SchoolHouse Connection

Trellis Strategies

Removing Barriers, Building Futures:

Data-Informed Policies to Support College Students Experiencing Homelessness

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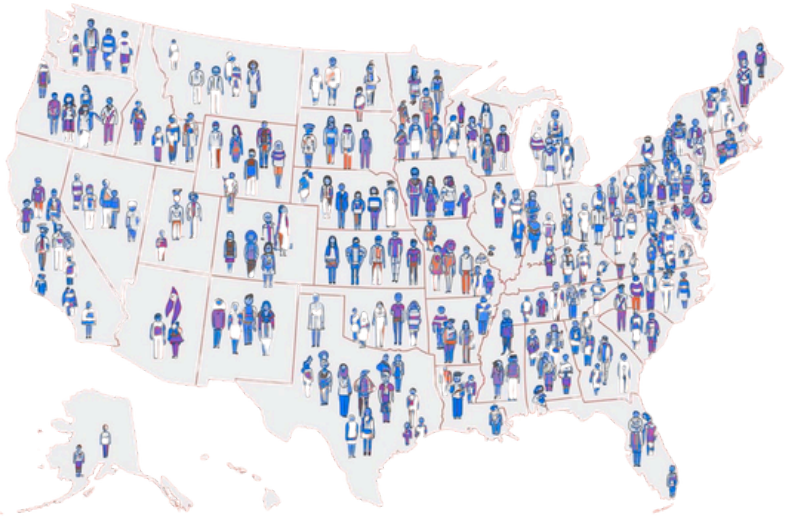
Introduction

Federal data from the 2019 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) estimate that 8% of undergraduates and 5% of graduate students experienced homelessness – more than 1.5 million college students nationwide.[1] While estimates vary by survey design and timeframe, more recent large-scale surveys also point to high prevalence: both the Hope Center's 2023–24 Student Basic Needs Survey and Trellis Strategies 2024 Student Financial Wellness Survey found that roughly 14% of students reported experiencing homelessness.[2] Housing-related hardship is even more common: 48% of students in the Hope Center's 2023–24 survey and 43% in Trellis Strategies 2024 survey reported difficulty maintaining stable housing, underscoring how many students may be at risk of homelessness. Research also links housing instability to lower postsecondary persistence and completion, making it harder for students to remain enrolled and progress to a credential.[3]



1.5+ Million

The Number of College Students Who Experienced Homelessness in 2019 Nationwide

~14%

The Percentage of College Students Reported Experiencing Homelessness

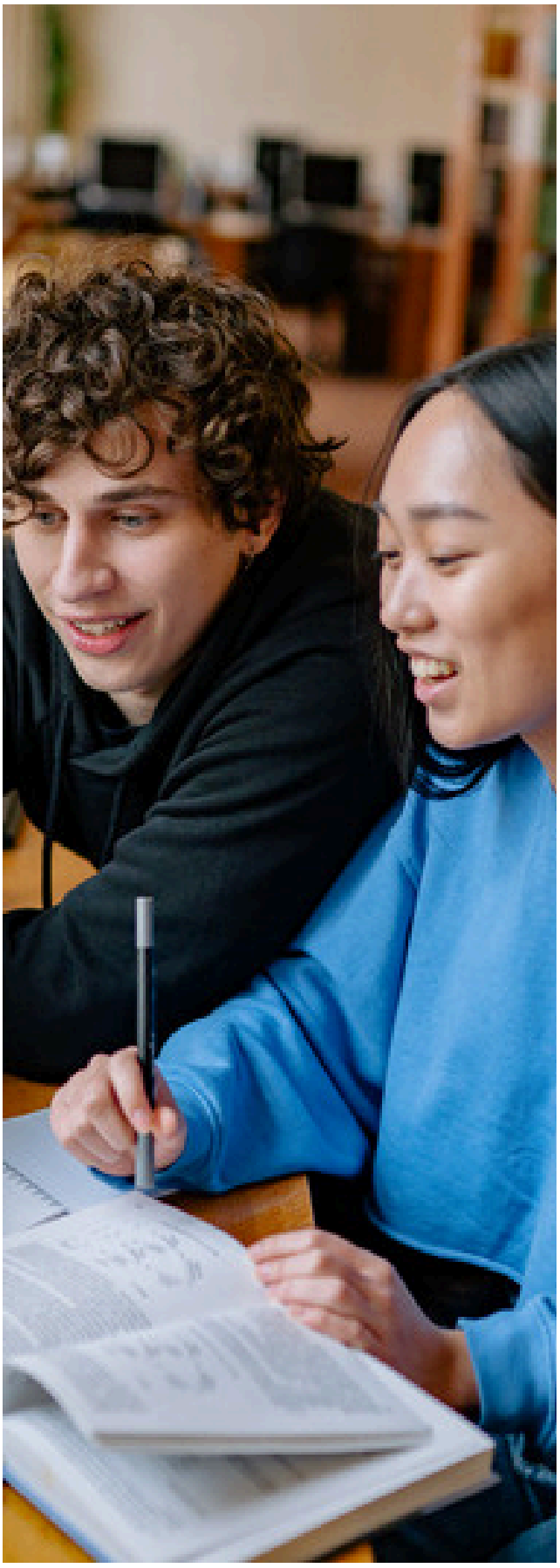
43–48%

The Percentage of College Students Reported Difficulty Maintaining Stable Housing

Against this backdrop, a new data analysis sheds light on the distinct experience of homelessness among college students and demonstrates how homelessness creates unique barriers and disproportionate harm – and therefore requires targeted solutions.

Data from the Trellis Strategies Financial Wellness Survey show that, compared with other students, students who have experienced homelessness face deeper basic needs insecurity; more reliance on high-cost coping strategies; and more instability related to transportation, child care, and work demands that disrupt their education. Students who experienced homelessness are also more likely to have overlapping risk factors, such as foster care histories and first-generation status, indicating that homelessness frequently intersects with other forms of vulnerability and limited familial college-navigation support – compounding hardship and increasing the need for proactive, targeted institutional support. Together, these findings underscore that standard "basic needs" supports or first-generation initiatives may not be sufficient on their own to reach students experiencing homelessness; intentional identification and targeted responses are needed alongside broader supports.

This brief reviews data and provides strategies for institutions and state and federal policymakers. It also includes a variety of state and local examples that illustrate a range of approaches for immediate practice, as well as longer-term policy. In providing these examples, we recognize that applicability and feasibility vary by institutional, state, and community context. In this analysis, homelessness and related hardship appear comparable across age groups. For that reason, we use the term "students" to refer to learners across ages. Where age-specific systems and solutions create distinct opportunities for prevention and intervention, we note those considerations.



"As a student experiencing homelessness, I've faced significant barriers when it comes to accessing consistent food and basic resources while in college. Dining halls aren't always open or available when I need them, and I often struggle to find affordable or accessible meals. **I've also encountered difficulties locating support services that are clearly designed for students in my situation, which can make navigating campus life extremely isolating and overwhelming.** Being without stable housing has also meant I don't have a private, dependable space to rest, cook, or recharge after long academic days. These barriers have made it difficult for me to focus on my education in a sustainable and healthy way. I often find myself moving between student lounges and organization spaces just to access small snacks or stay indoors longer. Without a stable home base or consistent access to meals, it's hard to sit down, concentrate, and truly immerse myself in my coursework. Basic survival often competes with my academic responsibilities, and that stress can feel relentless. **Higher education is important to me because it offers financial stability, access, and proximity to opportunities that can lead to higher wages and long-term economic mobility.** Persisting through college is how I position myself closer to jobs, networks, and resources that are often out of reach for students facing housing instability. Even when my basic needs are unmet, continuing my education allows me to assert agency over my life and work toward economic security. **I persist because education remains one of the most reliable pathways to stable income and upward mobility."**

— SchoolHouse Connection Scholar

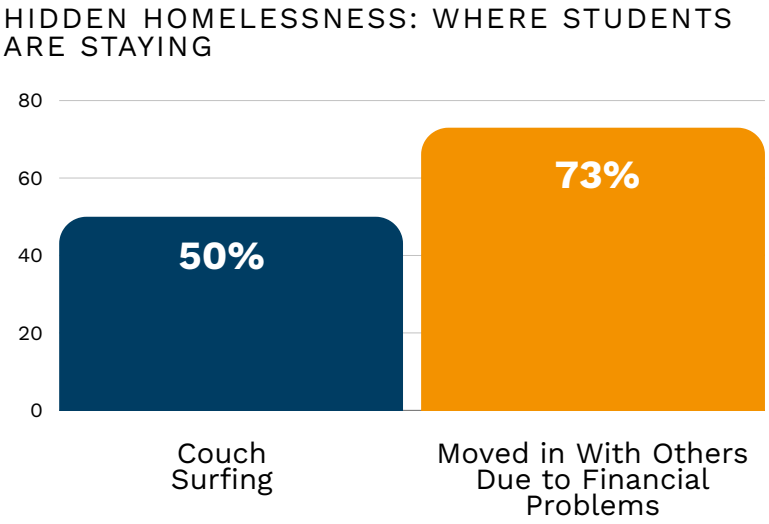
Key Findings

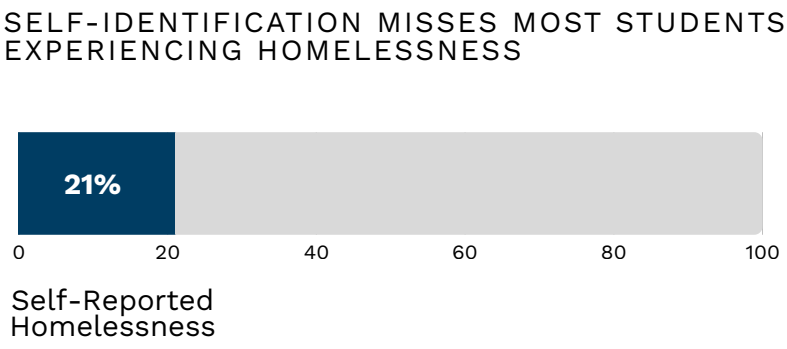
Across almost all of the basic needs and stability indicators examined, students who experienced homelessness reported greater hardship than both first-generation students who had not experienced homelessness, and students who had not experienced homelessness.

