The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess the health risk behaviors of youth and adults in the United States. For the 2017 survey administration, two optional questions about homelessness were added to the survey, with 17 states responding to those optional questions. In 2019, 27 states responded to the optional questions. The 2021 standard questionnaire will, for the first time, include one question about homelessness. States will also have the opportunity to choose an additional optional question. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed demographic and risk factor data from the YRBS in 27 states [i], comparing high school students experiencing homelessness and those not experiencing homelessness. This series shares the striking and heartbreaking results of that analysis, with tangible action steps schools can take to promote safety and health for students experiencing homelessness.

SchoolHouse Connection's analysis of the 2019 YRBS data found that students of color are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness.

- Black or African American students comprise only 13% of all high school students but represent 20.3% of high school students experiencing homelessness.
- Hispanic or Latino students comprise 25.6% of all high school students but represent 35.9% of high school students experiencing homelessness.
- American Indian/Alaska Native students comprise 1.4% of all high school students but represent 1.6% of high school students experiencing homelessness. [ii]

**THE METHODOLOGY**

The YRBS utilizes a two-stage cluster sample design to generate a representative sample of high school students across various states. Schools were selected with probability proportional to school district enrollment size and representative classrooms were then randomly selected. Each state met the CDC requirement for overall response rate of at least 60% for using population weighted data. The weighting was adjusted for non-response rates and for students’ grades, gender, race, and ethnicity. More information about the sample procedure and weighting process, as well as the data that support the findings of this study, are available publicly on the CDC website. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Version 27 and R Studio 1.4.1103. All prevalence rates and tests of significance were calculated using weighted data.
Although the YRBS survey is anonymous, some students experiencing homelessness may be hesitant to identify themselves because of fear of retaliation, historical trauma, stigma, etc. This includes Asian American and Pacific Islander students. Research shows subgroups of Asian American and Pacific Islander students have disproportionately negative education outcomes that are masked when educational institutions do not disaggregate data by subgroupings.
These data mean that Black high school students are 2.25 times more likely to experience homelessness, American Indian/Alaska Native students are 1.7 times more likely to experience homelessness, and Hispanic high school students are just over two times more likely to experience homelessness, than White high school students.
The YRBS homelessness data described above include high school students who experience homelessness as part of families, as well as high school students who are homeless by themselves. Studies of unaccompanied homeless youth that also include young adults have found similar disproportionalities for both racial and ethnic minorities. Some studies also have shown higher rates of homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Native youth. In schools, racial and ethnic equity requires a deliberate, district-wide commitment over time.

**ACTION STEPS FOR SCHOOLS**

1. Collect and disaggregate data on students experiencing homelessness. This could include basic identification data, as well as data on students of color experiencing homelessness who are suspended/expelled, chronically absent, graduate on-time, etc.

2. Support McKinney-Vento liaisons and other educators who communicate with families of color experiencing homelessness, to ensure they are relaying the law and its rights and protections in a way that centers anti-racism in conversations. NYS-TEACHS developed a helpful tool, "Centering Anti-Racism in Conversations with McKinney-Vento Families and Colleagues."

3. Adopt positive school discipline policies district-wide. Students experiencing homelessness are subjected to punitive discipline measures much more often than their housed peers. The risk of suspension or expulsion increases exponentially for students of color experiencing homelessness.

4. Develop and implement a school district or charter school data-driven Racial and Ethnic Justice Action Plan. The Plan should be based on the lived experiences of students of color and address racial equity impact assessments; funding inequities; ongoing training and support for all school staff to build a positive school climate; implicit bias; curricula and extra-curricular opportunities that respect and elevate the experiences of students of color; and other equity issues, with the voices of youth of color at the center.
McKinney-Vento liaisons play a critical role in connecting families and students to necessary educational rights, opportunities, and resources. It is imperative that liaisons understand the impact of their words when speaking with families and students of color. Their communication can mean the difference between helping a student of color experiencing homelessness feel supported and welcomed, or feel alienated and hopeless. NYS-TEACHS developed a tool that states and districts can use to support liaisons with these conversations, and it can be used as a springboard for district- and state-level trainings and other support.

5. Ensure that the McKinney-Vento homeless liaison has adequate time and capacity to participate in school climate activities and to collaborate with community agencies that provide food, health and mental health care, transportation, and housing, to meet students’ needs outside of school. These added services help show students they are valued by their school.

RESOURCES

- Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and National Women’s Law Center, Listening to Latinas: Barriers to High School Graduation
- NAACP, Advancing Equity in Education Webinar
- National School Climate Center
- Prevalence and Correlates of Homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Native Youth
- SchoolHouse Connection Webinar Series: Racial Equity and Students Experiencing Homelessness
- Teaching Tolerance, Examining Your School’s Climate

[i] AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, ID, IL, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MI, MT, NH, NM, NC, ND, PA, RI, SC, SD, VT, VA, WI
[ii] 2019 YRBS survey data is able to reflect Native American students experiencing homelessness for the first time.