

Bridging the Graduation Gap:

Stability Is Key for Homeless High School Students

High school graduation is a key marker of educational achievement. Adults with a high school diploma are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes; have better health; stay out of prison; avoid becoming parents as teenagers; and ultimately have greater life satisfaction than those who drop out or get their high school equivalency.¹ In New York City schools, there has been a tremendous increase in the four-year graduation rate, from less than half of students graduating in 2005 to almost three-quarters in 2015.² Yet not all students are represented in this positive trend; most notably, many homeless students are left behind. However, newly analyzed data from New York City Department of Education show that when homeless students maintain stability in school, they graduate at similar rates to their housed classmates.³ This snapshot presents data on housing transitions, school transfers, chronic absenteeism, and the relation of these stability factors to high school graduation.

Graduation Rates and Homelessness

Understanding why housing transitions place homeless students so far behind is key to closing the graduation gap.

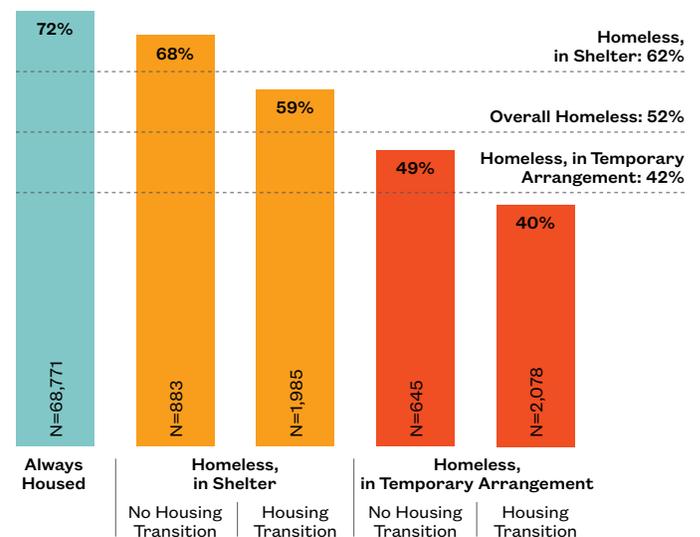
Overall, homeless students graduate at a lower rate than housed peers (52% to 72%).

Graduation rates differ by type of homelessness: high schoolers who live in shelter throughout or for some portion of high school graduate at a higher rate than those who live in temporary non-shelter arrangements, such as doubled up or in hotels (62% to 42%).

Transitions in and out of shelters or other temporary non-shelter arrangements have a negative effect on all homeless students. High schoolers with no transitions graduate at higher rates: 68% of students who remain in shelters throughout high school graduate while 59% of students who enter or exit the shelter system graduate.

Four-Year Graduation Rates, by Housing Transitions and Housing Status

Class of 2015



Note: All variables were looked at over the duration of high school (SY 2011-12 to SY 2014-15). "Temporary Arrangement" refers to students living in non-shelter homeless settings at some point during high school, including doubled up or other temporary situations. "Housing Transition" refers to a student transitioning into or out of permanent housing at some point during high school.

Source: New York City Department of Education, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, SY 2011-12 to SY 2014-15.

Transferring Schools and Homelessness

Points of transition—whether becoming homeless or exiting homelessness to permanent housing—are critical times to support students so they can maintain school stability.

Over a third of homeless high school students transfer schools mid-year—double the rate of housed peers (36% to 18%).

Homeless high school students who move in and out of shelters are twice as likely to transfer schools during the school year than homeless students who remain within the City shelter system all four years.

Homeless students who stayed in temporary non-shelter arrangements transfer more often than their peers who either have homes or have been in a shelter.

Chronic Absenteeism and Homelessness

Housing and school transitions place students at greater risk for chronic absenteeism.