Together, these findings show that broad "basic needs" or first-generation initiatives may not be sufficient on their own; institutions and policymakers need policies and practices that specifically identify and support students experiencing homelessness.[4]

STUDENT HOMELESSNESS IS OFTEN HIDDEN – AND THEREFORE EASY TO MISS.

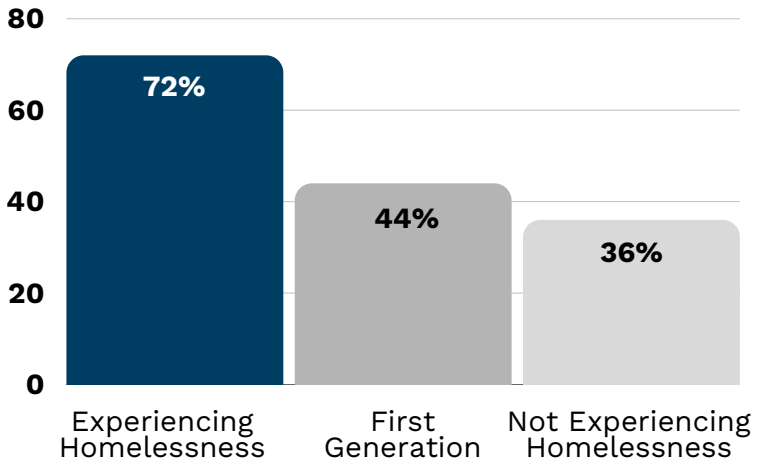
Most students experiencing homelessness are not in shelters; they are staying temporarily with others. In the Trellis data, 50% reported couch surfing and 73% reported moving in with others due to financial problems. Yet only 21% self-reported that they had been homeless, suggesting that relying on self-identification or narrow definitions will miss many students experiencing homelessness in less visible but harmful forms.





FOOD INSECURITY IS FAR MORE COMMON AMONG STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) had low or very low food security, compared with 44% of first-generation students and 36% of students who had not experienced homelessness.

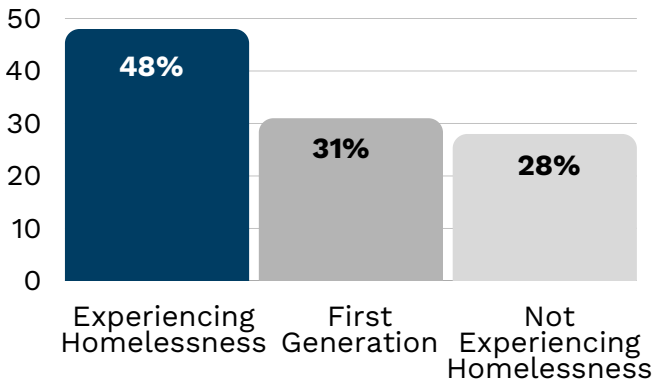


MENTAL HEALTH BURDENS ARE HIGHER.

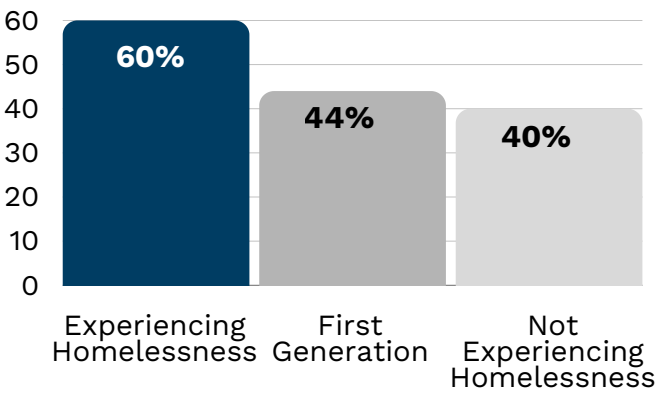
Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to screen positive for major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder.

- Nearly half (48%) screened positive for likely major depressive disorder (compared with 31% of first-generation students and 28% of students who had not experienced homelessness)
- 60% screened positive for likely generalized anxiety disorder (compared with 44% of first-generation students and 40% of students who had not experienced homelessness).

LIKELY MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER BY STUDENT GROUP

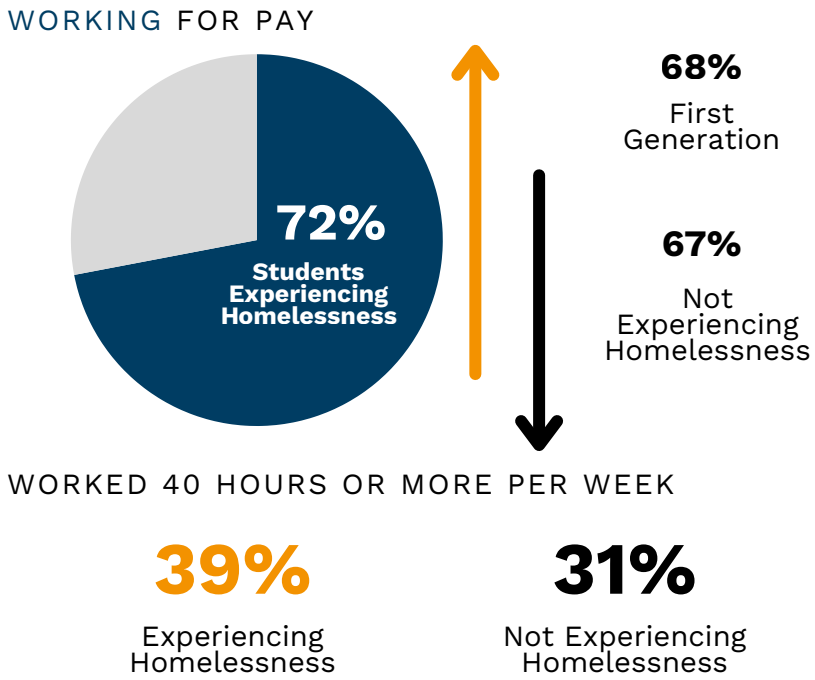


LIKELY GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER BY STUDENT GROUP



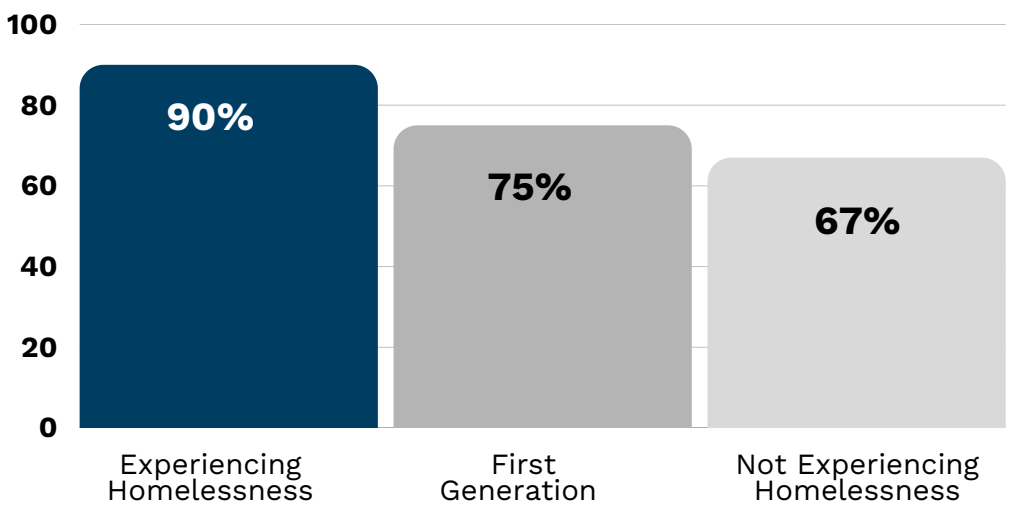
WORK INTENSITY IS HIGHER AMONG STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) reported working for pay – higher than students who had not experienced homelessness (67%) and first-generation students (68%). Among students who worked for pay, 39% of students who experienced homelessness worked 40 or more hours per week, compared with 31% of students who had not experienced homelessness.



