2015-16.¹ The increase in New Jersey is even more pronounced (27.4%) over the same period, from 10,391 students in SY 2015-16 to 13,234 students in SY 2017-18. In SY 2017-18, data from the U.S. Department of Education note relatively low rates of identified student homelessness for other urban public school districts in New Jersey, including Atlantic City (2.1% of all students), New Brunswick (1.6%), Newark (1.5%), and Trenton (0.7%). Nationally, nearly three-quarters of students experiencing homelessness were living doubled-up with friends or relatives, 12% were in shelter or awaiting foster care, 7% in hotels or motels, and 7% unsheltered. Students experiencing homelessness are less likely than low-income peers to show proficiency on state achievement tests and are less likely to graduate from high school, underscoring homelessness as a risk factor for poor academic achievement and attainment.

¹ National Center for Homelessness Education (2020, January). Federal data summary school years 2015-16 through 2017-18. <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Federal-Data-Summary-SY-15-16-to-17-18-Published-1.30.2020.pdf>

Camden City, NJ, is a city that faces considerable socioeconomic challenges. U.S. Census Bureau data describes high rates of several developmental risk factors associated with poverty in Camden City. The poverty rate is high (37.4% versus the U.S. rate of 12.3% for families), median household income is low (\$26,105 versus \$57,652), owner-occupied housing is low (39.2% versus 63.8%), and the median property value for owner-occupied housing is low (\$82,300 versus \$193,500). Despite these developmental risks, Camden City has a larger concentration of children and teens, representing an opportunity to promote resilience in development at a grand scale. About 31.4% of Camden residents are under 18 years old, and 8.9% are under 5 years old. Camden residents overwhelmingly identify as either Black/African American and/or Hispanic/Latino compared to national rates (45.4% in Camden versus 13.4% nationally and 48.5% vs 18.1% respectively).^{2,3}

Camden City School District uses several methods to identify students experiencing homelessness for the purpose of informing families of their rights, ensuring those rights are maintained, and offering services to support students. Identifying students experiencing homelessness has financial implications for the district; For students who experience homelessness and temporarily reside in Camden, the district receives state funding (for students from other states or countries) or local funding (for students from other districts in New Jersey).

The identification process and specific supports are coordinated by Sandra Cintron as the identified liaison for students experiencing homelessness and project manager in the CCSD Office of Human Services. Identifying students and families experiencing homelessness is a challenge for all school districts in the U.S. Many families are either unaware that their housing situation grants them access to educational supports or they take steps to not be identified as experiencing homelessness due to social stigma, perceived threats to receiving other forms of aid, fears about possible deportation for undocumented immigrants, or other concerns. Despite these challenges and concerns, CCSD is committed to better-serving students and families who experience homelessness, including improving how to proactively identify and engage those affected with sensitivity and respect.

Many homeless situations are identified when families enroll in the district. All families complete a form at annual or mid-year registration that asks about different housing situations, alerting district staff to a possible homelessness situation. CCSD processes also ask about homelessness when students transfer schools and request a change in transportation. Families who request a new bus stop complete a form that asks about their housing situation. In addition, CCSD maintains relationships with other agencies to receive referrals and coordinate services (e.g., the Anna Sample House family shelter and other county social services). Finally, the CCSD Office of Human Services trains school personnel in how to recognize when a student or family might be experiencing homelessness and responds to referrals from staff across the district.

Families complete an interview when CCSD staff suspect homelessness is occurring or when a family indicates that they are experiencing homelessness on any standard form or paperwork. Prior to 2018, all families met with Sandra Cintron of the CCSD Office of Human Services as part of a centralized procedure. Beginning in January 2018, a district-wide change in practice decentralized the process by utilizing clerks and Family and Operations Coordinators at each school to engage families directly while the CCSD Office of Human Services provides administrative support. This allowed families to make a personal connection at their students' schools. The goals were to build better connections between family and school supports that are vital for families, make supports at schools a one-stop resource for families, and increase capacity by reaching more families as they are more likely to frequent their children's schools.

² U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Quick Facts: Camden City, New Jersey. Accessed April 1, 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/camdennewjersey/POP815217#POP815217>.

³ U.S. Census Bureau (2019). Quick Facts: United States. Accessed April 1, 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218>.

CCSD staff respond to student homelessness in varied ways to help meet the different needs of each child, youth, 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 persist until 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).

Actionable Patterns, Future Innovation

This report considers data from the Camden City School District supplemented by aggregate data from the federal Department of Education to describe patterns in student homelessness from SY 2014-15 through 2018-19. We first describe patterns in those students who the district has identified as experiencing homelessness. We then consider differences in three indicators of educational functioning: absence rate, completion and performance on tests of academic achievement in English and Math, and suspension rate and duration. Finally, we describe identification rates at several charter agencies within Camden using data from the federal Department of Education.

The Data

Most of this report describes patterns contained in education records from CCSD during SY 2014-15 through 2018-19. We consider records from all students attending district schools (non-charter, non-renaissance) and who were active at the end of the respective school year (June 30). As part of the process of interpreting the findings and generating actionable recommendations, we engaged CCSD Family and Operations Coordinators by presenting the results and discussing their perspectives and the results' implications. Additional analyses including students who leave district schools before the end of the year will be the subject of a future report.

Student and family factors. Demographic information and homelessness status are derived from CCSD records. This information is updated at least annually during school enrollment and can be updated as part of any number of regular district processes during the year when CCSD staff become aware of changes in a student's situation. During SY 2017-18, CCSD staff also collected information to identify students who were displaced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria and entered the district.

Attendance. Attendance is based on CCSD records and reflected as a ratio of days attended divided by the 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. At district urging, we require that students be enrolled in a CCSD operated school for at least three days in a given school year to obtain an attendance ratio. Attendance data is available from SY 2014-15 onward for students attending district schools.

Academic Achievement. Achievement tests refer to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), the Title I assessment given by CCSD in SY 2014-15 through 2017-18.⁴ PARCC is aligned with Common Core state standards. Following state mandate, CCSD began administering the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA), a shortened form of the PARCC assessments in 2019.⁵ Students in grades 3 through 11 complete PARCC/NJSLA math and English/language arts (ELA) testing each spring, though grade 11 did not complete the NJSLA in 2019. Most students who are eligible for English Language Learner services and entered a school in the U.S. during an academic year are exempted from taking these standardized assessments.⁶

⁴ Pearson (2018, March 27). *PARCC: Final technical report for 2017 administration*. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/PARCC-2017-Technical-Report.pdf>

⁵ State of New Jersey Department of Education (2019). *Test coordinator manual*. <https://nj.mypearsonsupport.com/resources/manuals/NJSLASpring2019TCM.pdf>

⁶ State of New Jersey Department of Education (2019). Policy initiatives: ELL exemption. Website. <https://www.state.nj.us/education/bilingual/policy/lepacc.htm>

Federal homelessness counts. We also report on homelessness rates for CCSD and other Camden local education agencies using data from the National Center for Education Statistics and EdFacts. We joined aggregate counts of students identified as experiencing homelessness with enrollment⁷ counts across CCSD and each charter or renaissance entity for SY 2014-15 through 2017-18. Each local education agency (LEA) is required to report the total number of students identified as experiencing homelessness each year to the U.S. Department of Education. These are unduplicated counts of the number of identified cases involved with the LEA at any point during the school year. LEAs are exempted from reporting when they have identified zero students experiencing homelessness. Homelessness counts for each LEA are publicly available from EdFacts,⁸ though counts less than 3 are suppressed.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics (2020). Common core of data. Website.