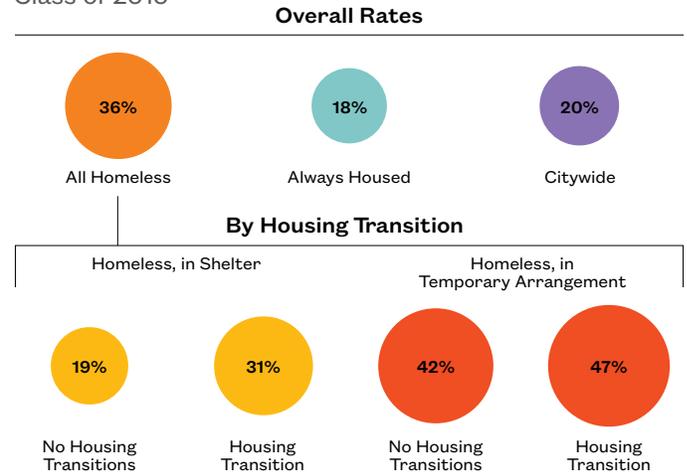
Overall, homeless students are more likely to be chronically absent at some point during high school: 63% miss 20 or more days in one year compared to 45% of housed students.

Housing transitions alone, whether becoming homeless or exiting homelessness to permanent housing, do not significantly impact homeless students' chronic absenteeism rates.

By contrast, housing transitions coupled with a mid-year school transfer make high school students four times more likely to be chronically absent.

Four-Year Transfer Rates, by Housing Transitions and Housing Status

Class of 2015

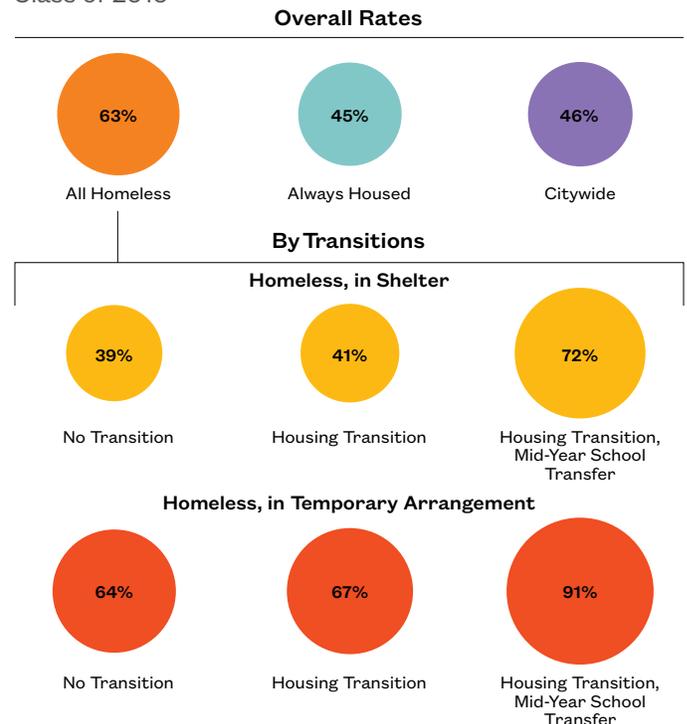


Note: All variables were looked at over the duration of high school (SY 2011–12 to SY 2014–15). “Temporary Arrangement” refers to students living in non-shelter homeless settings at some point during high school, including doubled up or other temporary situations. “4-Year Transfer Rates” refers to the percentage of students who transferred schools mid-year at some point during high school. “Housing Transition” refers to a student transitioning into or out of permanent housing at some point during high school.

Source: New York City Department of Education, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, SY 2011–12 to SY 2014–15.

Four-Year Chronic Absenteeism Rates, by Transitions and Housing Status

Class of 2015



Note: All variables were looked at over the duration of high school (SY 2011–12 to SY 2014–15). “Temporary Arrangement” refers to students living in non-shelter homeless settings at some point during high school, including doubled up or other temporary situations. “4-Year Chronic Absenteeism Rate” refers to the percentage of students who were chronically absent (missing 20 or more school days in a single year) during their four years of high school. “Housing Transition” refers to a student transitioning into or out of permanent housing at some point during high school. “School Transition” refers to a student transferring schools mid-year during at least one of their four years of high school.

