

# Draining the School-to-Prison Pipeline

SUPPORT  
Center  
FOR  
child  
advocates

*"Draining the School-to-Prison Pipeline" is a monthly publication addressing issues of community school reintegration, sharing practical recommendations to support returning students, tracking relevant public policy and legislation, and addressing racial and other inequities in Pennsylvania's educational system.*

## Youth Homelessness and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

On any given night in the United States, an estimated 41,000 unaccompanied youth will experience homelessness (1). An "unaccompanied youth" is a young person aged 13–25 who has no designated family group or no direct connection to a parent or guardian (1). Earning a high school diploma is a key intervention for the long-term stability of these young people.

Unfortunately, students who experience homelessness are more likely to be pushed out of school than their peers. These students find themselves more exposed to punitive discipline practices in school, which contribute to further isolation from the school community, and may lead to increased involvement in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems (2). In some states, youth experiencing homelessness are suspended from school at twice the rate of their housing-stable friends (2). These suspensions often stem from minor school infractions related to their housing status such as: being out of uniform, being late or truant from school, displaying defiant behavior, or fighting as a result of bullying or pent up aggression (2).

As a result of these disproportionate disciplinary practices as well as other barriers related to instability in housing that hinder a student's academic performance, youth who experience homelessness have poor long-term educational outcomes (3). Research indicates that youth who experience homelessness are 87% more likely to drop out of school (3). Without a high school diploma, youth are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness in adulthood, creating a self-perpetuating cycle (3).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the primary federal law addressing educational rights and protections for youth experiencing homelessness in the United States (4). The Act, along with other federal and state legislation, provides youth and families experiencing homelessness with the right to interventions and supports to increase stability in school, such as allowing youth to remain at their school of origin, transportation to and from school, and immediate enrollment if they must enroll in a new school (4). In Pennsylvania, the Act's requirements are largely carried out through the Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program.

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- 4) 42 USC CHAPTER 119, SUBCHAPTER VI, Part B: Education for Homeless Children and Youths

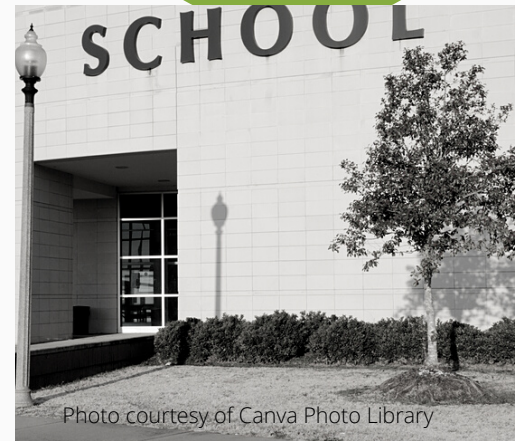


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### Table of Contents

Grow Your Knowledge

Spotlight Series p.2

From Policy to Practice p.2

The Road from Our Reality to Our Responsibility p.3

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## Grow your knowledge



[CLICK HERE](#)

Check out this episode of the Miseducation podcast featuring a teen discuss how homelessness affected her education.

# SPOTLIGHT SERIES

*Our Spotlight Series highlights individuals and organizations that are doing innovative and important work on the issues of community school reintegration, dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, and addressing bias in education.*

### **Manna House Apartments (Wilkes-Barre)**

Volunteers of America's Manna House Apartments, located in Wilkes-Barre, offers transitional housing for homeless young adults, ages 18-25 years old. The program provides eight units of safe, affordable housing as well as support services so that residents can build skills, obtain employment and transition to permanent housing within two years. Call 570-825-0542 or [CLICK HERE](#) for the website.

### **Burrowes Street Youth Haven (State College)**

The Burrowes Street Youth Haven (BSYH) is a four-bed facility located in State College, PA. This voluntary shelter houses both males and females ages 12 through 18, for a maximum of 15 days. Youth are welcome to access this shelter whenever they need a safe place to stay, day or night. There are caring, professional counselors at the facility 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to offer their assistance for both residential or drop in care. Call 814-234-2100 or [CLICK HERE](#) for the website.

