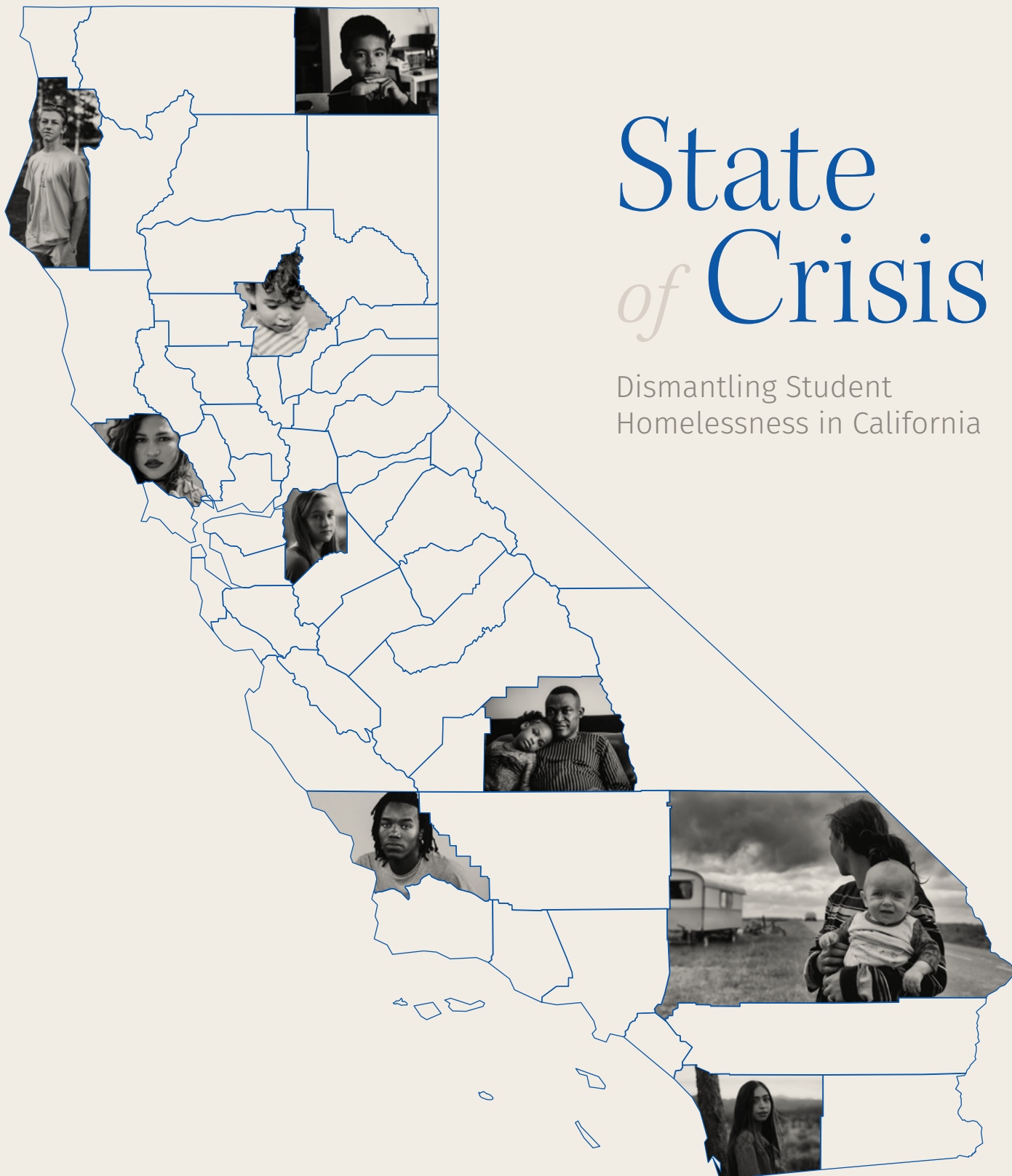# State *of* Crisis

Dismantling Student
Homelessness in California

cts | UCLA CENTER FOR THE
TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many of the preexisting inequities present for students and families profoundly impacted by poverty and inequality in California.

This includes over 4 million students in the Golden State who are economically disadvantaged, over 269,000 young people in K-12 systems experiencing homelessness, 1 in 5 community college students, 1 in 10 California State University (CSU) students, and 1 in 20 University of California (UC) students. The number of students experiencing homelessness in California K-12 settings has increased by over 48 percent in the past decade. Students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity tend to be disproportionately Latinx and Black with poor academic outcomes compared to their peers. The goal of this report is to explore the types of education and social supports that students experiencing homelessness need to succeed academically. Our analysis is based on the perspectives of over 150 stakeholders from across the state, including students, educators, homeless liaisons, community-based organizations, school districts, county offices of education, early childhood agencies and higher education institutions.