<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipedsdatacenter/ccd/ccddata.asp>

⁸ U. S. Department of Education (2020) EdFacts data files: Homeless students. Website.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/data-files/school-status-data.html>

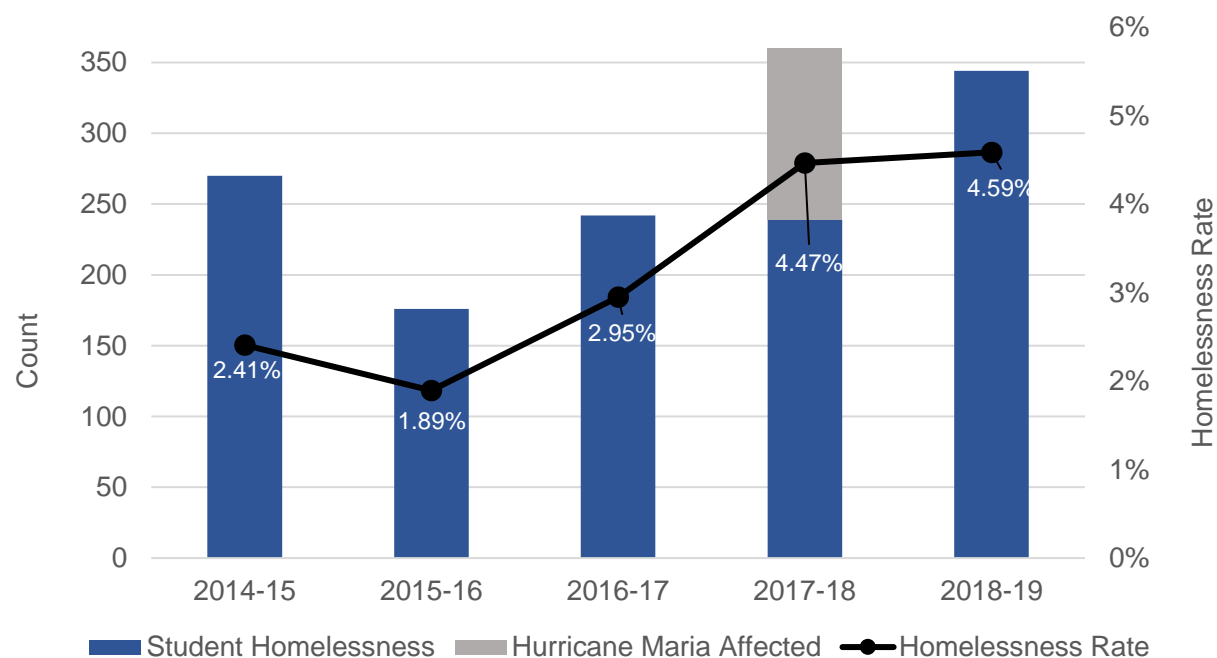
Section 1: How many students were identified as experiencing homelessness?

The number of identified students⁹ varied considerably across the five school years, from a low of 176 students in SY 2015-16 to a high of 360 in SY 2017-18. This corresponds to a range difference of 105%. The number of identified students were highest in SY 2017-18 and 2018-19, suggesting that these increases were sustained. The identification rate of homelessness increased by an even larger percentage because the number of identified students went up while overall enrollment in district schools went down. The annual identification rate varied from a low of 1.89% in SY 2015-16 to a high of 4.59% in 2018-19. See Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Rate and counts of students identified as experiencing homelessness.

Year	Homelessness		Hurricane Affected		Total Enrollment
	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	
2014-15	2.41%	270	--	--	11,213
2015-16	1.89%	176	--	--	9,292
2016-17	2.95%	242	--	--	8,207
2017-18	4.47%	360	1.50%	121	8,062
2018-19	4.59%	344	--	--	7,502

Figure 1. Number and rate of students identified as experiencing homelessness by year.



At least two factors likely contributed to the increased rate of homelessness identification in SY 2017-18 and 2018-19. First, CCSD staff made a practice change in the winter of SY 2017-18 such that identification procedures became less centralized. Family and Operations Coordinators and clerks were given a greater role in identifying and engaging families thought to be experiencing homelessness at schools where students were attending.

⁹ The counts reported here are limited to students in district schools who were actively enrolled as of June 30 of each year. These counts may differ from state and federal counts that use a different methodology.

Second, district staff began systematically identifying students who were displaced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria and entered the district, also partway through SY 2017-18. It is believed that most of these students arrived from Puerto Rico. Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck Puerto Rico in September 2017 and initiated an island-wide humanitarian crisis. The population of Puerto Rico declined by 3.9% between July 1, 2017, and July 1, 2018, largely as a result of migration from the island.¹⁰ Families with children were overrepresented in this migration. U. S. Census data estimate that 31.7% of Camden city residents were Puerto Rican,¹¹ suggesting a sizeable community that would encourage individuals and families displaced by the hurricanes to resettle in Camden. Students displaced by natural disasters are considered homeless if their living situation also meets the definition of homelessness in federal mandates.

Because they occurred at about the same time, we cannot conclude that either the practice change within the district or an influx of students displaced by Hurricane Maria solely accounts for the increase in identified homeless students in 2017-18. The number of identified students who were displaced by Hurricane Maria exceeds the number of additional students identified as homeless in SY 2017-18 relative to the year before. However, roughly the same number of students were identified as homeless in SY 2018-19 compared to SY 2017-18. This suggests that the practice change may have been impactful because increases in the number of identified students experiencing homelessness were maintained even after the influx of hurricane-affected students. It may be that the practice change contributed to an increased capacity to identify students experiencing homelessness, and that capacity was occupied with the influx of students displaced by the hurricane in SY 2017-18.

Students displaced by Hurricanes Irma and Maria

Two additional indicators suggest that Hurricanes Irma and Maria contributed to the increase in identified homelessness seen beginning in SY 2017-18.

First, homelessness was much more likely for Hispanic and Latino students beginning in SY 2017-18. The rate of homelessness among Hispanic and Latino students was below or about equal to that of Black/African American prior to SY 2017-18, but the rate for SY 2017-18 and 2018-19 is about double for Hispanic and Latino students (See Table 2 and Figure 2). This may suggest that the increases were precipitated by displacement from the hurricanes to the extent that those displaced disproportionately identified as Hispanic or Latino.

Second, schools with bilingual programs were much more likely to show increases in the identified homelessness rate during SY 2017-18 and SY 2018-19 compared to schools without bilingual programs. Analogous to the pattern for race/ethnicity, the homelessness rates for schools with a bilingual program were similar to other district schools through SY 2016-17 and markedly increased to 6 times greater than the other schools in SY 2017-18 and about 7 times greater in 2018-19. See Table 3 and Figure 3. This

Table 2. Identified homelessness rates by race/ethnicity.

Year	All Students	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Other Race/Ethnicity
2014-15	2.41%	2.73%	2.13%	1.69%
2015-16	1.89%	2.37%	1.45%	2.52%
2016-17	2.95%	2.87%	2.90%	5.65%
2017-18	4.47%	3.13%	5.68%	1.05%
2018-19	4.59%	2.59%	6.27%	3.66%

Table 3. Rates of identified homelessness for schools with and without bilingual programs.

Year	Bilingual Program	No Bilingual Program
2014-15	2.40%	1.66%
2015-16	1.22%	1.13%
2016-17	3.04%	2.08%
2017-18	7.49%	1.58%
2018-19	8.19%	1.42%

10 Flores, A., & Krogstad, J. M. (2019, July 26). Puerto Rico's population declined sharply after Hurricanes Maria and Irma. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/26/puerto-rico-population-2018/>

11 U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates [TableID: DP05]. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Puerto%20Rico&hidePreview=true&g=1600000US3410000&tid=ACSDP1Y2018.DP05&vintage=2018>

may also suggest that the influx of students following Hurricane Maria contributed to the increased in identified homelessness seen beginning in SY 2017-18 to the extent that those students disproportionately engaged in schools with bilingual programs.

