Not Reaching the Door: Homeless Students Face Many Hurdles on the Way to School

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Table of Contents

Summary

IBO has previously documented in our annual compendium of public school facts and figures the growing number of students who live in temporary housing—in the city's homeless shelters, doubled up in apartments with other families, residing in hotels or motels, awaiting foster care placement, or other transitory situations. There was a 25 percent increase in the number of temporarily housed youth attending schools run by the city's education department from school year 2010-2011 through 2013-2014, when the number totaled roughly 83,000. Along with the growth in the number of school-aged youth living in temporary housing is a growing recognition that housing instability can affect students' education.

The challenges many temporarily housed students face begin before the school bell rings in the morning and continue throughout the school day and into the evening. Those bearing the greatest burdens are the students living in the city's homeless shelters—who comprised more than a third of the temporarily housed students in school year 2013-2014. This report focuses on some of the challenges these students face as a consequence of living in city shelters.

The first obstacle for homeless students is often simply being able to get to school—attendance rates are much lower for students in shelters and a much greater share are categorized as "chronically absent." We looked at some of the factors contributing to low attendance by these students. Among our main findings in this report:

- Although federal law requires that students entering the shelter system be able to continue to attend their "school of origin," this is not always feasible given that families are often placed far from their previous neighborhood and transportation arrangements can be difficult to implement or maintain.
- Demands of the shelter system can force families to move multiple times. Each relocation requires either making new travel arrangements to continue at the school of origin, or enduring the upheaval of transferring to a new school closer to the shelter. Short-term placements can also increase the likelihood of school moves.
- Not being settled in housing can contribute to being unsettled in school. Stressful living conditions and isolation from prior community support networks can exacerbate the burden of temporary living conditions. For families in the shelter system even such basic needs as doing the family laundry can be difficult—and an impediment to school attendance for children without clean clothes.
- The stresses faced by students in temporary housing can also put additional burdens on the school system and on schools—especially the minority of schools that serve the majority of students who are temporarily housed. Funding for the education department's unit that serves students in temporary housing has not kept pace with the growth in the number of homeless students in the schools. The city's primary formula for allocating funding to schools, which is weighted based on the needs of individual students in a school, makes no additional resource

provision for students who live in temporary housing.

- The city's education and homeless services departments have struggled to coordinate serving the same school-aged children. There are duplicative systems to track students and school attendance but the systems are not fully integrated. Additionally, there is not a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for monitoring school attendance and addressing attendance problems.

This report also represents a new step in IBO's approach to conducting studies. In addition to our typical quantitative focus, this report involved extensive field work by IBO Education Analyst Liza Pappas and incorporates the insights and perceptions of homeless families; teachers, principals, and other school staff members; as well as school district and central administration staff in the unit for students in temporary housing. Their input was captured through the participation of 12 schools across the city and included roughly 100 interviews and 10 focus groups.

Introduction and Descriptive Statistics

U.S. Department of Education data shows that nationwide, the number of students attending public schools who were homeless during school year 2013-2014 rose to more than 1.36 million, an 8 percent increase from the prior school year.[1] The New York State Education Department reported that 116,000 students experienced homelessness across New York State this same year, with 75 percent of those students attending schools in New York City.[2] The numbers of homeless students locally and nationally have escalated since the 2008-2009 recession.[3]

In school year 2013-2014, nearly 83,000 youth attending Department of Education (DOE) schools—roughly 8 percent of the system's 1.1 million students—self-identified as living in temporary housing for at least part of the year on a school-based residency questionnaire.[4] Temporary housing is an umbrella term for homelessness as defined in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.), which applies to school-aged children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.[5] Thirty-four percent of city students in temporary housing identified as living in homeless shelters, while 58 percent said they are doubled up, defined in the federal law as "shared housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason."[6] An additional 8 percent awaited foster care placement or resided in other temporary housing situations (for example, hotels/motels, cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned property, and on the streets).[7] In total, the number of students in temporary housing had increased by 25 percent since the 2010-2011 school year.[8]

Despite increased media attention to the crisis of homelessness for young people in New York City and across the country, less attention has been paid to the specific ways in which housing instability affects students' education, or to the steps schools and communities can take to better support students' educational success. In addition to the myriad hardships that students in temporary housing endure while experiencing homelessness, these youth can also face enormous hurdles when it comes to their schooling.[9] Although all students are entitled to access to the same education opportunities under McKinney-Vento as provided to students who are permanently housed, those living in impermanent housing experience higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness, more frequent school transfers, and insufficient, intermittent, and uncoordinated support for health care, social services, and transportation.[10]

Temporary housing poses obstacles for students before the school bell rings and lingers with them throughout the day. While analysts have pointed to many potentially negative educational impacts resulting from living in temporary rather than permanent housing, this report focuses on very low attendance rates, particularly for students living in shelters. Research shows that chronic absenteeism is associated with lower academic achievement, increased drop-out rates, and reduced college and career preparedness.[11] This report examines various factors within the shelter system that impede regular attendance, as well as students' productive experiences in schooling

more broadly. It also observes compounding challenges that result from difficulties in coordinating shelter placement for families near their children's schools, as well as from a lack of coordination between social service and education agencies in aiding the same children and families more broadly. The report also investigates the availability of comprehensive and systematic resources to combat absenteeism for students identified in temporary housing.