DESPITE WORKING, FINANCIAL HARDSHIP IS NEARLY UNIVERSAL AMONG STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

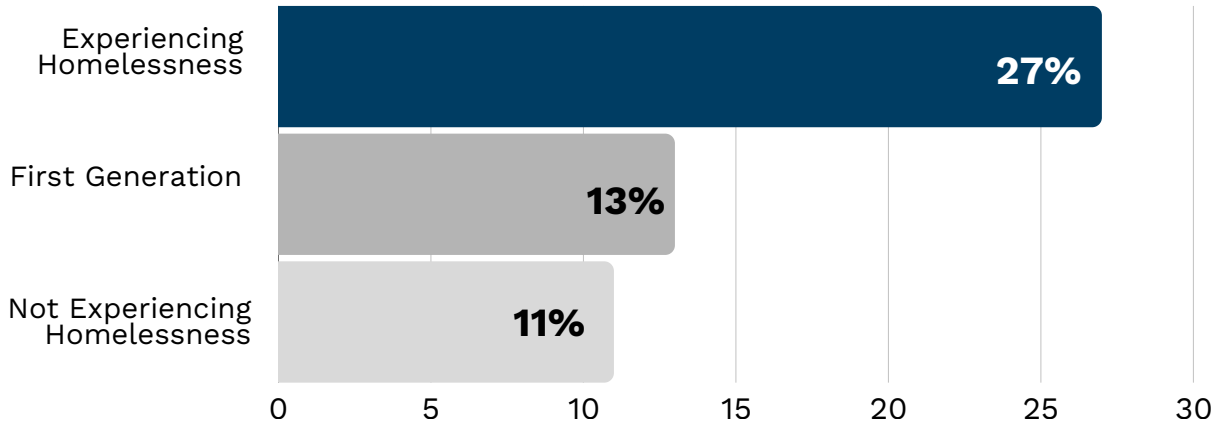
Ninety percent (90%) of students experiencing homelessness reported financial difficulties, compared with 75% of first-generation students and 67% of students who had not experienced homelessness.



TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS TRANSLATE INTO MISSED CLASS TIME.

More than a quarter (27%) of students experiencing homelessness missed classes sometimes, often, or always due to unreliable transportation, compared with 13% of first-generation students and 11% of students who had not experienced homelessness.

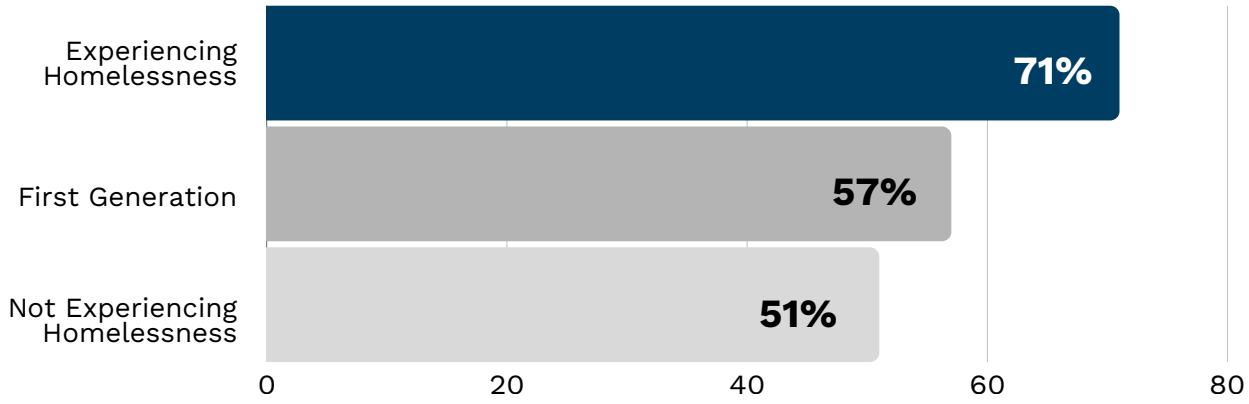
STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO MISS CLASS DUE TO TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS



WORK AND CHILD CARE DEMANDS MORE OFTEN DISRUPT EDUCATION.

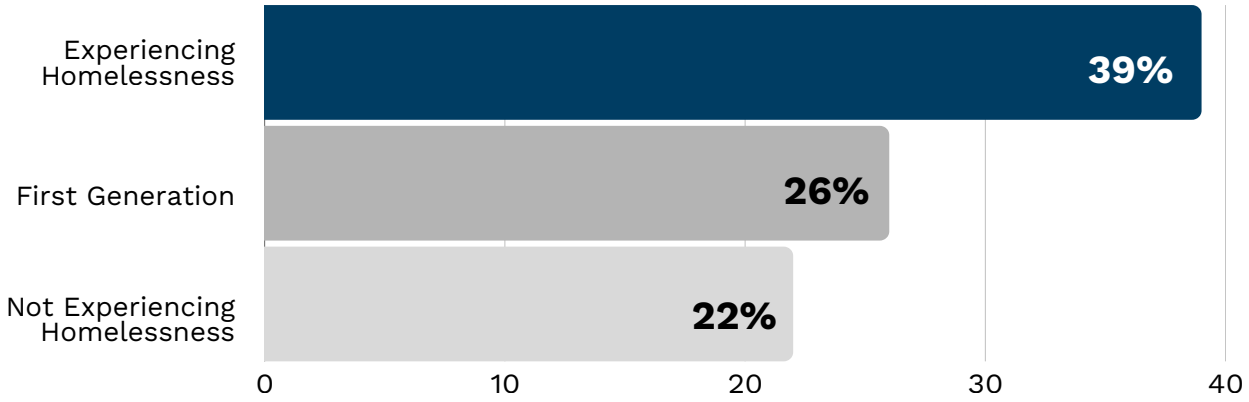
Among working students experiencing homelessness, 71% said their job interfered with extracurricular or social engagement (compared with 57% of first-generation students and 51% of students who had not experienced homelessness).

WORK DEMANDS LIMIT CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



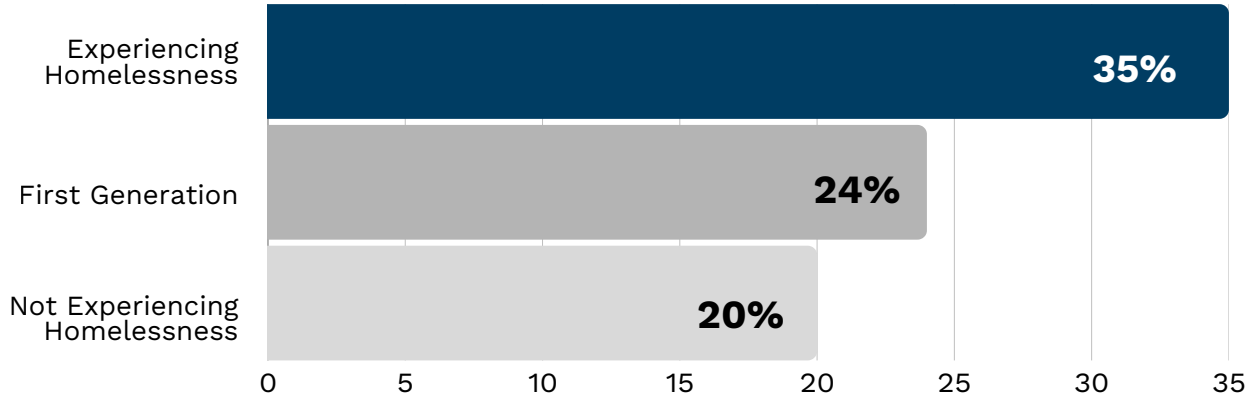
Students experiencing homelessness were also more likely to miss class due to job conflicts (39%, compared with 26% of first-generation students and 22% of students who had not experienced homelessness).

WORK CONFLICTS LEAD TO MISSED CLASSES



Among student parents experiencing homelessness, 35% missed class due to lack of child care (compared with 24% of first-generation students and 20% of students who had not experienced homelessness).

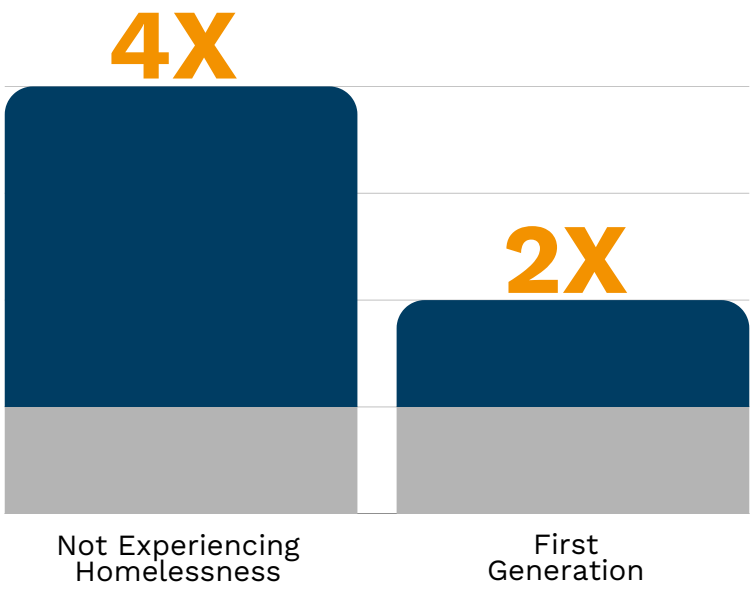
PARENTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS MORE LIKELY TO MISS CLASS DUE TO CHILD CARE



STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE FOSTER CARE HISTORIES.

Four percent (4%) reported being in foster care as teenagers, compared with 1% of students who had not experienced homelessness and 2% of first-generation students. Foster care histories indicate compounding adversity and reduced access to stable adult support, which can make it harder for students to navigate college systems, secure housing, and respond to crises without targeted help.