Figure 2. Homelessness rate by student race/ethnicity.

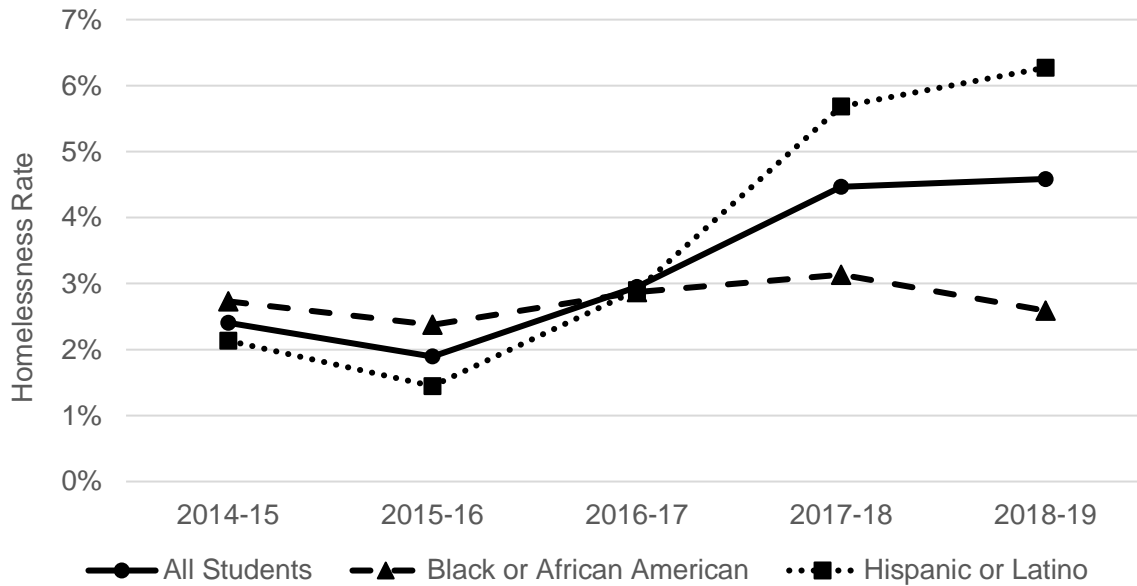
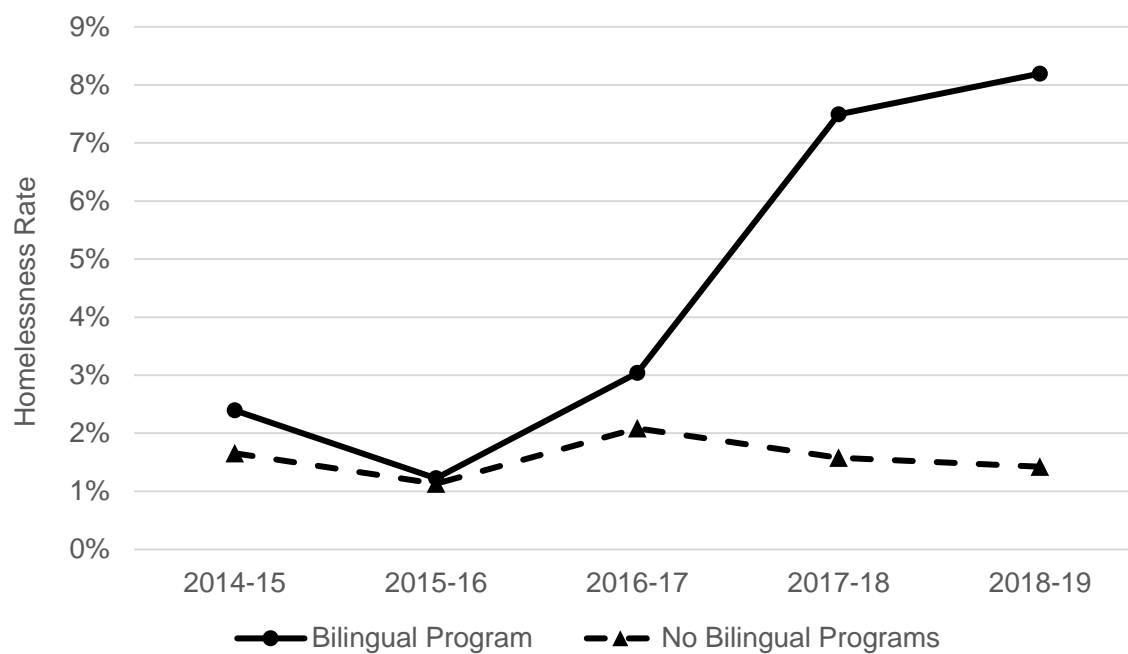


Figure 3. Rates of identified homelessness for schools with and without bilingual programs.



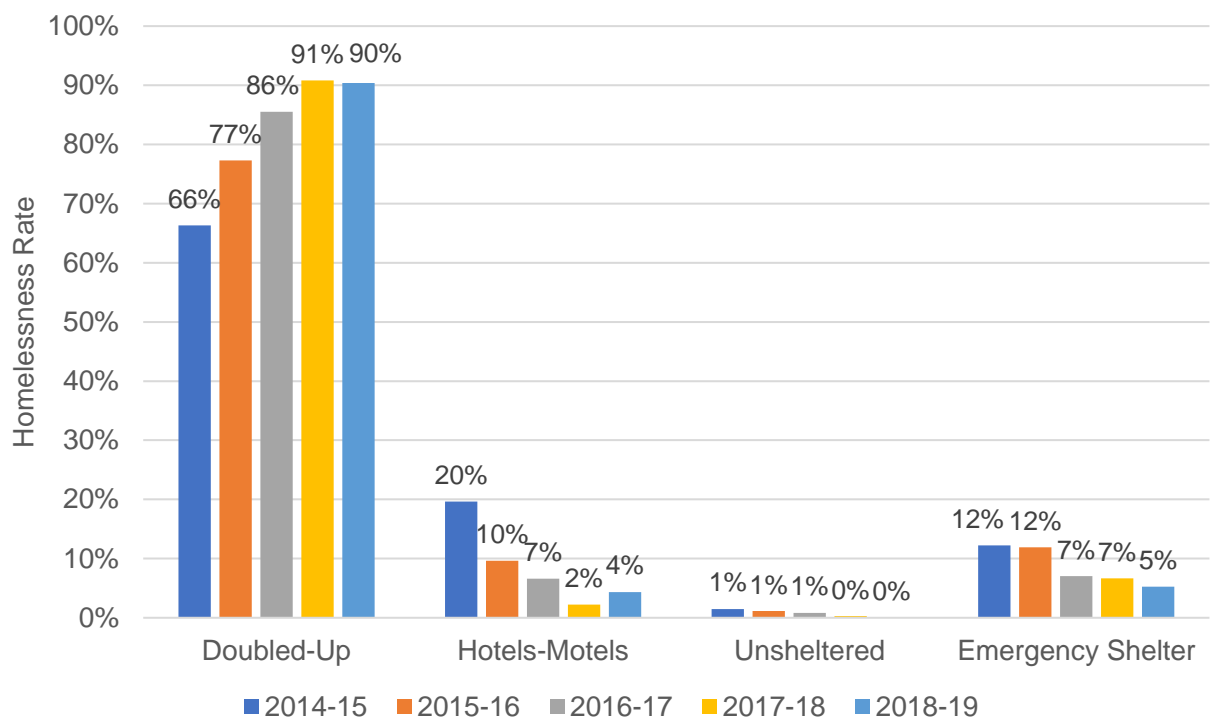
What are the housing situations of students experiencing homelessness?