**To assist youth in Pennsylvania who may be experiencing homelessness or housing instability, check out these resources from around the Commonwealth**

### **The Valley Youth House (Multiple locations and services across PA)**

The mission of Valley Youth House is to provide prevention and intervention services, counseling, life skills and behavioral health services to abused, neglected, and homeless youth and their families. Valley Youth House programs foster positive growth enabling at risk youth and their families to become healthy, productive, responsible members of the community. Call 215-925-3180 or [CLICK HERE](#) for the website.

### **Covenant House (Philadelphia)**

This emergency shelter can house any young person 21 and under. Call 215-951-5411 or Toll Free 888-829-1249 or [CLICK HERE](#) for the website.

## From Policy to Practice

- Create a community closet that has school uniforms, school supplies, and hygiene products free of charge for students. In addition, set up a "fee fund" to cover experiences like activity fees, class trips, yearbooks, school pictures, and other school activities.
- Embrace untraditional or creative ways for students to complete take home assignments.
- Ensure students have access to reliable transportation to and from school.
- Be flexible about deadlines for assignments.
- Provide extra space in classrooms or hallway closets for youth who must carry more of their things than just what they need for school to store their belongings.
- Know who your school or district has designated as its federally-required Homeless Liaison (<https://directory.center-school.org/homeless/liaison>); work with that person to identify other resources or supports that may be available.

# The Road from Our Reality to Our Responsibility

Every issue of this digest addresses issues of racial disparity and other inequities in the systems of education, juvenile justice, child welfare, and behavioral health by identifying systemic barriers, introducing evidenced-based research for dismantling current practice, and creating a blueprint for structural change and empowerment.

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) youth, youth who identify as LGBTQIA+, youth with disabilities, and other historically oppressed populations are more likely than their peers to experience homelessness (2). Black and Brown youth are twice as likely as their white peers to experience homelessness; youth who identify as Indigenous experience homelessness and housing instability at almost triple the rate of their white peers, and double the rate of Black and Hispanic youth (1). Youth who identify as members of more than one of the marginalized populations have an even higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness (1). Symptoms of homelessness and housing insecurity can manifest in behaviors that can further isolate these youth and expose them to the school-to-prison pipeline.

## Past

BIPOC youth are more likely than their peers to experience homelessness and housing insecurity because of historically racist systemic barriers that have lingering effects today. Specifically, redlining policies between the 1930's and 1960's:

- Created high concentrations of BIPOC individuals in communities with high rates of poverty; (3).
- Led residents in those communities to be exposed to environmental toxins, have less access to social and other services, encounter less nutritional food options, and be required to attend poorer-resourced schools (4);
- Contributed to a lack of economic investment in BIPOC communities that reduced employment opportunities (3).

## Present

The lingering effects of redlining that increase the likelihood BIPOC youth to experience homelessness also affect their current ability to succeed in school. The academic achievement gap between BIPOC youth and their white peers can perpetuate a cycle of homelessness and housing insecurity in communities of color. Research has shown that youth who experience homelessness also tend to start school academically behind and seldom have the opportunity to catch up to their peers (4). Moreover, these young people are more likely to experience trauma which may manifest in a variety of different ways, such as aggressive or irrational behavior, leading schools to impose disciplinary practices (5).

## Future

Several strategies can assist schools and school systems to be more responsive to the needs of youth experiencing homelessness:

- Create trauma-informed schools. This is one way educators and school teams can support youth experiencing housing insecurity. Creating trauma-informed learning environments supports cognitive functions and minimizes exposure to toxic stress (4).
- Collect accurate data of youth who are experiencing homelessness.
- Coordinate interdisciplinary team meetings to collaborate and identify levels of intervention that can be provided to the student and the student's family.-
- Consider holding affinity groups for youth that may be experiencing homelessness.

Slogan used by Valley youth House to bring awareness to the various forms of youth homelessness

For more information about McKinney-Vento click [HERE](#)

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