Given the complexity and scale of the challenges that students experiencing homelessness face in California, greater capacity and dedicated funding is needed to identify students experiencing homelessness to ensure they receive necessary educational supports.

An aggressive response to the issues experienced by students experiencing homelessness should include policy actions at the local, state and federal level to address the student homelessness crisis. We hope that by drawing attention to the perspectives of educators, homeless liaisons and by elevating the perspectives of students who experience homelessness, this report can serve as a catalyst for sustained and strategic action to ameliorate this growing problem.
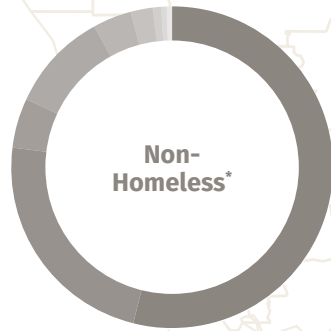
K-12 Homeless Cumulative Student Enrollment: 269,269 (4.3%)

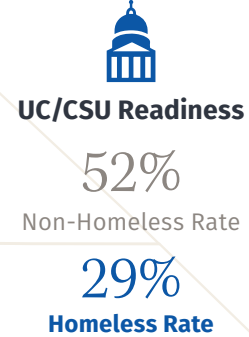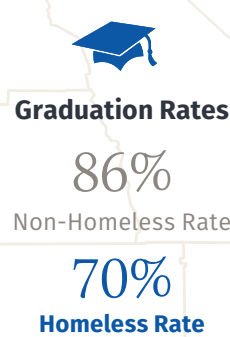### Total students in CA: **6,329,883**[1]

Student Enrollment by Race, 2018-2019[2]

	Non-Homeless*		Homeless
54%	Latinx	**70%**	
23%	White	**12%**	
5%	Black	**9%**	
10%	Asian	**3%**	
4%	Two or more races	**3%**	
2%	Filipino	**1%**	
1%	Not Reported	**0.8%**	
0.5%	American Indian or Alaska Native	**0.8%**	
0.4%	Pacific Islander	**0.6%**	

Student Educational Outcomes for California, 2018-2019[3]

Suspension Rates	Chronic Absenteeism	Graduation Rates	UC/CSU Readiness
3%	12%	86%	52%
Non-Homeless Rate	Non-Homeless Rate	Non-Homeless Rate	Non-Homeless Rate
6%	**25%**	**70%**	**29%**
Homeless Rate	**Homeless Rate**	**Homeless Rate**	**Homeless Rate**
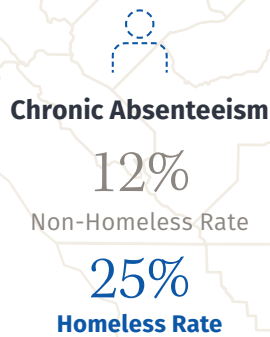
1 Represents the total number of primary and short-term enrollments for the school year: July 1 to June 30.

2 State education data were retrieved from multiple 2018-19 reports created on DataQuest, disaggregated by Homelessness and filtered by "yes" for students experiencing homelessness and "no" for non-homeless students, California Department of Education, 2019b (https://data1. cde.ca.gov/dataquest/)

3 Data in the infographic were retrieved from multiple DataQuest reports. Enrollment numbers were retrieved from DataQuest 2018-19 Chronic Absenteeism Rate under "Cumulative Enrollment", California Department of Education, 2019d.

Suspension rates were retrieved from DataQuest 2018-19 Suspension Rate, California Department of Education, 2019c.

Chronic absenteeism rates were retrieved from DataQuest 2018-19 Chronic Absenteeism Rate, California Department of Education, 2019d.

Graduation data were retrieved from DataQuest 2018-19 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, California Department of Education, 2019e.

Click here for the interactive map and full county-level data

LEARN MORE

Key **Findings**

From Stakeholders in the Field of Early
Childhood Education, K-12 & Higher Education

01 **Current professional capacity to support students experiencing homelessness is inadequate:** comprehensive, targeted and coordinated training is needed.

Additional training on common strategies that incorporate student supports such as: trauma-informed care, restorative practices, and efforts that promote positive social and emotional development are essential for schools serving students experiencing homelessness. This is especially true for educators working directly with LGBTQ students who experience high rates of homelessness and housing insecurity often due to family rejection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

02 **Homeless liaisons are struggling to effectively respond to growing needs** in their community, requiring more resources and staffing.

Student homelessness has increased by 48 percent over the last decade. The federal McKinney Vento Act (MVA) mandates that all school districts designate a homeless liaison who can serve as an advocate for students experiencing homelessness. Homeless liaisons are among the few staff who shoulder the major responsibilities for the academic success and well-being of young people experiencing homelessness, including the initial identification of students experiencing homelessness and managing whole support efforts to ensure student academic success.