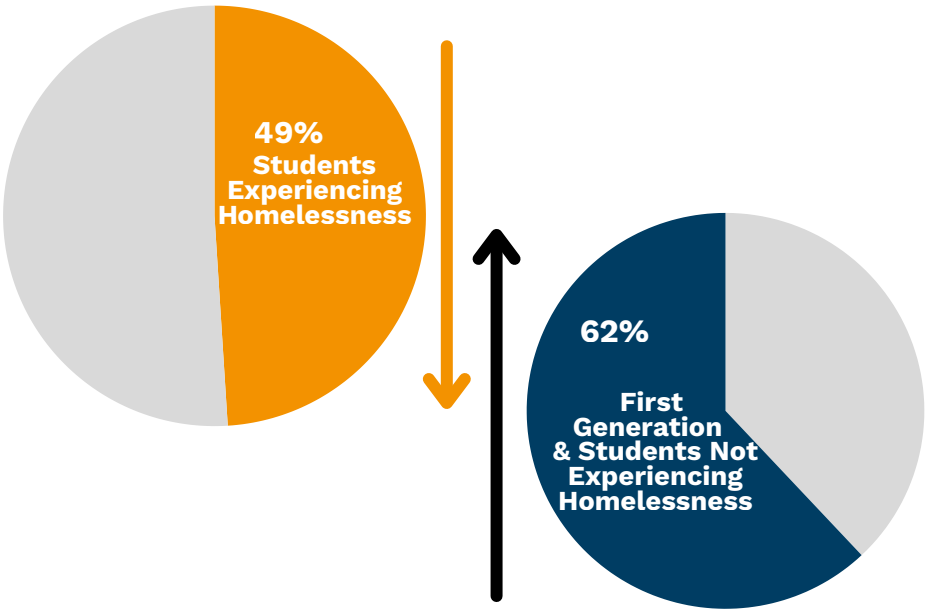
RATE OF FOSTER CARE HISTORIES WITH STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS COMPARED TO PEERS



STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS REPORT LESS INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT DESPITE GREATER NEED.

Only about half (49%) agreed their institution has support services for their financial situation, compared with 62% of first-generation students and 62% of students who had not experienced homelessness.

AGREED THEIR INSTITUTION HAS SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION



Overview of Strategies

Higher education is one of the most powerful engines of economic mobility. When students experiencing homelessness are able to enroll and persist, complete credentials, and enter the workforce with stability, the benefits extend to families, communities, and the nation.

Yet because homelessness is hidden and creates unique barriers, institutions, policymakers, and funders should not assume that broad "basic needs" or first-generation initiatives will reach these students. For example, while a "first-gen" focus may reach some students impacted by homelessness, it will not consistently identify homelessness or address the distinct, higher levels of hardship and barriers associated with it.

The data support policies and practices that intentionally identify and support students experiencing homelessness so that the promise of higher education may be realized for those who seek it, regardless of housing status. The strategies below focus on four overarching solutions that match what the data show: homelessness is often hidden, it compounds hardship, and it requires comprehensive multi-sector responses.

While our strategies are focused on the unique needs of students experiencing or at high risk of experiencing homelessness, we recognize that the broader federal policy context matters. For example, adequate staffing for and oversight by the U.S. Department of Education, and adequate funding for Pell grants, must be in place to support students and those who serve them.

1. Designate and train homeless higher education liaisons.

2. Make emergency aid accessible and responsive to homeless students.

3. Support gap and year-round housing options.

4. Improve support for students transitioning from high school.

Within each area, strategies are grouped by actors:

- Institutions of higher education
- State policymakers
- Federal policymakers

Strategies at a Glance

Area	Institutions	States	Congress
Designate and train homeless higher education liaisons	1. Designate a liaison and provide training. 2. Make the role visible. 3. Build identification pathways. 4. Pair the liaison with a robust referral system and the authority to help students access resources directly.	1. Enact or strengthen statewide liaison policies and support implementation. 2. Tie liaison work to other higher education protections and resources for homeless students.	1. Enact the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY).
Make emergency aid accessible and responsive to homeless students	1. Make emergency aid broad and flexible by design. 2. Remove eligibility restrictions that may exclude homeless students. 3. Conduct proactive outreach to students experiencing homelessness. 4. Streamline the application and accelerate decisions. 5. Pair emergency aid with a person and wraparound support. 6. Update policies to ensure clarity and awareness that emergency grants are not counted against Cost of Attendance.	1. Ensure that any state-funded emergency aid programs explicitly include housing-related costs and make accommodations for students experiencing homelessness. 2. Include presumptive eligibility in state-funded emergency aid programs. 3. Target or prioritize emergency resource funding to institutions with demonstrated homelessness.	1. Provide funding for, and restore flexibility to, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) program. 2. Require the U.S. Department of Education to reinstate and distribute funding for the Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program (Basic Needs Grants) as intended by Congress.

Strategies at a Glance

Area	Institutions	States	Congress
Support gap and year-round housing options	1. Utilize residence halls during breaks and for emergency housing. 2. Formalize community partnerships. 3. Use the homeless liaison as a housing connector. 4. Defer housing fees for vulnerable students until after financial aid is disbursed. 5. Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for housing access. 6. Develop a coordinated referral system and identification practices.	1. Require or strongly incentivize public colleges and universities to provide priority access to campus housing – and, where possible, year-round/break housing continuity – for students who are currently or formerly homeless and for students with foster care histories. 2. Support institutional capacity to address gap housing through targeted technical assistance and practical tools. 3. Explore state capital/acquisition programs that can be used for conversions into deeply affordable student housing in partnership with colleges and community providers. 4. Facilitate the use of existing dorm capacity for community college students and other students experiencing homelessness.	1. Enact the Housing for Homeless Students Act (HSSA). 2. Enact the Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA). 3. Enact the Higher Education Access and Success Act for Homeless and Foster Youth (HEASHFY). 4. Create a time-limited college housing demonstration program to test and scale proven community-campus models. 5.

Strategies at a Glance

Area	Institutions	States	Congress
Improve support for students transitioning from high school	1. Help high school students make informed decisions. 2. Assist students to complete the FAFSA as early as possible. 3. Host specialized tours and orientations. 4. Create a warm handoff with K–12 McKinney-Vento liaisons and foster care points of contact. 5. Connect students to summer bridge programs.	1. Connect PreK-12 and higher education policy through structured guidance. 2. Use existing foster-youth transition infrastructure – and expand it to explicitly include homelessness. 3. Eliminate upfront cost barriers that derail enrollment and early stability. 4. Guarantee priority enrollment and other "first-term readiness" supports for homeless and foster youth. 5. Fund bridge-to-college supports that explicitly cover housing-related transition needs. 6. Sustain statewide basic needs and transition supports for homeless and foster youth through dedicated programs and accountability.	1. Enact the Higher Education Access and Success Act for Homeless and Foster Youth (HEASHFY). 2. Preserve and increase funding for EHCY, TRIO, and GEAR UP to build transition capacity where it matters most. 3. Strengthen and expand Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) for youth leaving foster care to reduce housing instability in higher education.

1. Designate and train homeless higher education liaisons.

Trellis survey data make clear that students experiencing homelessness have overlapping risk factors and many needs that, unaddressed, increase the likelihood of dropping out. One of the most effective strategies to address these myriad needs is the designation of a homeless higher education liaison, who may also serve as a point of contact for other vulnerable students (including foster youth). While a trained homeless liaison role does not, in and of itself, "solve" homelessness, it solves a central systems problem: students can't access what they can't find, what they can't navigate, or what doesn't exist in a coordinated way.

Similar to their federally-mandated counterparts in K12 education, homeless higher education liaisons connect students to available resources on and off campus. Liaisons offer direct, individualized support including navigating financial aid, securing emergency and longer-term housing, and accessing food, transportation, health, mental health, and other services. Liaisons also can play an important role for students who are enrolled in online programs by connecting them to resources and helping navigate documentation and benefits remotely. By serving as a single, trusted, consistent point of contact, homeless liaisons promote college retention and completion by actively breaking down obstacles and ensuring that students who often are "hidden" are identified and can focus on their education.

Designated liaisons are especially important for students who enter higher education without family or other adult support systems, particularly youth who were homeless on their own in high school (unaccompanied youth), and youth who are or were in foster care. These young people are transitioning to adulthood while carrying histories of abuse, neglect, and severe poverty and disruption. Education beyond high school plays an outsized role in helping them achieve stability, but without a trusted, knowledgeable and caring adult, they may continue to experience homelessness and be at higher risk for stopping out.

Yet designating liaisons is only a first step. Liaisons, whether mandated through legislation or voluntarily appointed, often report receiving little to no training about students experiencing homelessness before assuming this role.[5] Without robust implementation support, liaison designation becomes a checkbox exercise rather than meaningful action. Effective liaison programs require ongoing training, resources, and institutional commitment to ensure students actually receive the support they need.

Designate and train homeless higher education liaisons.

ACTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

- **Designate a liaison and provide training.** Institutions can designate homeless higher education liaisons in a number of offices, including the dean of students, student affairs, campus wellness or basic needs, student support and outreach, and financial aid offices. Some states require liaisons to be housed in the financial aid office, given their role in helping students access resources and financial aid.[6] Once established, liaisons should attend regular training sessions each year on trauma-informed best practices for working with students experiencing homelessness, including how to identify students and make connections to housing and services.

- **Make the role visible.** Institutions can help students find the liaison quickly from the institution's website, framed as a supportive service and taking care to avoid stigmatizing language. For example, SUNY Cortland clearly lists out the role of the homeless higher education liaison, resources, and contact information.[7]

- **Build identification pathways.** Institutions can embed questions to help identify homeless students in applications for admissions, as well as for other campus support programs. These optional questions, voluntarily answered, can help institutions proactively outreach to students. Simple connection points that don't rely on student self-reporting also can be integrated where students already interact: financial aid, housing, advising, emergency aid forms, TRIO/GEAR UP partnerships, and orientation communications.

- **Pair the liaison with a robust referral system as well as the authority to help students access resources directly**. A liaison is most effective when staff across the institution can easily refer students experiencing homelessness for support. The liaison should be connected to a "rapid response" team and have the authority to coordinate access to emergency aid, housing exceptions, and other short-term support.