Most students identified as experiencing homelessness were living doubled-up with others (Table 4 and Figure 4). The proportion of identified homeless students living doubled-up increased from two-thirds in SY 2014-15 to around 90% in SY 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Table 4. Students' primary nighttime residence when identified as experiencing homelessness.

Year	Doubled-Up	Hotels-Motels	Unsheltered	Emergency Shelter
2014-15	66.30%	19.63%	1.48%	12.22%
2015-16	77.27%	9.66%	1.14%	11.93%
2016-17	85.54%	6.61%	0.83%	7.02%
2017-18	90.83%	2.22%	0.28%	6.67%
2018-19	90.41%	4.36%	0.00%	5.23%

Figure 4. Primary nighttime residence of students identified as experiencing homelessness.



Fewer students were identified as homeless while staying in hotels or motels. The proportion of homeless students staying in hotels or motels decreased from 20% in SY 2014-15 to 4% in SY 2018-19, reflecting a drop in count from 53 to 15, respectively. Similarly, the proportion of identified students staying in emergency shelter declined over time from 12% in SY 2014-15 and 2015-16 to 5% in SY 2018-19, corresponding to counts of 33 and 18 students, respectively.

Exceptionally few identified students were living unsheltered. This is not uncommon as relatively few families are known to experience unsheltered homelessness.¹² Unaccompanied older youth are more likely to be unsheltered but are less likely to come to the attention of school districts or engage other human service systems.¹³

These patterns may suggest that referrals and collaboration with other agencies may have declined in recent years. Many Camden families who stay in hotels or motels as temporary housing are referred by Camden County Board of Social Services, which subsidizes the stay as a means of providing shelter to families who engage with other county social services. Barring any indication that Camden County Board of Social Services has reduced the number of families it subsidizes in this way, this pattern of results suggests that fewer of these families are coming to the attention of district staff. Similarly, the declines in students staying in emergency shelter are likely differences in identification rate and not differences in the number of students staying in shelter. This is being addressed through renewed efforts to collaborate with these agencies. Parents who did not qualify or who exceeded allowed benefits and began paying for their own hotel/motel stays usually were not identified and remain a challenge.

Different identification rates by school and by grade

Schools varied in the number of students they identified as experiencing homelessness. For simplicity, we report identification rates for each district school in SY 2018-19 in Table 5. Exact rates and counts were suppressed for schools with fewer than 10 students identified as experiencing homelessness. Among the 20 district schools, 11 identified fewer than 10 students. Identification rates for the remaining 9 schools varied from 2.74% to 10.87%.

Table 5. Identified homelessness rate by school for SY 2018-19.

School Name	Homelessness		School Enrollment
	Rate	Count	
Veterans Memorial Family School	10.87%	51	469
Cramer Elementary School	9.76%	49	502
Dudley Family School	9.61%	49	510
Woodrow Wilson High School	8.84%	63	713
Sharp Elementary School	5.98%	22	368
Wiggins College Prep Lab School	5.12%	21	410
Cream Family School	3.51%	11	313
Catto Family School	2.83%	17	601
Yorkship Elementary School	2.74%	13	474
H.B. Wilson Elementary School	*	< 10	482
Cooper's Poynt Family School	*	< 10	416
Early Childhood Develop Ctr.	*	< 10	406
Camden High School	*	< 10	390
Davis Elementary School	*	< 10	329
Creative Arts/Morgan Village Academy	*	< 10	309
Forest Hill Elementary School	*	< 10	296
Medical Arts High School	*	< 10	208
Met East High School	*	< 10	191
Bonsall Family School	*	< 10	70
Pride Academy	*	< 10	45

*Note: * indicates less than 10 students and suppressed*

¹² Henry, M., Watt, R., Mahathey, A., Ouellette, J., Sitler, A. (2020, January). The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1 Point in time estimates of homelessness. U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

¹³ For example, see Cutuli, J. J., Treglia, D., Herbers, J. E. (2020). Adolescent homelessness and associated features: Prevalence and risk across eight states. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 51, 48-58.

It is impossible to know and difficult to estimate what school's identification rates should be. As a result, it is difficult to know which schools are under-identifying homelessness and missing opportunities to best support families. Given the high proportion of students from families with low incomes, the district may consider focusing on schools with fewer than 5% to 10% identification rates to provide additional training and support.

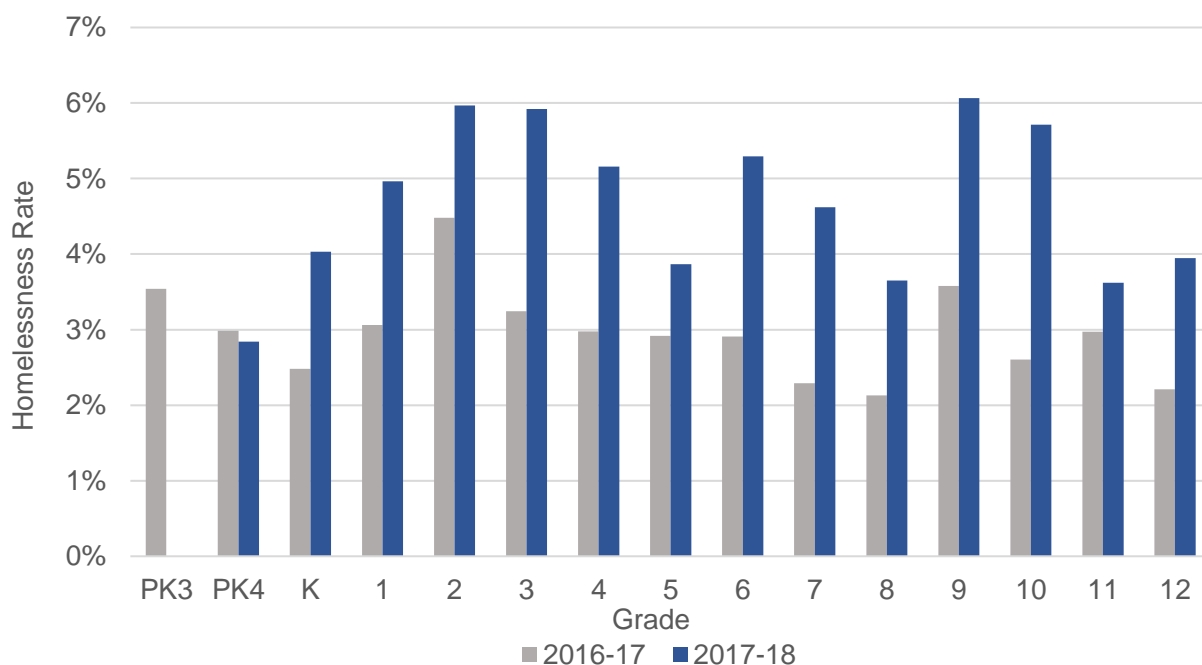
Considering homelessness identification by grade and over time, identification rates generally increased across most grade levels starting with SY 2017-18 (Table 6 and Figure 5). This is consistent with the general trend of increased identification across the district in those school years.

Table 6. Identified homelessness rate by grade and year.