03 **The prevalence of Latinx and Black students experiencing homelessness** requires more racially and culturally responsive strategies in education practice and policy.

Analysis of statewide statistics shows that Latinx (70%) and Black (9%) students who are experiencing homelessness are almost twice as likely to be suspended or miss an extended period of school to absenteeism, experience lower graduation rates, and to be less ready for college than their non-homeless peers. Addressing these patterns will require educators and policymakers to challenge the customary discourses related to homelessness, and the role race plays in determining the educational success of students.

04 **Students experiencing homelessness are often overlooked or misunderstood** in school settings, which can result in negative educational experiences.

A lack of understanding of student experiences can reinforce educator stereotypes about homelessness and heighten student feelings of isolation. Prioritizing consistent and caring school environments can help foster quality relationships between teachers and students, and help educators to identify and address underlying issues that can make students particularly vulnerable in school.

05 Better coordination is needed between child welfare, housing and education stakeholders to alleviate barriers for students and families.

To improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness, a greater focus must be placed on the coordination of efforts to address homelessness between schools, community-based organizations, housing, and county and state agencies. Doing so would make it possible to create an integrated, family-centered response aimed at disrupting cyclical patterns of homelessness. Greater coordination also acknowledges that no one public system (i.e. schools) can adequately respond to all the needs of young people and families.

06 Community-based organizations and nonprofits provide a critical function as part of an ecosystem of support for students and can get out resources to families quickly.

Nonprofit organizations provide services to students experiencing homelessness and families outside of the regular school day hours and on weekends. Fragmented coordination between schools, districts, homeless liaisons, and nonprofits or community-based organizations can create unnecessary obstacles for young people and families seeking support. There are emerging examples of school systems, community-based organizations, faith-based groups, counties, and governments who have been able to align services in communities for the benefit of students and families experiencing homelessness.

07 The bookends of education, early education and higher education are an essential part of a coordinated response to student homelessness, from cradle to college.

The nature of the challenges facing students experiencing homelessness varies considerably depending on their age and the type of educational institution in which they are enrolled. Distinct responses, coupled with more seamless educational pathways can help students experiencing homelessness encounter minimal disruption to their educational pursuits. Early interventions and continuous investments in quality school experiences can change mobility patterns across generations and break cycles of poverty. The California Community College (CCC), California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems are responding proactively through efforts like the California Higher Education Basic Needs Alliance (CHEBNA) to ensure that growing populations of students experiencing food insecurity, homelessness or other related challenges, are able to make academic progress and ultimately graduate.

Student **Perspectives**

Interviews with young people revealed a common set of patterns that can help inform the types of services and supports that are currently lacking in some educational settings.

Shared Experiences & Educational Patterns

**A lack of early mentorship and stability** can fuel a sense of distrust and isolation.

Students often struggle to identify strong mentors and caretakers, starting from an early age. Students also provided examples of the consequences of not having mentors who could understand and or identify with their circumstances. This speaks to importance of more liaisons and educators who can build strong, positive bonds with young people early in their schooling.

Adverse life experiences have changed the educational and employment trajectory of students (e.g. death in the family, abuse, traumatic life events, loss of school equipment, job loss).

A number of students shared examples of how a series of traumatic events, including the death of a primary caretaker, sibling or parent, abuse from a family member, job loss or essential item in their life (i.e. computer for classes) has profoundly impacted their ability to live healthy, stable, productive lives.

Students experiencing homelessness often lack the supports they need to fully engage in learning, ranging from basic needs to emotional and physical safety.

Young people seeking services at homeless drop-in centers struggle to identify trusted adults in their lives, and shared common challenges around having their basic needs met, including a predictable income, housing, clean clothes, and food. Students also shared stories of traveling great distances just to have their basic needs met, including one young man who travels 90 minutes to an LA-area drop-in center several times a week.
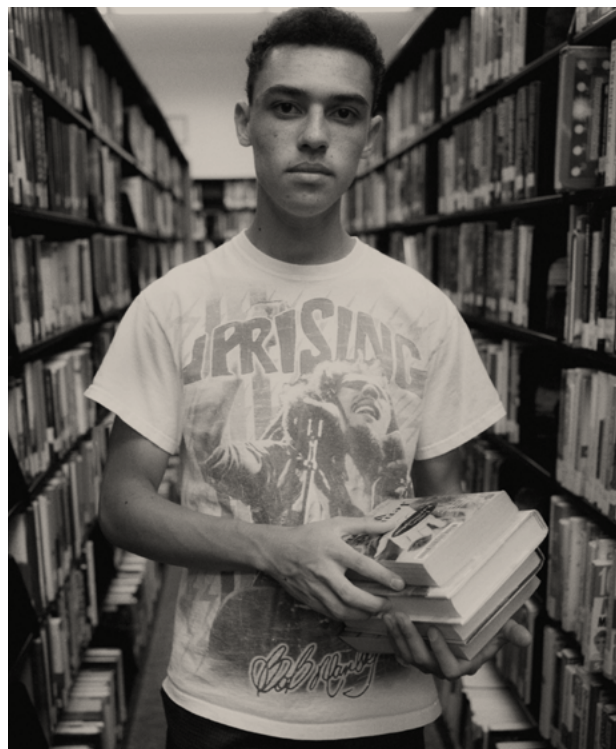
Educational Flexibility & Support