SPOTLIGHT: SUNY

In 2023, State University of New York (SUNY) Chancellor King designated homeless higher education liaisons across all 64 campuses as part of his policy agenda in his State of the University address.[8] This system-wide initiative demonstrates SUNY's recognition that dedicated liaisons are essential to ensuring vulnerable students can access and complete their postsecondary education. To support the implementation of this commitment, SchoolHouse Connection and Pearl Strategies have provided ongoing assistance to SUNY liaisons through the development of a higher education learning network, gap housing analysis and action plan, and intensive technical support around basic needs at select SUNY institutions.

Designate and train homeless higher education liaisons.

ACTIONS FOR STATES

- **Enact or strengthen statewide liaison policies and support implementation.** State legislation or policy designating liaisons helps ensure a uniform approach across the state and can create a network of peers to learn from each other. To date, ten states have enacted legislation to establish or authorize colleges and universities to designate a homeless liaison: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Tennessee, and Nevada.[9] State higher education systems can support homeless liaisons and drive consistent liaison practice across multiple campuses by offering training and opportunities to convene. For example, Illinois' Higher Education Housing and Opportunities Act requires the designation of liaisons (HOUSE liaisons) and requires liaisons to undergo annual training and collect certain data on the institution's homelessness population as part of this role.[10] States can further strengthen implementation by convening liaisons across public and private institutions to share best practices, align referral pathways, and build a consistent statewide approach. Finally, states can fund dedicated positions on campus to provide more intensive services through a case management model.

- **Tie liaison work to other higher education protections and resources for homeless students.** Liaison roles are most impactful when paired with policies that reduce barriers (e.g., fee/tuition supports, priority enrollment, housing flexibility, and academic policy reforms that reflect the realities of homelessness). States can embed homeless liaisons into other statewide reforms that remove barriers to access, persistence, and completion. Where feasible, states also can support cross-agency data sharing and coordinated needs assessment (higher education, housing, and human services) to better understand the scope of student homelessness and target resources accordingly.

SPOTLIGHT: ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In the first year after enacting the Higher Education Housing and Opportunities Act, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) offered grants of up to $50,000 to public and private nonprofit institutions of higher education through the End Student Housing Insecurity (ESHI) grant from the Illinois' Department of Human Services.[11] HOUSE liaisons must review, complete, and sign a certificate statement in compliance with the law. SchoolHouse Connection has partnered with Illinois to provide the yearly trainings.[12]

Designate and train homeless higher education liaisons.

ACTIONS FOR CONGRESS

Enact the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY). Federal PreK-12 education law (the McKinney-Vento Act) requires that every local educational agency (LEA) designate a liaison for students experiencing homelessness, specifying ten legal duties. Similarly, federal law (Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) requires the designation of an LEA point of contact for students in foster care. Despite the prevalence of homelessness in higher education, there is no equivalent federal expectation for institutions of higher education. The Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act (HEASHFY) is bipartisan legislation that would align federal higher education policy with Pre-K12 policy by recognizing and responding to the unique educational barriers caused by homelessness and foster care.[13] This legislation requires institutions of higher education to designate an appropriate staff person with sufficient capacity and training as a liaison for homeless and foster youth to connect these students to housing and support services. The legislation also requires institutions to post on their websites the contact information for the liaison, and prioritize homeless and foster youth for Federal Work-Study programs. Trellis data highlight why this matters: students who experienced homelessness are more likely to be working and to report that work demands disrupt their education. Prioritizing homeless and foster youth for Federal Work-Study can help connect these students to more stable, flexible campus employment that supports persistence. HEASHFY allows states and institutions to continue to shape and tailor their own responses to student homelessness while creating a consistent federal expectation so that homeless and foster youth have a basic opportunity to achieve stability through postsecondary education.

NATIONAL HOMELESS HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING NETWORK

On a national scale, SchoolHouse Connection has built and sustained a national learning network of homeless higher education liaisons. Now in its third year, SHC's national network brings together over 100 liaisons from 26 states across the country. This community of practice gives new and experienced liaisons a space to share strategies, troubleshoot barriers, and align efforts, resulting in a more consistent, informed support for students experiencing homelessness across diverse institutions and states. For more information, or to join the homeless higher education liaison learning network, see SchoolHouse Connection's tips for homeless higher education liaisons resource.[14]

2. Make emergency aid accessible and responsive to homeless students.

Trellis Strategies survey data show that financial hardship is nearly universal among respondents who experienced homelessness, indicating the increased vulnerability and greater need for targeted support for these students. The situation is particularly concerning for managing debt: 95% of students experiencing homelessness stated they use credit cards to pay for basic expenses, yet only 34% agreed or strongly agreed they pay off their credit card balance each month. This means that students experiencing homelessness are accumulating fees and penalties just to afford basic necessities, putting them at an even greater financial disadvantage. Despite this greater need for financial support, the data also indicate that only 49% of students who had experienced homelessness agreed that their institution has adequate support services to address their financial situation.

Many institutions now offer emergency aid to address short-term crises that threaten to disrupt successful completion. Pandemic higher education emergency grants (Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, HEERF) offered a clear signal about what students need in a crisis: in a large national survey of emergency-aid recipients, 50% reported using aid for housing, and Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) similarly found that HEERF recipients most often spent grants on basic necessities, with housing among the top expenses.[15] SNHU also found that HEERF recipients were more likely to persist into the next term compared with matched controls, suggesting that timely emergency aid can support persistence. Western Governors University (WGU) similarly reported improved student outcomes following its HEERF emergency aid distributions; these and other institution-level findings are reflected in the U.S. Department of Education's HEERF annual performance reporting.[16]

Some post-pandemic programs are seeing the same pattern; for example, housing is the most requested emergency-aid category in Washington's statewide program. To reach students experiencing or at risk of homelessness, emergency aid must be flexible and fast. Aid must be designed for unstable living situations, disrupted enrollment patterns, and urgent needs that can't wait for paperwork.

Make emergency aid accessible and responsive to homeless students.

ACTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

- **Make emergency aid broad and flexible by design.** Institutions can ensure that funds cover the costs that keep students experiencing homelessness enrolled and safe: housing deposits, rental arrears, utilities, transportation, food, child care, technology, and health-related needs. Including reimbursements for past related expenses that students have already paid can help them stay enrolled.

- **Remove eligibility restrictions that may exclude homeless students.** Institutions can devise policies that avoid rigid GPA minimums, full-time enrollment requirements, and credit-hour thresholds that homelessness and/or foster care histories themselves make hard to meet.

- **Conduct proactive outreach to students experiencing homelessness.** Institutions can ensure that aid reaches students experiencing or at high risk of homelessness through tailored outreach strategies, as well as information on institutional websites, campus orientation materials, course syllabi, student dashboards, learning management systems, social media, flyers, and other publicly available spaces to maximize awareness and reduce stigma.

- **Streamline the application and accelerate decisions.** Where possible, institutions can adopt automatic or presumptive eligibility for emergency aid based on existing indicators to reduce administrative burden and improve access. For example, institutions can accept information already on file (including homeless FAFSA determinations where available) rather than requiring repeated proof. A short, easy application encourages students to complete the process during moments of crisis. When full disbursement takes longer, institutions can offer interim support (case management, meal vouchers, gift cards, or short-term transportation).

- **Pair emergency aid with a person and wraparound support.** Emergency aid works best when connected to the homeless liaison role or another trusted navigator who can stabilize the student's situation beyond the immediate crisis. Institutions can embed homeless liaisons or navigators into emergency aid programs and processes.

- **Update policies to ensure clarity and awareness that emergency grants are not counted against Cost of Attendance.** Under the Higher Education Act, emergency grants awarded to students for unexpected expenses related to their Cost of Attendance are not counted as "Other Financial Assistance," and will not count against students' Cost of Attendance.[17] Institutions should update their policies to be compliant with the law. Institutions also can create promotional materials available to students increasing awareness that emergency grants will not count against students' financial aid eligibility.

SPOTLIGHT: CSU BAKERSFIELD

California State University Bakersfield offers housing-specific emergency funds that explicitly cover security deposits, first month's rent, and eviction prevention.[18] This targeted funding allows students experiencing homelessness to focus more time and energy on their education rather than securing their housing throughout the year. Students are more likely to stay enrolled and complete their academic program if they receive housing support and resources to find stable housing in the event of an eviction or sudden change in housing eligibility.

Make emergency aid accessible and responsive to homeless students.

ACTIONS FOR STATES

- **Ensure that any state-funded emergency aid programs explicitly include housing-related costs and make accommodations for students experiencing homelessness.** Eligibility for state emergency aid programs should explicitly include criteria that are impactful for students experiencing homelessness, such as housing deposits, rent payments, utilities, transportation, and more. If public funds support emergency aid, students should not be excluded because homelessness disrupts enrollment intensity or academic standing.

- **Include presumptive eligibility in state-funded emergency aid programs.** States can provide guidance and funding parameters that allow institutions to use existing eligibility indicators to expedite awards, reduce administrative burden, and improve access for students with urgent needs.

- **Target or prioritize emergency resource funding to institutions with demonstrated homelessness.** Targeting emergency grants to postsecondary institutions that can show evidence of significant homelessness not only helps institutions with the greatest needs, it also incentivizes attention data collection and attention to student homelessness. For example, Minnesota's Office of Higher Education administers the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students (EAPS) grant program, which provides targeted funding to private, non-profit postsecondary institutions and/or Tribally-affiliated postsecondary institutions with a demonstrable homeless population.[19] This funding allows participating postsecondary institutions to foster attendance and retention for low-income students, including students experiencing homelessness.

Make emergency aid accessible and responsive to homeless students.

