

The Research Alliance for  
New York City Schools

***Homelessness in NYC Elementary Schools:  
Student Experiences and Educator  
Perspectives***

**Technical Appendices**

**Kathryn Hill  
Zitsi Mirakhur**

**March 2019**

## APPENDIX A: DATA CONSIDERATIONS, SAMPLE INFORMATION, AND KEY DEFINITIONS

### Data Considerations

All of the administrative records we use for this study come from the New York City Department of Education as a part the Research Alliance’s data-sharing agreement. As we explain in the brief, students’ residency status is generally self-reported. When elementary students are enrolling in a (new) school or reporting a change of address, their parent/guardian completes the NYCDOE’s [Housing Questionnaire](#). If the parent/guardian reports that student is doubled-up, living in a hotel/motel, or in an “other temporary living situation” (e.g., trailer park, campground, car, public space, etc.) due to economic hardship, the student is recorded as being in temporary housing. If a student enters a shelter, a shelter-based Family Assistant (who is a NYCDOE staff member) enters that information into the DOE’s system. Put differently, for all forms of homelessness other than shelter, families self-report their residency status. In addition, as we discuss in the brief, our administrative records do not capture multiple forms of homelessness *within the same school year*. So, for instance, if a student’s family was doubled up and then moved into a shelter, we would only know about their shelter status.

In the past, the Housing Questionnaire has included and marked students who are awaiting foster care as a category of students in temporary housing. However, in December 2016, the Every Student Succeeds Act rules changed such that children awaiting foster care placement were no longer considered “homeless children and youth” (please see page 3 of [this document](#)). *For simplicity and ease of interpretation across years, we include children who were awaiting foster placement in all years, including the 2016-2017 school year, as homeless students.* This group represents a very small share (just 52 students) of all those identified as homeless in the last year of our analysis.

## Quantitative Samples

For the analyses in the brief that focus on *all* students in NYC (e.g., the change-over-time analysis we present in Figure 1), we created an analytic file that includes all kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who were actively enrolled in a NYC public school each October from 2012-2013 through 2016-2017. We excluded students who were missing data about the school in which they were enrolled or who were listed as attending District 88 schools. Total enrollment varied slightly by year but ranged from 943,592 to 987,331 students.

For our cohort-based analyses, we followed the 81,669 students who were enrolled as kindergarten students in a NYC public school in the fall of 2012. We excluded students who enrolled in District 88 schools this year. As such, this cohort does *not* include those who joined the district after their kindergarten year (and who might have different levels of homelessness). Limiting our analytic sample in this way enables us to follow a single, consistent group of students over time.

## **APPENDIX B: SAMPLING AND ANALYSIS FOR QUALITATIVE STUDY**

We conducted fieldwork in five elementary schools for our qualitative research. All of these schools had higher than average proportions of students living in shelter. Thus, our qualitative sampling might yield results about school practices that are not generalizable across the City's elementary schools. We focus on students in shelter because much of the programming provided by district staff for homeless students focuses on students living in shelter sites. We supplemented our school-based fieldwork with interviews with four district staff members who also primarily work to support students in shelter.

### **Site Sampling and Recruitment**

We identified a sample of 30 schools that had higher than the citywide average proportions of students in shelter, but where these students had attendance rates and test scores that were similar to housed students in their school and to the citywide average for all students. We decided to focus on the student population in shelter instead of the wider category of homelessness because we learned from our conversations with various district stakeholders that the shelter count was the most accurate and reliable. To create this sample, we used our administrative records from the 2016-2017 school year to sort schools based on the proportion of students in shelter. We then:

- Eliminated schools with that were much smaller than average (over 1 standard deviation below the mean for school size);
- Compared the rate of chronic absenteeism for students in shelter to the rate for those who were housed and highlighted schools where the difference was less than 10 percent; and
- Compared average 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELA test scores between students in shelter and housed students, and highlighted schools where the difference between the two groups was zero or greater (meaning that students in shelter had higher scores).

We then repeated this process except that we used data on student homelessness from the 2015-2016 school year and test score data from the 2016-2017 school year. We

did this to capture the possibility that students may be in shelter *after* they have already taken statewide exams (and thus, their test score performance would not be affected by a shelter stay)

We added schools to our final list for recruitment into the study if their average 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELA test score for students in shelter was within 1 standard deviation of the overall citywide mean for all students that year. This resulted in a list of 30 schools.

We sent emails to each of these 30 schools asking whether they would participate in our study. We also followed up with phone calls to each school. Our recruitment efforts resulted in the five elementary schools where we conducted fieldwork—two in Harlem, two in the Bronx, and one in Central Brooklyn.

### *Participant Sampling*

After recruiting our five school sites, we recruited educators in each school who work closely with students experiencing homelessness, and who could speak to the supports that their school offered these students. Our final interview sample included seventeen school staff members: five principals, four social workers (including two Bridging the Gap social workers), three guidance counselors, three teachers, a pupil secretary, and a para-professional. We supplemented these school staff interviews by recruiting four non-school-based district staff who work to support homeless students.

## **Interviews and Focus Groups**

In each school, we conducted one-on-one interviews with the school principal and focus groups with two to four educators and/or staff who worked to support homeless students. The interviews and focus groups lasted around 40 minutes each, on average. We used a semi-structured approach in our interviews—while we followed a standard interview protocol with questions, we also allowed some flexibility to capture any additional insights from participants that we did not anticipate. We asked educators to discuss, among other things, how they identify students who might be experiencing homelessness, how they use and share information about homeless students, how they support homeless students who struggle with attendance, how they provide academic and socio-emotional support to homeless students, and how they connect students and families in need to outside resources.

## Coding and Generating Thematic Findings

The analysis consisted of generating hypothesis-forming thematic summaries of the interviews, as well as more penetrating, coded analyses of interview transcripts. Immediately after conducting interviews, field researchers wrote thematic summaries of interviews in reflection memos. We used these memos along with our research questions to construct an initial list of topical category codes. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then coded using Atlas.ti software.

After this first round of coding, we examined the existing coding system to look for gaps and redundancies and then refined our list to build a hierarchy of codes and sub codes. This helped ensure that we remained open to noticing conflicting data and developing new insights. This iterative process of coding, re-coding, and sub-coding increased the validity of the analytical process. The lead qualitative researcher coded all of the interview transcripts using this refined coding system.

Upon completion of the coding, we used Atlas' categorizing and sorting features, and created a framework matrix, which summarized relevant interview data for each participant across all codes. This helped us identify the critical patterns and themes across the transcripts. We fleshed out key themes and determined the prevalence of specific concepts and patterns across all of the participants' interview data. From further analyses of these themes, we developed a cohesive set of findings that connected the research questions to the patterns and evidence present in the data. We then examined how the qualitative findings either complimented or complicated our quantitative findings.