Education institutions must be more flexible in how they extend educational opportunities (e.g. credit recovery, remediation).

Students experiencing homelessness face unique challenges as a highly mobile population—not only in getting to school but also in whether they are placed in challenging academic courses. Sometimes appropriate student placement is difficult based on an unclear academic history to assess student knowledge or past schooling experiences. Consistent with scholarship on evidence-based education models for educating homeless students, schools must allow for flexible and high quality schooling experiences, requiring schools to restructure schedules, coursework, and other academic and extracurricular activities.

Policy **Implications**

Coordination among school district, city-level, county, state, and federal partners is needed to support the growing crisis of student homelessness, recognizing that no one branch of government has the resources or administrative reach to be effective if working in isolation. Key decision-makers from the public and private sector, including students, educators and lawmakers must work together to make the best use of limited resources in the face of a growing challenge. Policy options from our report are identified from each level of government.

School District Policies

- **Ensure that district resources for students experiencing homelessness are aligned with Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) goals,** and take into account the likely number of students experiencing homelessness and their needs.

- **Encourage the development and sharing of common district-wide strategies for identifying and serving students experiencing homelessness** so that responsibility for doing so does not fall solely upon the homeless liaison. This information sharing could help elevate strategies in place that districts may not know about. Additionally, prioritizing site-based liaisons can help eliminate school barriers to learning.

- **Adopt a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework to organize schools around the needs and learning interests of students experiencing homelessness.** Reduce suspensions that disproportionately impact unhoused students and students of color, and embrace alternative strategies to punitive discipline approaches.
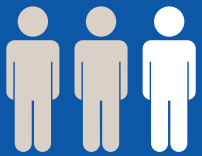
Cities & County Policies

- **Work between school districts, city and county agencies to provide and coordinate access to resources to support students and families experiencing homelessness** (e.g., affordable housing, neighborhood safety, reliable public transportation, and access to job training).

- **Encourage the support of development for after-school programming and community services** from businesses, faith-based organizations, and nonprofits.

- **Improve coordination across city departments to ensure more efficient service delivery and access to basic needs** in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by housing instability.

- **Focus on improving access to affordable housing options** for young people and families, including college age students.

- **Establish city-led efforts that focus more deliberately on K-12 and college level rapid rehousing partnerships** that meet student basic needs and address housing security challenges early for young people.

State Policies

- **Provide more targeted funding to augment Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)** in counties and districts that have the highest concentration of homelessness, as identified in the CTS state map on student homelessness.

- **Continue to invest in data systems like the Cradle to Career longitudinal data system** and standard procedures for identifying and tracking the educational progress and health of students experiencing homelessness, from birth to employment.

- **Increase access to high-quality early education programs as a foundational strategy** for targeting resources and services for young children and families.

- **Expand investments in the college-focused rapid rehousing and basic needs efforts** to reach more CCC, CSU and UC campuses that are being impacted by the student homelessness crisis.

Federal Policies

Establish a standard definition for student homelessness to improve the identification of young people for targeted support and resources to eliminate confusion that multiple definitions create for educators and school systems.

- **Adequately fund the McKinney Vento Act (MVA) to allow for federal resources to be directed to the state and local systems at a much larger scale** to support homeless student success and to address the student homelessness crisis across states. Currently, 2 out of 3 students experiencing homelessness in California are not being reached by MVA dollars due to limited federal funding.

- **Expand funding for full-service community schools to support primary health, mental health, and dental care** in schools. Adopt educational models that invest in young people before and after school.

- **Incentivize state efforts through federal funding streams that strengthen coordination** between early childhood education, colleges, housing, employment, and homelessness services providers as part of a whole-family approach to improve both child and family outcomes.

- **Increase financial aid packages to cover the total cost of attendance** for low-income students, including students experiencing homelessness, who often have to cover the majority of the cost of attendance out of pocket.

2 out of 3

students experiencing homelessness in California attend schools that receive no dedicated MVA funding.