ACTIONS FOR CONGRESS

- **Provide funding for, and restore flexibility to, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) program, to allow SEOG to function as emergency aid.** The SEOG program provides financial assistance to low-income students. In light of the evidence that emergency aid can support persistence, Congress should allow institutions to use a portion of their funds specifically for emergency micro-grants.[20]

- **Provide funding for, and require the U.S. Department of Education to distribute funding for the Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program (Basic Needs Grants) as intended by Congress.** While not emergency aid per se, the Basic Needs Grants are competitive grants that help colleges build coordinated systems to address a range of needs, including hubs where emergency aid can be leveraged with other supports. In late 2025, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) reorganized priorities under the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and effectively eliminated the Basic Needs Grants.[21] Fortunately, the final FY2026 appropriations package, signed into law on February 3, 2026, includes $10 million for the Basic Needs Grants and requires ED to use these funds for their intended purpose.[22] Congress should continue to invest in this critical program.

SAP Appeals: A Hidden Financial Aid Barrier for Students Experiencing Homelessness

To maintain eligibility for federal and state financial aid, students must meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards, typically including minimum GPA, pace of completion, and maximum timeframe requirements. Institutions generally allow students to appeal loss of aid based on extenuating circumstances, but policies and implementation vary widely. When a student experiences homelessness, the resulting instability can quickly disrupt attendance, coursework, and grades, making SAP failure more likely and turning financial aid rules into a "hidden" barrier to persistence for students who most need aid to stay enrolled.[23]

Institutions can reduce this barrier by explicitly listing homelessness as an extenuating circumstance in SAP appeals guidance; training financial aid staff and campus partners on documentation pathways; and ensuring appeals are student-friendly, timely, and accessible during periods of acute instability.

States can reinforce consistent practice by requiring publicly funded institutions (and institutions participating in state aid programs) to treat homelessness as an allowable basis for SAP appeals and by setting minimum expectations for transparent, timely appeals processes. For example, California's AB 2416 requires colleges to consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance in SAP appeals.[24] Subsequent statewide reforms (e.g., AB 789) aim to standardize SAP policies and appeal procedures to reduce unnecessary aid loss.

3. Support gap and year-round housing options.

While student homelessness cannot be solved solely through housing support, progress will be limited without specific housing strategies. Yet college students confront the same severe lack of affordable and available rental homes that all Americans face – a housing crisis that constrains broader institutional solutions and contributes to the seeming intractability of college student homelessness.

Still, institutions and communities are making strides in meeting student housing needs in ways that can inform policy and practice. Housing solutions must start with understanding what student homelessness looks like. Trellis Strategies survey data underscore that college homelessness is most often "hidden," not sheltered: many students experiencing homelessness reported staying temporarily with other people (e.g., couch surfing or moving in with other people due to financial hardship), and a relatively small percent self-identified as "homeless." This pattern is consistent with national higher education basic needs research showing that students experiencing homelessness are far more likely to stay in informal unstable arrangements than in shelters.[25] Because these situations are less visible, and are sometimes misperceived as less serious – even though they can be unstable, and, at times, unsafe – students and institutions may not recognize them as homelessness.

Because most students experiencing homelessness do not meet the narrow definition of homelessness used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – a definition that is often adopted by state and local housing agencies – these students are effectively precluded from even being considered for federal homeless and housing assistance.

Moreover, many college students are ineligible for federal housing benefit programs. Both the Housing Choice Voucher program (Section 8) and Low Income Housing Tax Credit housing (LIHTC) include restrictions on full-time students, with exceptions for certain populations (e.g., married students, veterans, students with children, and others).[26] Even when students are eligible, the treatment of financial aid can be complicated: depending on the type of assistance and how it is used, some student aid – particularly amounts above tuition/required fees and other allowable education costs – may be counted toward household income, affecting rent calculations.[27] For example, when a young adult in a HUD-assisted household enrolls as a full-time student, the student's status and aid can affect the household's income and rent determination.

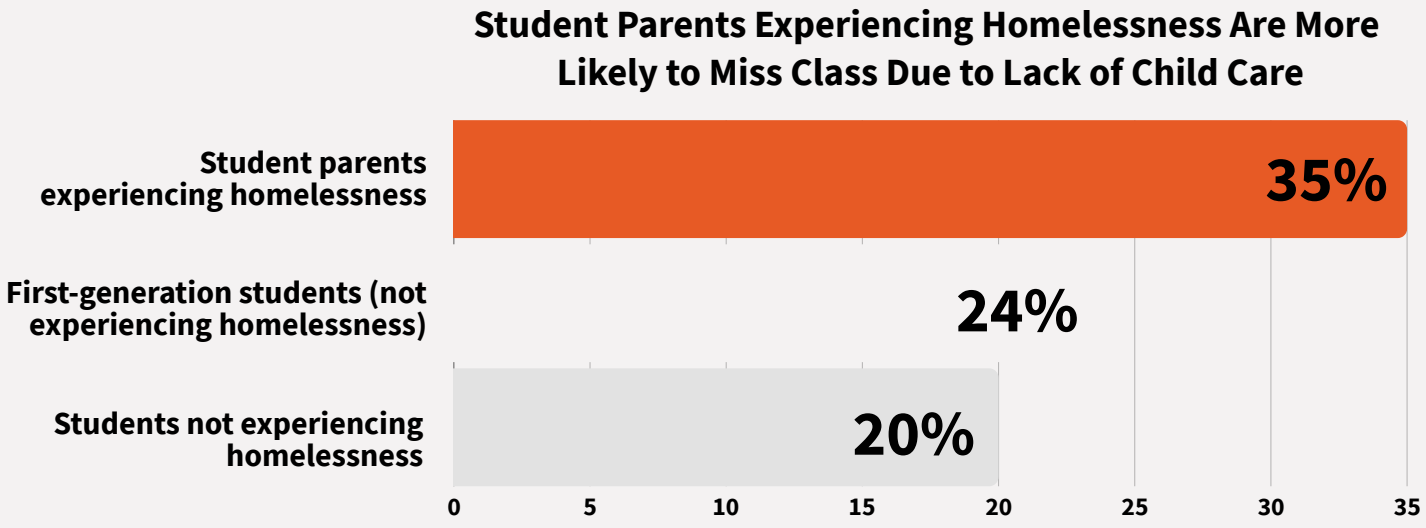
College students are also competing for very limited federal housing assistance with the broader U.S. population. While there are no federal requirements or incentives for public housing authorities (PHAs) to provide housing to students experiencing homelessness pursuing postsecondary degrees, some PHAs are developing partnerships with colleges and universities to support students – for example, by dedicating vouchers or developing student-targeted housing.[28] These efforts often rely on PHAs receiving specific regulatory waivers through designation under "Moving to Work" (MTW), a HUD demonstration that gives select PHAs flexibility to test alternative policies and use funds in more tailored ways.

Expanding incentives and flexibilities beyond MTW would help scale these campus partnerships. However, because these flexibilities are limited to a subset of PHAs, they are not yet widespread and often focus on existing HUD-assisted households rather than new applicants. Therefore – especially in the context of the massive national affordable housing crisis – federal rental subsidies and other housing-related benefits are not often a viable tool for reducing homelessness among college students.

In light of this grim reality, institutions need a range of proactive, student-centered housing strategies that stabilize students quickly, including options for gap housing during academic breaks and year-round housing support. Institutions – especially community colleges that do not provide on-campus housing – also need strong community-based housing partners that are resourced and skilled in meeting the housing and service needs of students. These approaches align with what students' experiences actually look like: precarious arrangements that can unravel during breaks, financial shocks, unstable or low-wage employment, or family crises. Students with histories of experiencing homelessness on their own in high school, or histories of foster care, are especially vulnerable, as they lack family and adult support and may have no rental histories.

Connecting Early Childhood, Homelessness, Housing, and Higher Education

Some students experiencing homelessness are also raising young children, which raises the stakes and the barriers to persistence. Trellis data show that among student parents who experienced homelessness, 35% missed class due to lack of child care, compared with 24% of first-generation students and 20% of students who had not experienced homelessness. When parents can't stay enrolled, the consequences extend beyond the student: disrupted education can quickly become disrupted income, disrupted routines, and greater instability for young children. Efforts to support student parents in higher education must intentionally account for homelessness, while efforts to support homeless families – especially families with infants and toddlers – should intentionally include pathways to postsecondary access and completion as part of a family stability strategy. Federal investment in child care, especially campus-based child care through the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, can help parenting students remain enrolled during periods of instability.[29]



Support gap and year-round housing options.

ACTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

- **Utilize residence halls during breaks and for emergency housing.** Institutions that provide on-campus housing can allow students experiencing or at risk of homelessness to stay in residence halls during breaks, or reserve a limited number of rooms for emergencies. These approaches help prevent predictable crises when residence halls close and provide immediate stabilization while longer-term housing solutions are identified.

- **Formalize community partnerships.** Institutions can develop formal referral agreements with housing organizations, host-home programs, and other community partners that understand student homelessness and can coordinate closely with campus-based supports. These partnerships are particularly important for community colleges and other institutions that do not provide on-campus housing.

- **Defer housing fees for vulnerable students until after financial aid is disbursed.** Institutions can remove barriers by deferring housing-related fees for vulnerable populations, including former foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, until after financial aid is disbursed. This removes an up-front barrier to securing housing and helps sets students up for success.

- **Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for housing access.** Institutions can create priority access for students experiencing homelessness and, when possible, strategically place students experiencing homelessness in certain residence halls or apartment-style housing that remain open year-round.

- **Use the homeless liaison as a housing connector.** Housing navigation should be a core function of the homeless higher education liaison, particularly for students who are couch surfing or doubled up. Homeless liaisons can build and maintain relationships with community partners to identify, coordinate, and expand housing options for students.