Grade Level	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
PK3	*	*	3.54%	*	2.40%
PK4	2.06%	1.88%	2.99%	2.84%	1.77%
K	2.18%	*	2.48%	4.03%	5.80%
1	2.99%	2.11%	3.06%	4.96%	6.40%
2	2.21%	2.14%	4.48%	5.97%	5.60%
3	2.59%	2.12%	3.24%	5.92%	3.02%
4	3.06%	1.85%	2.98%	5.16%	5.07%
5	2.21%	2.04%	2.92%	3.87%	5.68%
6	3.01%	*	2.91%	5.30%	5.47%
7	1.63%	1.78%	2.29%	4.62%	4.59%
8	2.59%	*	2.13%	3.65%	3.11%
9	1.87%	3.11%	3.58%	6.07%	5.97%
10	2.47%	*	2.61%	5.71%	6.30%
11	*	2.13%	2.97%	3.62%	*
12	3.82%	2.94%	2.21%	3.95%	4.20%

Note: * indicates less than 10 students and suppressed.

Figure 5. Increases in identified homelessness by grade during SY 2017-18 compared to 2016-17.



Two exceptions to this general pattern existed for preschool and for the last two years of high school where increases were either not evident or less pronounced, respectively. This might indicate an opportunity to increase efforts to identify students in district-administered pre-K programs as families with young children might be more amenable to engaging services and supports.

Considering national rates, identifying older high school students experiencing homelessness tends to be more challenging than other grades as adolescents are least likely to engage social services like emergency housing, more likely to be aware of social stigma, and be more proficient at actively avoiding identification as a result. The district may need to innovate new approaches to engage and support these students.

Section 2: Identified Homelessness and Indicators of Educational Functioning

We also report on three indicators of educational functioning for students experiencing homelessness: absence rate, math and English/language arts achievement testing, and suspension rate. These indicators were readily available in the CCSD education records and are reported at the group level. These indicators should not be considered a comprehensive account of student wellbeing.

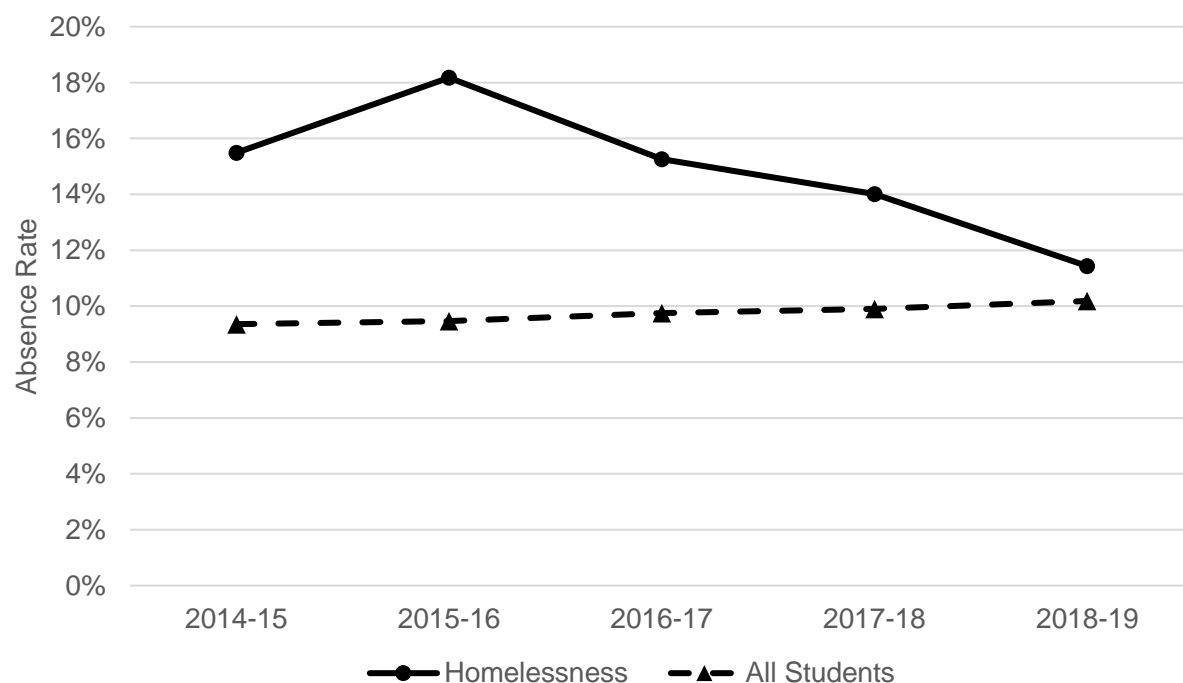
Absence rate

Students identified as experiencing homelessness tended to have an absence rate much higher than other students in the district for most school years. This rate is the number of days absent while enrolled in a district school divided by the number of days enrolled in a district school. The average absence rate for students identified as experiencing homelessness was roughly 1.5 to almost 2 times the average absence rate of students not identified as experiencing homelessness for SY 2014-15 through 2017-18. The group average rates were comparable for SY 2018-19. It should be noted that the overall district absence rate increases steadily over these five years. See Table 7 and Figure 6.

Table 7. Mean absence rate by student homelessness status.

Year	Homelessness	No Homelessness	All Students
2014-15	15.49%	9.20%	9.36%
2015-16	18.18%	9.30%	9.47%
2016-17	15.26%	9.58%	9.75%
2017-18	14.02%	9.71%	9.90%
2018-19	11.43%	10.12%	10.18%

Figure 6. Absence rate for groups of students based on homeless status.



Academic achievement testing

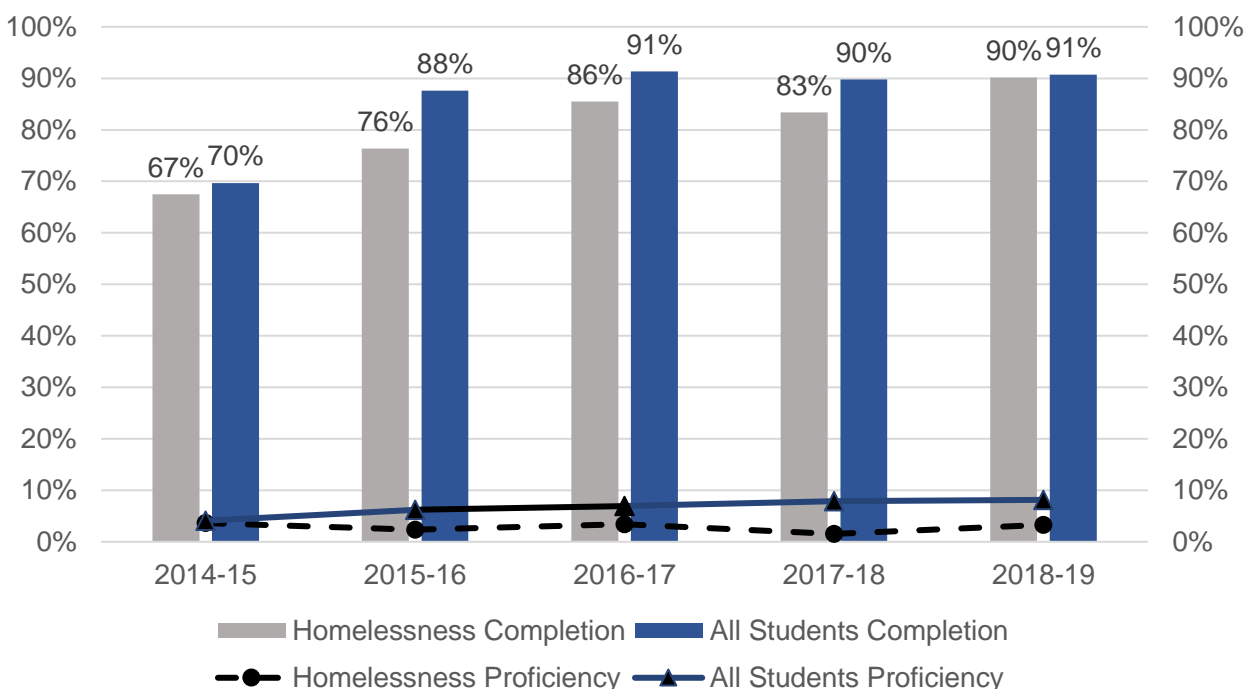
Students identified as experiencing homelessness were less likely to be proficient on standardized assessments of math or English/Language Arts (ELA). We compared groups of students on the completion rates and performance in the Math and English/Language Arts PARCC standardized tests. These figures only consider students who were enrolled in the district at the time of testing and in a grade that completed the assessment. We consider group proficiency rates instead of continuous scores as our indicators of group-level performance.

