



Understanding Homelessness: Strategies for Student Support and Stability for Identification and Prevention

October 23, 2025 • HOUSE
Liaison Training





SchoolHouse Connection



SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness, from prenatal to postsecondary, through strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with youth, families, schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, and service providers.

Learn more:

schoolhouseconnection.org

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Today's Learning Objectives

- 1. Define homelessness and recognize examples of what homelessness looks like in higher education**
- 2. Understand the national landscape and research of higher education and homelessness**
- 3. Understand the role of IL HOUSE liaisons and best practice strategies for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness in higher education**



Today's Agenda

- 1. Homeless Overview**
 - a. Definitions**
 - b. National Landscape**
- 2. Role of the Homeless Higher Education Liaison**
 - a. Research**
 - b. Role and Responsibilities**
- 3. Best Practices**
- 4. Resources**





Definitions

Homelessness Defined

Federal Education
definition of homelessness
from McKinney-Vento Act
and the Higher Education
Act

Under McKinney-Vento the term
“homeless” children and youth
means:

**Children who lack a fixed,
regular, and adequate
nighttime residence**

Fixed, Regular, and Adequate

Can the student go to the same place (fixed), every night (regular) to sleep in a safe and sufficient space (adequate)?

→ **Fixed:**

- ◆ Stationary, permanent, not subject to change

→ **Regular:**

- ◆ Used on a predictable, routine, consistent basis
- ◆ Consider the relative permanence

→ **Adequate:**

- ◆ Lawfully and reasonably sufficient
- ◆ Sufficient for meeting the physical and psychological needs typically met in a home environment

Definitions

What Does Homelessness Look Like?

There isn't always a "sign."



Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason.



Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.



Living in emergency or transitional shelters



Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.



Living in a residence hall/dorm but otherwise would have no place to go

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

→ Unaccompanied

- Not living in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian

→ Homeless

- Lacking fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

Child and Youth Homelessness in the United States:

Data Profiles

Scan the QR Code or
visit schoolhouseconnection.org/article/data-profiles



Search Data by:

- National Level
- State Level
- County Level
- School Districts
- Congressional Districts
- State Legislatures
- Trends Over Time
- Graduation Rate
- Chronic Absence
- Under Identification





During the 2022-2023 school year, an estimated 1.4 million youth (pre K-12) are identified as experiencing homelessness. In Illinois, 55,022 students (pre K-12) and 16,865 children 3 and under were identified as experiencing homelessness.

Child and Youth Homelessness **Data Profiles**

Homelessness in Higher Education

In 2023, the National Center for Education Statistics released a major federal report that **8% of undergraduate students** are experiencing homelessness.

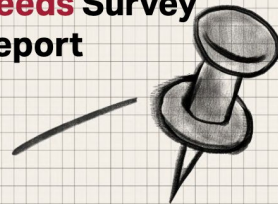
Experienced homelessness: previous 30 days		
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Undergraduate		
Total	8.0	92.0
NPSAS institution sector		
Community colleges	8.0	92.0
Public 4-year colleges & universities	7.3	92.7
Private non-profit 4-year colleges & universities	7.7	92.3
Private for-profit colleges & universities	10.7	89.3

**74,350 students
comprised of 91
institutions and 16
states, between Spring
2023-Summer 2024**

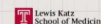
3 in 5

of students experience **basic needs
insecurity** related to food and/or
housing.

**Student Basic
Needs Survey
Report**



The Hope Center 2023-2024
Student Basic Needs Survey Report

 Lewis Katz School of Medicine | The Hope Center
for Student Basic Needs Security



Research on Homeless Higher Education Liaisons

What research is there on homeless higher education liaisons?

Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness: Perspectives from California's Community Colleges (2019)

- California Homeless Youth Project and ACLU Foundations of California

A Survey on Higher Education Liaisons: Role preparation and professional development needs (2021)

- Mary Haskett and Alexandra Bucceli, North Carolina State University

Key Takeaways

From California research

- 1 Homeless liaisons positions aren't adequately funded
- 2 5 greatest needs are housing, FAFSA completion, mental health, supportive services beyond school setting, CalFresh assistance with housing being the most difficult need
- 3 Majority of respondents are aware of recent legislation, but implementation is incomplete

Key Takeaways

North Carolina research

- 1 Liaisons often had other roles (financial aid administrator, counselor, case manager, etc.)
- 2 Over 50% of liaisons didn't include contact information on their website
- 3 92% of liaisons engaged in self-directed learning and more guidance, resources, and specialized training are needed

Overview of Homeless Higher Education Liaisons

**Who do
students
need
to be
successful
in school?**



Connection to **positive, supportive adults**

Stability - difficult to meet educational needs when you can't meet basic needs

Help navigating **financial aid**

Knowledge of existing **campus support programs and resources** (social media, word of mouth, visibility: posters, flyers)

The Role of the Campus Liaison



New Responsibility of the Homeless Liaison!

The director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or **other program serving individuals who are experiencing homelessness**

Liaisons can use this [sample form letter](#) to provide determinations or partner with the financial aid office to determine unaccompanied homeless youth

Homeless Liaisons as a Best Practice

State Policy

9 states have policies about homeless higher education liaisons and hopefully more to come!

Informal Structure

Some states like Colorado, Georgia, and North Carolina

Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth

Reintroduction of HEASHFY soon!
This bill in the past has been bipartisan and bicameral



Best Practices

Illinois HOUSE Liaisons (SB 0190): Key Responsibilities

- This bill was passed in 2021
- HOUSE (Housing and Opportunities that are Useful for Students' Excellence) liaisons are required at Illinois college and universities to provide support and resources to students experiencing homelessness.
- Key Responsibilities
 - Understand financial aid eligibility
 - Identify services and resources
 - Assist with financial aid and services
 - Track and monitor outcomes
 - Report annually to IBHE or CCB
 - Act as an intermediary
 - Connect to community supports
 - Publish information online
 - Develop housing access plan
 - Train institutional employees
 - Provide additional support as needed

Identification & Outreach Best Practices

- Partner with [K12 liaisons](#) to ease transition to postsecondary education
- Utilize [FAFSA data](#) and connect with the financial aid office
 - Identify unaccompanied homeless youth
 - Benefits outreach
- Clear referral systems
 - Partner with faculty and staff for referrals
- Utilize existing surveys/forms