- **Develop a coordinated referral system and identification practices.** Institutions can establish comprehensive campus-wide policies and practices that identify and support students experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This includes training faculty and staff to recognize and respond to housing needs, offering housing intake or basic needs assessment tools, and clearly communicating available housing and support services.

SPOTLIGHT: WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY, PA

West Chester University's Promise Program is a comprehensive campus support program serving unaccompanied homeless youth and foster youth by providing year-round housing, priority access to on-campus employment, scholarship support, basic needs access, and regular mentoring and community-building programming.[30] The Promise Program helps ensure that unmet housing and basic needs do not prevent students from persisting and graduating. The program is staffed with a designated point of contact for homeless and foster youth who helps students navigate resources and build connections.

Support gap and year-round housing options.

ACTIONS FOR STATES

- **Require or strongly incentivize public colleges and universities to provide priority access to campus housing – and, where possible, year-round/break housing continuity – for students who are currently or formerly homeless and for students with foster care histories.** For example, Tennessee requires public institutions to establish plans that include first priority in housing placement for homeless students and placement in housing that remains available during breaks/year-round.[31] California's AB 1228 requires CSU campuses (and requests CCC and UC campuses) to prioritize current/former homeless youth and current/former foster youth for housing and to plan for access to housing that remains open during academic breaks.[32]

- **Support institutional capacity to address gap housing through targeted technical assistance and practical tools.** For example, a partnership supporting several State University of New York campuses provided technical assistance to assess gap housing needs and implement solutions, alongside a systemwide gap-housing analysis and an action-planning template.[33]

- **Explore state capital/acquisition programs that can be used for conversions into deeply affordable student housing in partnership with colleges and community providers.** Converting existing buildings, such as hotels, can add units faster and more economically than new construction, which is especially important for community colleges without dorms. For example, College Housing Northwest's Abigail Court conversion in Oregon was supported by a state grant (Project Turnkey), resulting in studio units targeted to students facing homelessness/housing insecurity.[34]

- **Facilitate the use of existing dorm capacity for community college students and other students experiencing homelessness.** States can reimburse public four-year campuses for making dorm rooms available (including during breaks) for community college students and pair the housing with basic support (food access, counseling, case management) so students can remain enrolled and persist. For example, Massachusetts' Student Housing Security Pilot paired community colleges with state universities to provide dorm rooms to homeless community college students. Although the pilot formally concluded, the underlying model (community college students accessing dorm housing through partnerships) continues in some communities.[35] Even without dedicating funding, states can facilitate agreements between institutions through convenings and technical assistance.

SPOTLIGHT: CALIFORNIA'S COLLEGE FOCUSED RAPID REHOUSING

California's College-Focused Rapid Rehousing (CFRR) is a state-funded campus-community housing strategy designed to provide sustained stability so students can stay enrolled. CFRR pairs months of rental subsidy with significant staff support – a higher-intensity intervention than one-time or very short-term housing help.This longer-duration support can reduce housing-related strain long enough for students to stabilize and keep progressing academically. A three-year evaluation of eight CSU and two community college CFRR programs found participants averaged nine consecutive months of housing (about two semesters) and, among CSU participants, students had a significantly higher probability of staying in school or graduating than students who received short-term housing assistance.[36] California's scale is also notable: as of 2025, the state invests $31 million annually in campus rapid rehousing programs, and the evaluated campuses verified housing 639 students through CFRR from Summer 2020 through Spring 2024.

Support gap and year-round housing options.

ACTIONS FOR CONGRESS

- **Enact the Housing for Homeless Students Act (HHSA).** The bipartisan HHSA would update the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) rules so that homeless youth and veterans are not barred from LIHTC housing solely because they are enrolled as full-time students.[37] This no-cost solution would mean that students no longer have to choose between housing and the education they need to achieve economic independence.

- **Enact the Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA).** The bipartisan HCYA would align HUD's restrictive definition of homelessness with those of other federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education, so that students and families are not locked out of homeless and housing assistance by a definition that ignores how they actually live. Students whose homelessness has been verified by one of eight specific federal programs – including federal financial aid programs – would be eligible for HUD homeless assistance. Students would be able to be assessed for services using the same "vulnerability" indices used currently to prioritize people for assistance.[38]

- **Enact the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth (HEASHFY) Act.** The bipartisan HEASHFY Act removes barriers and ensures that homeless and foster youth have clear and reliable pathways into and through higher education, including through housing support.[39] Recognizing that every community is unique, HEASHFY requires institutions of higher education to develop a plan for homeless and foster youth to access on-campus housing during and between academic breaks.

- **Enact the Campus Housing Affordability Act (H.R. 6753).** This bipartisan bill would reduce barriers that prevent some low-income college students from using Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) by changing the federal "student restriction."[40] It also would give the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development authority to waive certain requirements so that voucher-eligible students living in campus-owned student housing could use vouchers to help pay for that housing. While the Campus Housing Affordability Act would not increase the overall supply of vouchers, it could expand options for some voucher-eligible students.

- **Create a time-limited college housing demonstration program to test and scale proven community-campus models.** Local innovation is ahead of federal policy: community housing providers and colleges are building real solutions, but too often without sustainable funding or a way to evaluate and replicate results. A federal demonstration would catalyze broader adoption by supporting partnerships, measuring outcomes, and identifying scalable housing approaches that help students stay housed, stay enrolled, and complete their credentials.

SPOTLIGHT: COLLEGE HOUSING NORTHWEST'S AFFORDABLE RENTS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS, OREGON

College Housing Northwest's Affordable Rents for College Students (ARCS) is a model non-profit initiative that partners with community colleges and universities to provide stable, affordable housing and rental assistance to students experiencing homelessness.[41] By reducing barriers such as high move-in costs, cosigner requirements, and utility expenses, ARCS helps students focus on their education rather than accessing housing. The program offers deeply subsidized units and supportive environments designed to foster academic success. Importantly, CHNW pairs direct assistance with a scalable housing-development strategy – acquiring and rehabilitating properties near campuses and leveraging affordable housing financing tools (including state tax credits) to create long-term, student-serving housing supply. This approach allows CHNW to go beyond responding to individual short-term crisis response by building a durable pipeline of affordable units that campuses can reliably refer students into year after year. CHNW's partnerships also strengthen coordinated systems on the back end, aligning housing providers and campus staff around eligibility, referrals, and ongoing stabilization so students don't fall through the cracks between academic terms. As a result, CHNW demonstrates how communities can translate local innovation into a replicable model that improves housing stability, persistence, and completion for students with the fewest resources.

4. Improve support for students transitioning from high school.

Too often, the pipeline to college student homelessness is homelessness in PreK-12 public schools. In the 2023-2024 school year, local educational agencies (LEAs) identified and enrolled over 1.5 million PreK-12 students experiencing homelessness.[42] Strong evidence of under-identification suggests that the actual numbers are much higher. In addition to PreK-12 students who experience homelessness, approximately 180,000 school-age children are in foster care at any given time.[43]

The transition period after high school can be the most precarious time for these students: they lose access to high school counselors and other supportive adults, and might not have the guidance or support from family members. Their homelessness, trauma, and lack of support does not end with high school graduation, and is often a precursor to instability in higher education. For those youth who do make it to campus, new challenges emerge. Students experiencing homelessness may feel isolated, overwhelmed by unfamiliar systems, or hesitant to disclose their circumstances. “Imposter syndrome,” difficulty navigating academic expectations, or not knowing where to turn for help can lead some to withdraw or reach back to high school staff for support that higher education systems aren’t prepared to provide.

Despite these known challenges, basic needs initiatives largely omit college transition support as a targeted prevention strategy. A sharper focus on supporting the transition of vulnerable students could prevent homelessness in higher education from happening in the first place, while at the same time supporting retention and completion for students whose future stability depends on obtaining education beyond high school.

Improve support for students transitioning from high school.

ACTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS & LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

- **Help high school students make informed decisions.** Counselors, social workers, college access programs, and McKinney-Vento liaisons can help students consider housing availability and support options in their higher education selection process, including planning for summer housing.

- **Assist students to complete the FAFSA as early as possible.** It's important for homeless and foster youth to apply for FAFSA as early as possible in order to receive institutional, state, and federal aid – particularly given the specific FAFSA documentation they need in order to complete the FAFSA.[44] Maximizing financial aid helps ensure greater support for housing and other needs.

- **Host specialized tours and orientations.** Institutions and LEAs can support students before they enroll by hosting specific learning days for students who are or may be at risk of homelessness, such as Independent Student Day at Colorado State University, where students also learn about housing options, or hosting tailored college visits.[45]

- **Create a warm handoff with PreK–12 McKinney-Vento liaisons and foster care points of contact.** PreK-12 educators can help ensure that students experiencing homelessness and those from foster care arrive with a clear point of contact if the institution has a designated liaison, or help them identify contacts in college access, student support, or other specialized programs.

- **Connect students to summer bridge programs.** Programs such as Kennesaw State University ASCEND Program provide year-round housing and extensive case management support.[46] Florida State University's Unconquered Scholars Program offers a summer bridge program that allows students to come onto campus earlier and acclimate to campus life before their peers.[47]

SPOTLIGHT: CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS, OHIO

Cincinnati partnerships illustrate what it looks like when a school district homelessness program treats college transition as part of its core work.[48] Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) supports Project Connect, the office that implements the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. Project Connect school counselors provide one-on-one FAFSA support for students experiencing homelessness, including help navigating verification for unaccompanied homeless youth. In parallel, the University of Cincinnati's "CPS Strong" partnership is organized around readiness, access, and success for CPS graduates pursuing degrees at the University of Cincinnati, offering wraparound supports that help students persist in college, such as priority access to on-campus housing and scholarships, the ability to remain in housing during breaks, academic coaching, mentorship, and connections to campus resources. As a result of this collaborative effort, Project Connect students have a 70% retention rate. Together, these efforts underscore an important lesson for the field: when PreK–12 homelessness infrastructure aligns with higher education access and persistence strategies, students are less likely to be derailed by paperwork hurdles, timing gaps, and housing instability during the transition to college.