For math, students identified as experiencing homelessness completed the PARCC assessment at a rate that is lower than the overall district rate for most years (SY 2015-16 through 2017-18) though completion rates were comparable during SY 2014-15 and 2018-19. The group proficiency rate was markedly lower for the groups of students experiencing homelessness for most years (SY 2015-16 through 2018-19) though the proficiency rate was similar in SY 2014-15. See Table 8 and Figure 7.

Table 8. PARCC Math completion and proficiency rates by year.

Year	Homelessness			All Students		
	Completed Count	Completed Rate	Proficient Rate	Completed Count	Completed Rate	Proficient Rate
2014-15	163	67.48%	3.64%	6,844	69.65%	4.09%
2015-16	110	76.36%	2.38%	5,722	87.59%	6.23%
2016-17	138	85.51%	3.39%	4,894	91.36%	6.93%
2017-18	235	83.40%	1.53%	4,833	89.80%	7.86%
2018-19	203	90.15%	3.28%	4,357	90.73%	8.15%

Figure 7. PARCC Math assessment completion and proficiency rates by year.

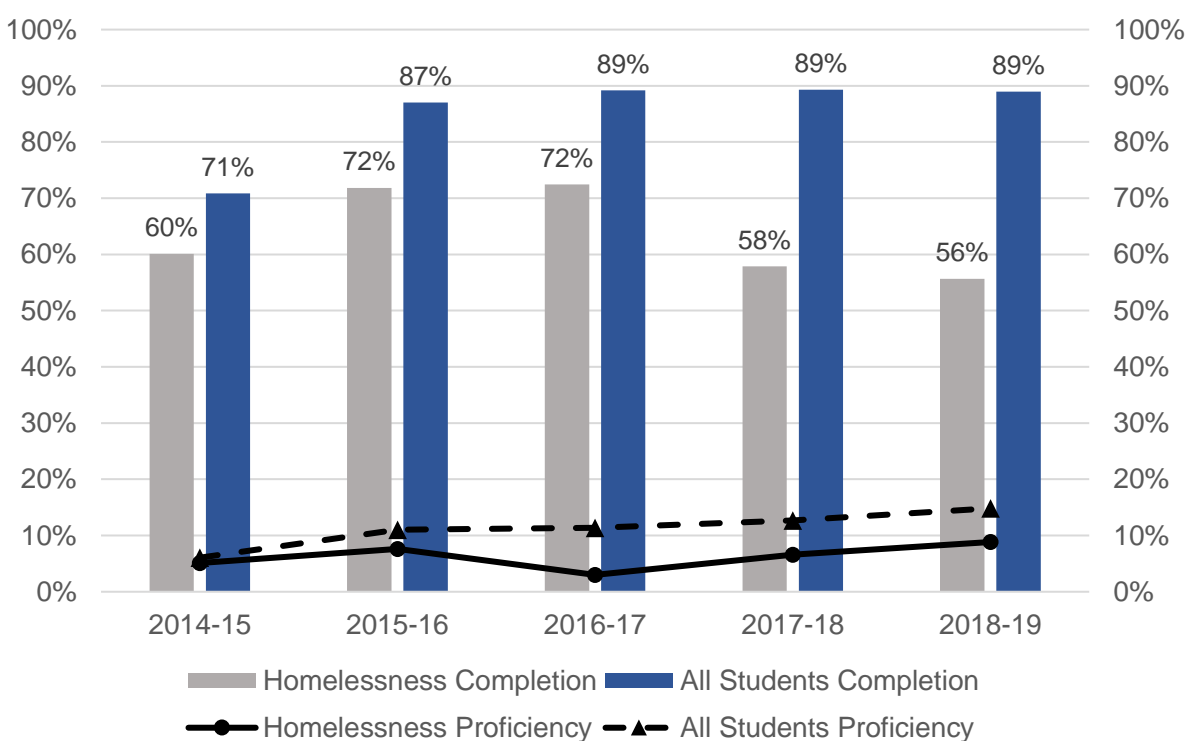


For ELA, there were large and widening gaps apparent for students identified as experiencing homelessness in the test completion rates. Some of this gap is likely due to state policies allowing students who qualify for English Language Learner services to be exempted from completing the ELA assessment only. As noted previously, an influx of students identified as experiencing homelessness in SY 2017-18 and 2018-19 occurred in schools with bilingual programs. Among those who completed the ELA PARCC assessment, students experiencing homelessness were much less likely to be proficient compared to the district-wide proficiency rate for SY 2015-16 through 2018-19. See Table 9 and Figure 8.

Table 9. PARCC ELA completion and proficiency rates by year

Year	Homelessness			All Students		
	Completed Count	Completed Rate	Proficient Rate	Completed Count	Completed Rate	Proficient Rate
2014-15	98	60.12%	5.10%	4,851	70.88%	6.06%
2015-16	79	71.82%	7.59%	4,981	87.05%	11.06%
2016-17	100	72.46%	3.00%	4,364	89.17%	11.37%
2017-18	136	57.87%	6.62%	4,317	89.32%	12.67%
2018-19	113	55.67%	8.85%	3,876	88.96%	14.83%

Figure 8. PARCC ELA assessment completion and proficiency rates by year.



Suspensions

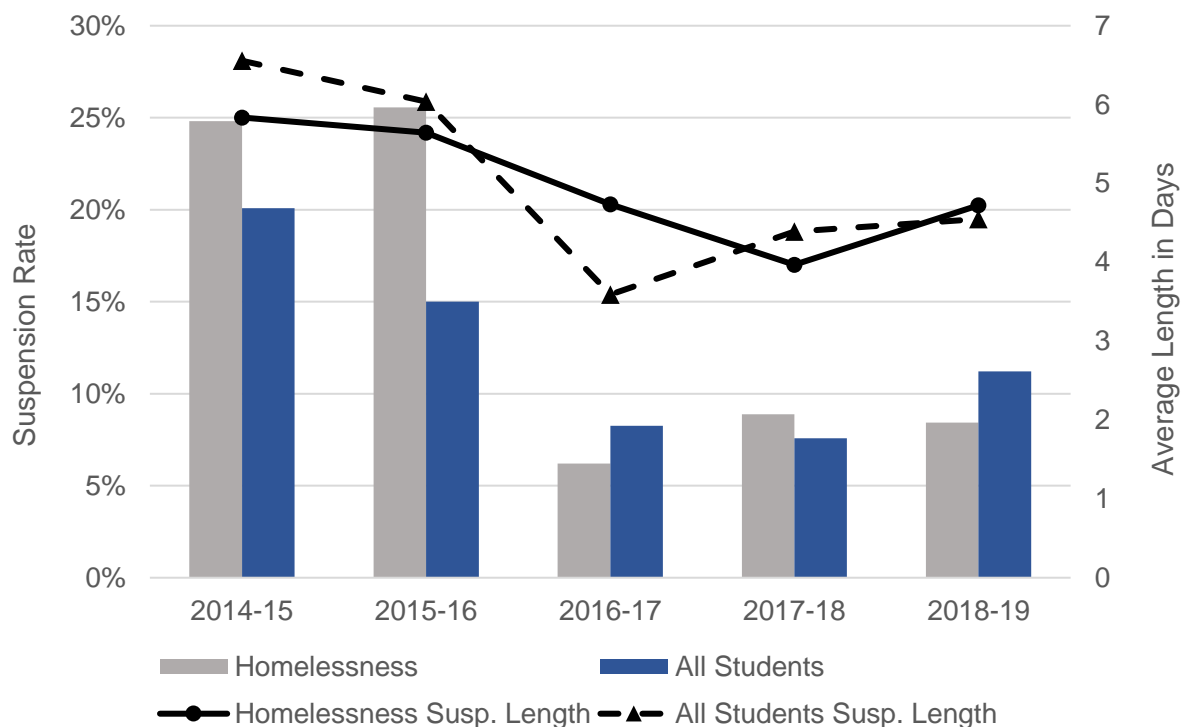
Students identified as experiencing homelessness, as a group, had suspension rates that were generally similar to the district average in recent years. We considered the likelihood students received any out of school suspension and the average number of days per suspension for those that did. These rates must be interpreted in the context of an overall, persisting decline in suspensions across district schools beginning in SY 2016-17.