Identification & Outreach Best Practices

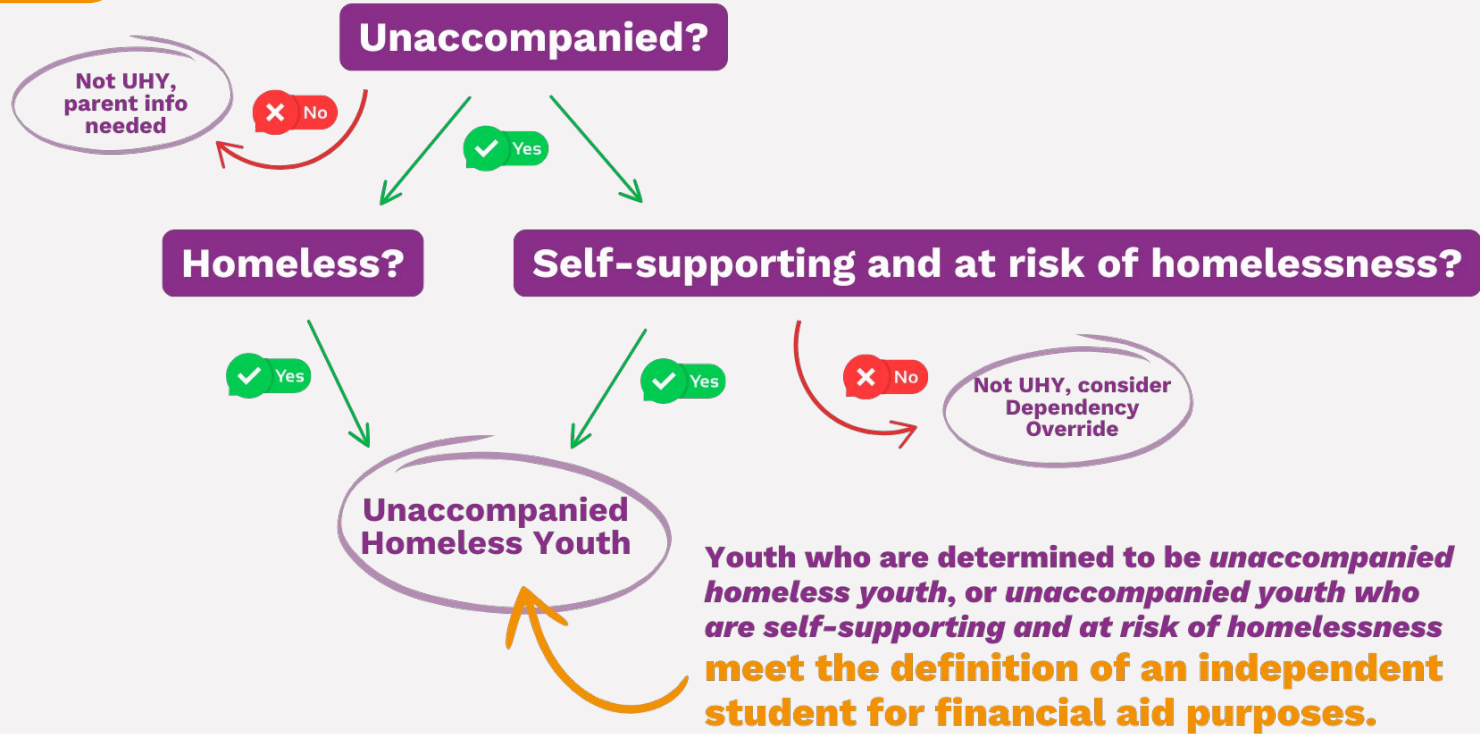
“Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable her to provide any resources that she may possess.”

- Encourage faculty to include a basic needs support information into class syllabus
- Create a centralized phone number and/or website that includes liaison contact information
- Use sensitive language in outreach materials (e.g. describe living situation)
- Leverage technology (social media, apps, tex, email, student portal, etc.)
- Trainings to inform campus community like [NC State's PEAK Project](#)

FAFSA

- Encourage students to complete the FAFSA ASAP.
- Provide UHY determination for independent student status.
 - “The director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or **other program serving individuals who are experiencing homelessness**”
 - Utilize SHC [sample form letter](#) to provide UHY determinations or partner with the FAA office to determine UHY
- Partner with FAA office for referrals and ensure FAA offices are compliant with federal law and [guidance](#)
- Review SAP policies and consider homelessness as an extenuating circumstance

Best Practices



Basic Needs

- Housing
 - Prioritize on-campus housing for students experiencing homelessness
 - Gap housing/emergency housing
 - Community partners
- Food
 - Food pantries/basic needs hubs
 - SNAP
- Health and Wellness
- Child care
- [Tips for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)



What Next?

SHC Homeless Higher Education Liaison Learning Network

- Over 90 liaisons from 25 states
- Large Illinois presence!
- Informal network to share best practices and peer learning
- Professional development opportunity (present at virtual and in-person conferences)
- First meeting is October 28th from 2-3:15 PM Central
- Meetings are recorded and sent out afterwards

Let's Connect + Resources

LinkedIn: [SchoolHouse Connection](#)

Instagram: [@SchoolHouseConnection](#)

YouTube: [@SchoolHouseConnection](#)

Facebook: [SchoolHouse Connection](#)

Bluesky & X: [@SchoolHouseConn](#)

[SHC Higher Education Page](#)

- [Tips for Helping Homeless Youth Succeed](#)
- [Tips for Homeless Higher Education Liaisons](#)

[SHC FAFSA Page](#)



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- News related to education and homelessness



<https://bit.ly/4brxbor>



Contact Information



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