SPOTLIGHT: FIRST STAR ACADEMIES (AZ, CA, IL, OH, VA, AND UT)

First Star Academies provide college preparatory programs for youth in foster care while in high school.[49] Academies provide: immersive residential summers on a university campus, monthly sessions during each school year, specialized programming that addresses the academics, life skills, and adult support needed by students in foster care. Academies, now in Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, Virginia, and Utah, partner with local high schools, child welfare agencies and universities. Young people are able to continue receiving support when they transition to postsecondary programs through the First Star Alumni Program.

SPOTLIGHT: FOSTERING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT NATIONWIDE (FAAN)

FAAN brings together leaders of statewide foster care and higher education organizations in an effort to create pathways and remove barriers for students in foster care.[50] By connecting statewide backbone organizations and sharing policy and practice strategies, FAAN strengthens the capacity of state-level infrastructure to support students during the transition from high school to postsecondary education and cultivates a national community of practice for emerging states. FAAN currently includes representation from twenty states.

Improve support for students transitioning from high school.

ACTIONS FOR STATES

- **Connect PreK-12 and higher education policy through structured guidance.** States can create clear transition pathways between PreK-12 McKinney-Vento liaisons, child welfare transition staff (for foster youth), and campus liaisons/points of contact so students do not lose support at graduation. This can include statewide guidance, shared templates, and best practices for outreach to identified students before the end of senior year (including summer planning and FAFSA verification support).

- **Use existing foster-youth transition infrastructure – and expand it to explicitly include homelessness.** Many state transition initiatives, campus networks, and student supports are built around foster care; states can broaden eligibility and outreach so that youth verified as homeless in high school can access the same navigation help (and so that programs serving homelessness and foster care are aligned rather than siloed). Georgia's Embark Georgia model is explicitly designed to increase college access and retention for youth who have experienced foster care or homelessness, and anchors support in cross-agency collaboration and campus-based points of contact.[51]

- **Eliminate upfront cost barriers that derail enrollment and early stability.** States can require or strongly encourage public institutions to provide streamlined fee supports for students verified as homeless or in foster care – such as application fee waivers, orientation deposits, and enrollment/tuition fee waivers – using a simple verification process that is accepted statewide. For example, California law authorizes waiving community college enrollment fees for homeless youth, and Florida and Maryland have statewide tuition/fee supports for students experiencing homelessness.[52]

- **Guarantee priority enrollment and other "first-term readiness" supports for homeless and foster youth.** Priority registration is a homelessness prevention strategy because it increases the likelihood that students secure a workable class schedule (supporting employment stability), access required classes on time (reducing stop-out risk), and connect early with campus support.

- **Fund bridge-to-college supports that explicitly cover housing-related transition needs.** States can finance summer bridge programming, early move-in/bridge housing, and "start-up" supports (e.g., deposits, transportation, work clothing, technology) targeted to students verified as homeless or in foster care. Colorado's EmpowerEd program is a strong example of a state approach tied directly to high school homelessness identification, providing financial assistance that covers remaining cost of attendance (after other aid) for eligible students who experienced homelessness while enrolled in a Colorado high school.[53]

- **Sustain statewide basic needs and transition supports for homeless and foster youth through dedicated programs and accountability.** Washington's Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness (SSEH) program illustrates how a state can fund campus capacity to provide tailored accommodations and services (e.g., case management, basic needs supports) to students experiencing homelessness and students who were in foster care at high school completion.[54] States can pair this approach with expectations for outreach to incoming students and consistent points of contact across campuses.

SPOTLIGHT: EMBARK GEORGIA CENTER, GEORGIA

Embark Georgia Center is a statewide initiative designed to increase college access and retention for youth who have experienced foster care or homelessness, illustrating how states can treat college transition as a cross-system responsibility rather than a campus-by-campus effort.[55] Embark connects students to resources (including information on Georgia's Education and Training Voucher supports) and emphasizes campus-based points of contact across statewide higher education systems—an approach that helps ensure students have a clear, trusted support pathway as they move from high school into college.

Improve support for students transitioning from high school.

ACTIONS FOR CONGRESS

- **Enact the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth (HEASHFY) Act.** In addition to provisions related to higher education liaisons and housing, HEASHFY strengthens federal college access programs so that homeless and foster youth are not missed during the high school to college transition. It directs TRIO and GEAR UP projects to conduct targeted outreach to these students, remove barriers to participation and retention, and track/report the number served and what strategies are working – helping ensure these programs reach the youth most likely to face housing instability when they enroll.

- **Preserve and increase funding for EHCY, TRIO, and GEAR UP to build transition capacity where it matters most.** Federal law already places key transition responsibilities in the PreK-12 system: counselors must support college preparation for students experiencing homelessness, and McKinney-Vento liaisons must help homeless youth secure FAFSA documentation. But at the current funding level, only about one in five local educational agencies receives Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funding, which limits staffing capacity for proactive transition planning. Increased federal investment would expand the number of school districts that are able to provide sustained, individualized support that prevents homelessness at college entry.

- **Strengthen and expand Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) for youth leaving foster care to reduce housing instability in higher education.** Established in 2001 as part of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program can provide up to $5,000 annually to support foster youth in pursuing college and career education, including but not limited to, housing costs.[56] Federal appropriations for the Chafee ETV program have been approximately $43 million per year, well below the program's $60 million authorization (with one-time supplemental funding provided during the pandemic). Congress should modernize the ETV program by increasing the annual appropriation; increasing the award amount to reflect the rising cost of attendance; requiring that youth in foster care are notified of the program and provided assistance to apply; and ensuring that the ETV application process is low barrier.[57]

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- Jennifer Pokempner, Youth Law Center

About SchoolHouse Connection

SchoolHouse Connection is a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through early care and education. We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with early childhood programs, schools, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth. For more information, visit www.schoolhouseconnection.org.

About Trellis Strategies

Trellis Strategies is a leading strategic nonprofit research and consulting firm focused on advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce. Our commitment is to provide unparalleled insights into the modern learner experience, spanning from application through graduation. For more information, visit www.trellisstrategies.org/about-us/

Appendix A: Survey Methodology

The Fall 2024 Student Financial Wellness Survey was implemented between late October and mid-November 2024, with invitations sent to nearly 683,000 undergraduate students at 104 institutions in 27 states.[57] Responses were received from 53,158 students for a response rate of 7.8%. The responses were weighted by gender, age, and enrollment intensity to better reflect the total population of the participating institutions. Survey data were analyzed descriptively to compare students experiencing homelessness (n=9,704), first-generation students not experiencing homelessness (n=11,662), and students who had not experienced homelessness (n=33,175) on student economic and overall well-being. In addition to descriptive analysis, significance testing was conducted for all outcomes.

For all findings, comparisons are statistically significant ($p<.0001$). Significance testing helps us to understand whether the differences between groups we observed in the survey are likely a real effect rather than random variation in the data. The reported p-value provides strong evidence that the observed differences are real and not due to chance.

Respondents were categorized as having experienced homelessness if they answered 'Yes' and/or 'True' to any of the eleven homelessness questions:

- Since starting college, have you ever been homeless?
- I was thrown out or forced out of my home
- I was evicted from my home
- I stayed in a shelter, transitional housing, or independent living program
- I stayed in an abandoned building
- I didn't know where I would sleep at night
- I didn't have a home
- I temporarily stayed with a relative, friend, or couch surfed while I looked for housing
- I slept in an outdoor location such as a street, sidewalk or alley, bus or train stop
- I slept in a closed area/space not meant for human habitation such as a car or truck, van, RV, or camper, encampment or tent, or unconverted garage, attic, or basement
- I moved in with other people due to financial problems

Respondent demographics are provided below.

Characteristic	Students Experiencing Homelessness *Respondents (n=9,704)*	First Generation Students Not Experiencing Homelessness *Respondents (n=11,662)*	Students Not Experiencing Homelessness *Respondents (n=33,175)*
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	1%	1%
Asian, Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander	4%	4%	4%
Black/African American	20%	15%	14%
Hispanic/Latino	21%	37%	25%
International	4%	1%	2%
White	37%	31%	41%
Multiple	4%	3%	4%
Not Reported	9%	8%	10%
Gender			
Female	74%	79%	72%
Male	22%	18%	23%
Self-Identify/Not Reported	4%	3%	4%
Enrollment Intensity			
Full-time	59%	58%	63%
Part-time	40%	40%	34%
Not Reported	2%	2%	2%

Characteristic	Students Experiencing Homelessness *Respondents (n=9,704)*	First Generation Students Not Experiencing Homelessness *Respondents (n=11,662)*	Students Not Experiencing Homelessness *Respondents (n=33,175)*
Class Year			
1st (<30 credits earned)	46%	48%	47%
2nd (30-59 credits earned)	21%	22%	21%
3rd (60-89 credits earned)	14%	13%	13%
4th (90-120 credits earned)	8%	7%	8%
5th (120+ credits earned)	4%	4%	4%
Not Reported	6%	7%	7%
Age			
Average Age	25.8	26.8	25.2
Parenting Status			
Parenting Student	20%	26%	18%

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