Students who were identified as experiencing homelessness had higher probabilities of suspension in SY 2014-15 and 2015-16, but had generally comparable likelihoods of suspension after the district-wide decline in SY 2016-17 through 2018-19. The average number of days suspended for students with identified homelessness and any suspension was similar to the district average each year. See Table 10 and Figure 9.

Table 10. Suspension rate and average length in days by year.

Year	Homelessness			All Students		
	Count	Rate	Length	Count	Rate	Length
2014-15	67	24.81%	5.84	2,252	20.08%	6.56
2015-16	45	25.57%	5.64	1,395	15.01%	6.04
2016-17	15	6.20%	4.73	677	8.25%	3.59
2017-18	32	8.89%	3.97	611	7.58%	4.39
2018-19	29	8.43%	4.72	841	11.21%	4.55

Figure 9. Suspension rate and average length by year.



Section 3: Homelessness Identification Rates for Camden Local Education Agencies

Finally, to gauge identification rates in charter and renaissance schools, we report annual rates of student homelessness identification for Camden Local Education Agencies (LEAs). We use data from the U.S. Department of Education via the National Center for Education Statistics and EdFacts. Camden LEAs include CCSD as well as other agencies that operate non-district public schools. Student homelessness data includes unduplicated counts of students identified by each LEA during each school year and reported to the New Jersey Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education, which makes these data publicly available.

The publicly available data files suppress counts that are less than 3 students. Counts of student homelessness were divided by the overall enrollment of each LEA to construct a rate. The rates for CCSD differ from those reported previously in this report because the data in this section includes counts of students who may have experienced homelessness at some point during each school year but were no longer active in the district at the end of the year.

Four LEAs had no reported homelessness for any school year from 2014-15 through 2017-18: ECO Charter School, Hope Community Charter School, Camden Prep

(Uncommon), and Camden's Promise Charter. KIPP Cooper Norcross had no reported student homeless or enrollment data for SY 2014-15 or 2015-16. LEAs are required to provide counts each year unless the number of students identified experiencing homelessness is exactly zero. Mastery Schools did not have enrollment data for SY 2014-15 and 2015-16. These years are excluded.

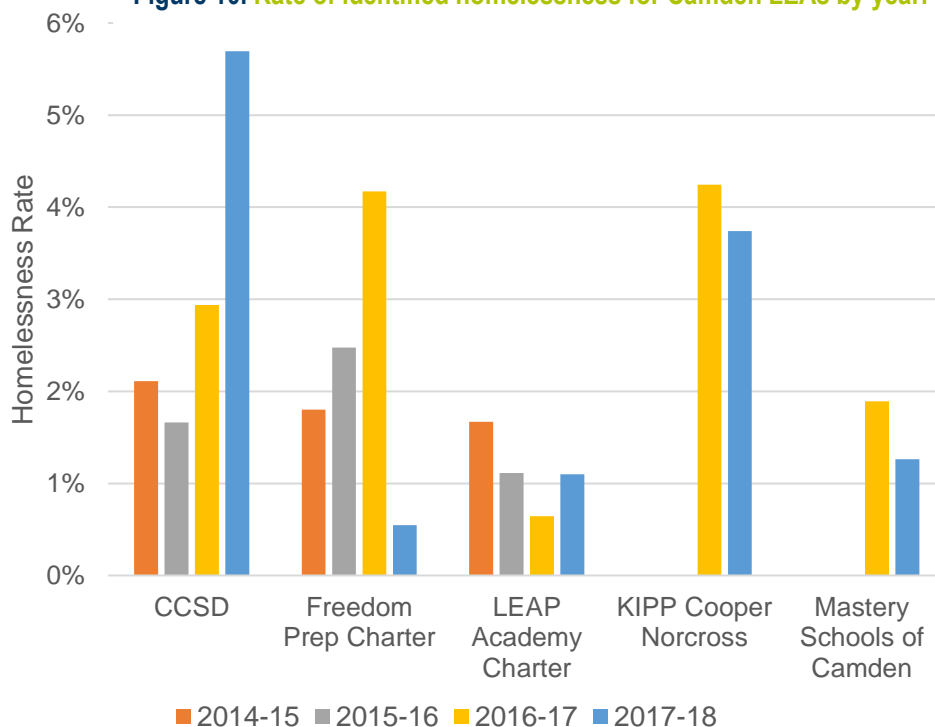
The homelessness rates varied between LEAs and within LEAs during different years, though rates for the other agencies did not closely resemble the pattern within CCSD. Other LEA rates were generally comparable to or less than those of CCSD. These rates are reported in Table 11 and represented in Figure 10.

Table 11. Rate of identified homelessness for Camden LEAs by year.

Name	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
CCSD	2.11%	1.66%	2.94%	5.69%
Freedom Prep Charter	1.80%	2.48%	4.17%	0.55%
LEAP Academy Charter	1.67%	1.11%	0.64%	1.10%
KIPP Cooper Norcross	E, H	E, H	4.25%	3.74%
Mastery Schools of Camden	E	E	1.89%	1.26%
ECO Charter School	H	H	H	H
Hope Community Charter	H	H	H	H
Camden Prep (Uncommon)	E, H	E, H	H	H
Camden's Promise Charter	H	H	H	H

Note: E = No available enrollment data; H = No homelessness data, assumed to be zero

Figure 10. Rate of identified homelessness for Camden LEAs by year.



Summary and Conclusions

This report presents information about students who completed the year in CCSD district schools and experienced homelessness during 2014-15 through 2018-19. It also presents publicly available data provided from the U. S. Department of Education on the rate of identified student homelessness from agencies that operate charter and renaissance schools in the city.

More students were identified as experiencing homelessness in SY 2017-18 and 2018-19, but this is still likely an undercount. The number of students identified as experiencing homelessness in CCSD operated schools varied across years, including a sizeable increase in SY 2017-18 which was maintained in SY 2018-19. About 1 out of every 20 students was identified as experiencing homelessness in SY 2018-19. Students in all grades appear to be identified as experiencing homelessness at similar rates, except in preschool which had lower rates. Most students identified as experiencing homelessness attended just four CCSD schools. In recent years, about 9 out of 10 students identified as experiencing homelessness were staying doubled-up with family or friends.