Source: New York City Department of Education, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, SY 2011–12 to SY 2014–15.

Instability and Graduation

Stability, irrespective of setting, is key to improving homeless students' graduation rates. However, relatively few homeless students are able to maintain school stability and many transfer schools mid-year—especially when they are recently homeless or have exited homelessness to permanent housing. When homeless students' lives are disrupted by housing transitions and school transfers, it becomes increasingly difficult to attend school regularly.

Close to 90% of homeless students who experience no instability factors graduate from high school, regardless of the type of homelessness they experience.

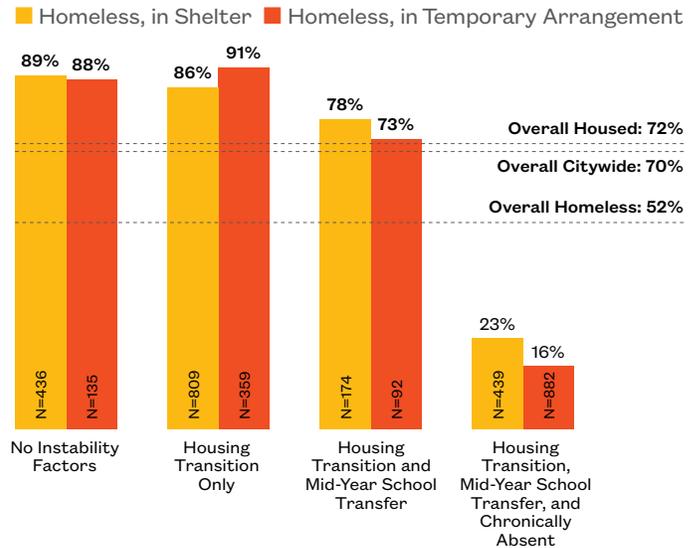
Housing transitions unaccompanied by other instability factors do not greatly affect homeless students' graduation rates. Homeless high schoolers who undergo only a housing transition, either through a shelter or temporary non-shelter housing arrangement, graduate at similar rates to those who do not experience any instability factors (about 90%).

When students who transition housing also transfer schools mid-year, graduation rates drop below 80%.

How can students facing instability factors—housing transitions, mid-year school transfers, and chronic absenteeism—graduate at similar rates to their peers? Supporting students through transitions is critical to preventing chronic absenteeism and decreasing the graduation gap. Shelters and schools can provide the stability and resources required by homeless students to graduate. As community resource centers, they can also extend their services to other students in the community. In addition, McKinney-Vento liaisons can support homeless students by ensuring that children in shelters and temporary non-shelter arrangements are enrolled, remain in school, and graduate along with their peers. With proper connection to services, homeless young adults can exit the New York City Public School system to a future that has not been pre-determined by their housing status.

Four-Year Graduation Rates, by Instability Factors and Housing Status

Class of 2015



Note: All variables were looked at over the duration of high school (SY 2011–12 to SY 2014–15). “Temporary Arrangement” refers to students living in non-shelter homeless settings at some point during high school, including doubled up or other temporary situations. “4-Year Transfer Rates” refers to the percentage of students who transferred schools mid-year at some point during high school. “Housing Transition” refers to a student transitioning into or out of permanent housing at some point during high school.

Source: New York City Department of Education, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, SY 2011–12 to SY 2014–15.

Chronically absent high school students who experience housing transitions and school transfers are far less likely to graduate. Less than one-quarter of homeless students who experience all three instability factors graduate.

1 Measure of America, *High School Graduation in New York City: Is Neighborhood Still Destiny?* May 2016, 2.

2 Measure of America, *High School Graduation in New York City: Is Neighborhood Still Destiny?* May 2016, 2.

3 SY 2014–15; Data excludes charter schools.

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