Disasters elsewhere may have brought new students to CCSD. The increase in identified homelessness in SY 2017-18 corresponds to an influx of students following two major hurricane disasters in Puerto Rico and elsewhere in the fall of 2017. CCSD identified 121 students affected by the hurricanes and experiencing homelessness who also completed the school year in the district during 2017-18. This is about the same magnitude as the overall increase in students experiencing homelessness. In addition, the increase in SY 2017-18 and 2018-19 is seen largely in students who are Hispanic or Latino and only in schools that have bilingual programs. This is consistent with students migrating from Puerto Rico and other Spanish-speaking areas impacted by the hurricanes.

CCSD capacity also may have increased in SY 2017-18. The increase in identified homelessness in SY 2017-18 also corresponds to a practice change in how CCSD engages families believed to be experiencing homelessness, decentralizing the process and placing it within schools. This report cannot discern whether the increase in identified homelessness was due to migration into CCSD following the natural disasters elsewhere, due to the practice change increasing capacity, or, perhaps most likely, a combination. This increase in SY 2017-18 caused CCSD to identify a higher rate of student homelessness than other nearby cities in New Jersey, including Newark (1.5%), Atlantic City (2.10%), New Brunswick (1.56%), and Trenton (0.74%).

Homelessness was sometimes linked to differences in educational functioning. Though it varied across years, the average absence rate was higher most years for the homelessness group. Also, while proficiency rates were low across the district on standardized achievement tests, rates for students experiencing homelessness were even lower. Finally, homelessness appears unrelated to out-of-school suspensions in recent years.

Student homelessness may be underreported in most charter and renaissance agencies. Data from the U. S. Department of Education suggests no consistent pattern for rates of identified student homelessness across other agencies operating public schools in Camden from SY 2014-15 through 2017-18. Two agencies reported persistent annual homelessness rates under 2%. Four agencies did not report any student homelessness.

Recommendations

- 1) Additional efforts should focus on increasing the identification and support of students experiencing homelessness. Despite increases in the number of students identified and served in recent years, there are likely additional challenges to identifying all student experiencing homelessness.
 - a) Encourage parent engagement with school supports beyond academics. Families experiencing homelessness may have concerns about sharing their situation, including stigma, beliefs about potential involvement from child protective service agencies, and concerns about possible deportation and/or blocking future pathways to citizenship under public charge laws, to name a few. Family and Operations Coordinators (FOCs) emphasized that relationships with parents built on trust were necessary before families will make their needs known and engage supports. This begins with events and activities to encourage collaboration between parents and FOCs. For example, FOCs could engage parents at routine school functions (e.g., back-to-school nights, parent-teacher night) to explain their role, followed by working to engage parents over time and building trust. Other parent engagement activities can also be helpful, including information sharing, presentations, and panel discussions for and with parents to discuss housing instability and other challenges.
 - b) Emphasize teacher and staff professional development. In SY 2018-19, most district schools identified fewer than 10 students experiencing homelessness, while some others identified over 5 – 10% of all students at their school. Family and Operations Coordinators (FOCs) emphasized the importance of communication between school personnel to assist students and families, starting with staff being aware of the different services and supports that the FOCs can provide. Professional development activities can help inform school personnel about when and how to engage FOCs when they have a concern about a student. Professional development can also help clarify district processes and procedures to help teachers and staff access additional services for students. This professional development can be supported by a quick-reference guide and a more robust interactive website for health and social service program resources for FOCs and other personnel looking to support families in any of a variety of situations.
 - c) Continue to strengthen relationships with other social service agencies that support students and families experiencing homelessness. Recent years have shown an increase in the proportion of identified families staying doubled-up with friends or relatives, while students staying in other homelessness situations have declined (e.g., hotels/motels, shelter). Identifying students in all categories of homeless situations requires close working relationships with county social service agencies and nonprofits that provide shelter and long- and short-term housing subsidies. These relationship building efforts are already underway as district staff have engaged more deeply with the local family shelter in Camden. As a result, in SY 2019-20 CCSD received regular updates on who is residing at the shelter as opposed to needing to wait for families to self-disclose to school or district personnel or for a case manager to reach out regarding enrollment or other services.

- d) Emphasize identifying and serving families experiencing homelessness with a preschooler. In recent years identification rates increased throughout the district for most grades except preschool. Other research suggests that about half of children experiencing family homelessness are under 6 years old and experiences in early childhood are more likely to have lasting effects across development. Effectively identifying and supporting these youngest students in the district is most likely to have benefits across the entire academic career. Preschoolers now enroll through Camden Enrollment, a centralized enrollment process that includes most aspects of initial registration. Through Camden Enrollment, CCSD may better identify and prepare to serve families with preschoolers who are displaced before they reach their identified school.
 - e) Continue recent changes in practice while continuing to innovate new approaches to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness. The district decentralized the processes of identifying student homelessness in SY 2017-18, empowering Family and Operations Coordinators to engage families at their child's school. CCSD also initiated an annual audit of students transferring into the district at that time. While this report cannot say with certainty that these changes are the reason identified student homelessness increased in recent years, the timing of these changes and the continued high-rate of identified student homelessness in SY 2018-19 suggest that these two practices are likely contributing to a much greater capacity within the district to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.
- 2) Prepare for large increases in student homelessness because of recent disasters and related economic fallout.
- a. Students may migrate to Camden after being displaced by disasters elsewhere. District schools saw large increases in identified student homelessness following Hurricanes Irma and Maria that caused disasters in Puerto Rico during SY 2017-18. Earthquakes caused a new disaster in the southwest region of Puerto Rico in early 2020 which may contribute to new students entering the district in need of support. If so, the previous pattern suggests increases in needed supports for students who identify as Hispanic or Latino and among district schools with bilingual programs.
 - b. Prepare for the likelihood that homelessness will increase dramatically during the 2020-21 school year. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented health and economic disruptions, including thousands of infections, hundreds of deaths, and mass unemployment in the City of Camden. Homelessness will rise when the New Jersey eviction moratorium ends (two months after the governor declares the health crisis over, see Executive Order 106). Families who do not own their dwelling and do not have a lease (e.g., doubled-up, hotel/motel) are immediately vulnerable as this moratorium offers no protection. CCSD should be sure to preserve and expand their current supports for students experiencing homelessness immediately. Specific recommendations will change as the situation is fluid, though federal and state legislation in response to COVID-19 offers opportunities. Monitor the changing situation through staying connected to national groups (e.g., National Center for Homeless Education (<https://nche.ed.gov/covid-19-coronavirus-information/>), SchoolHouse Connection (<https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/covid19-and-homelessness/>), National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (<https://naehcy.org/educational-resources/covid-19-resources-guidance/>)).

- 3) Routine supports for students experiencing homelessness can especially target attendance (e.g., innovative transportation options and policies), academic achievement (tutoring and other out-of-school time enrichment), and English Language Learning services. Though not considered in the current report, referrals for additional services will sometimes be required, such as healthcare, mental healthcare and treatment for other behavioral disorders, and two-generation approaches for parenting youth enrolled in school. Continued collaboration with early childhood agencies as well as housing, health, and other human service agencies is important.
- 4) Engage other local education agencies in Camden to encourage a more proactive and coordinated response to student homelessness citywide. Training and professional development, coupled with data-based feedback, may help support other LEAs in prioritizing student homelessness. This includes agencies that operate Charter and Renaissance schools in the city. Coalition building also presents opportunities for collective impact to support advocacy or encourage philanthropic support for initiatives that benefit district schools, charters, and renaissance schools.
- 5) Continue to produce annual reports considering student homelessness within the district. Findings suggest differences across years in identification rates and educational functioning for students experiencing homelessness. Annual updates are important to encourage and sustain progress, while new questions can be answered with district data in the future.

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