This study includes three areas of inquiry. First, we describe the diverse population of students identified in temporary housing in New York City schools. Analyses of the data focus on students residing in the two largest categories: shelters and doubled-up housing. Second, we document the scope of chronic absenteeism and severe chronic absenteeism for temporarily housed students compared with their permanently housed peers. Third, using evidence drawn from the perspectives of school staff and families, we explore reasons why students living in homeless shelters are more likely to miss school than students in permanent housing. We discuss the challenges posed for students and their schools.

Who Are New York City Students In Temporary Housing?

As required by the New York State Education Department, the New York City Department of Education developed a school-based residency questionnaire to ascertain the housing status of children enrolled in the city's public schools.[12] IBO used this data to produce a profile of temporarily housed students in the city and to describe their attendance patterns compared with those of permanently housed students.

Short-Term Trends. From school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014, the number of the city's public school students identified as living in temporary housing situations increased by 25 percent. Over that same four-year period, the number of students identified as doubled up jumped by 65 percent. The number of students living in shelters increased by 5 percent and there has been a slight decline in the number of students identified in "all other temporary housing" situations.[13]

Multiyear Involvement in Temporary Housing. By linking records across the four years studied, IBO has found significant numbers of students who are identified as

Four-Year Rise in Number of Students in Temporary Housing, School Years 2010-2011 Through 2013-2014
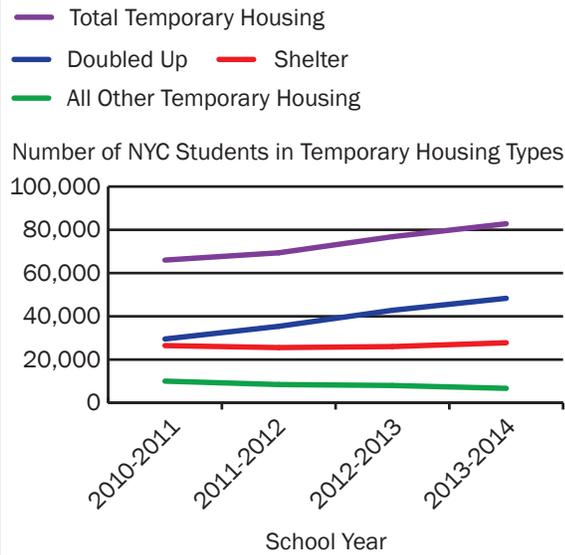
SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Excludes students in charter schools. All other temporary housing includes students awaiting foster care placement, students living in hotels or motels, and students residing in other temporary housing situations.
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living in shelter or in doubled-up housing in more than one school year, calling into question the meaning of the term temporary. Our data identifies students who were in a particular temporary housing status for any part of the school year. Therefore, when we say that a student is identified as living in shelter for two, three, or four years, we do not know if their shelter stay was continuous during this time period or if it was made up of moves into and out of the shelter system at different points in time.

For students identified as living in shelters in 2013-2014:

- 6,128, or 22.1 percent, were also identified as living in shelters in each of the 3 previous years of data (school years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013).
- 5,330, or 19.2 percent, were so identified in 2 of the 3 previous years.
- 7,066, or 25.4 percent, were identified in 1 of the 3 previous years.
- 9,248, or 33.3 percent, were identified in shelters for only the 2013-2014 school year.

Over the four-year period, 55,553 unique students (students are counted only once, regardless of their

Sixty-two Percent of Students Doubled Up in 2013-2014 Had Been Doubled Up for Multiple Years
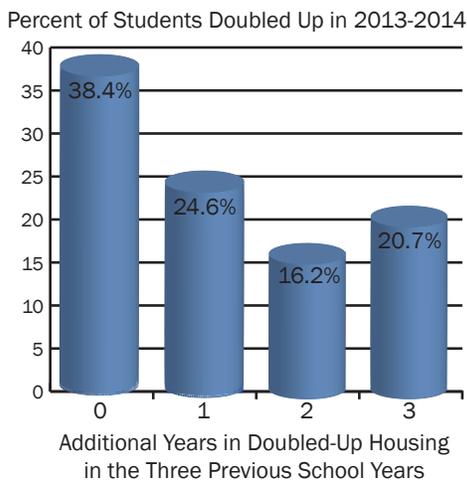
Percent of Students Doubled Up in 2013-2014

Additional Years in Doubled-Up Housing
in the Three Previous School Years

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTES: Percentages are of all students identified in shelters and doubled-up housing in 2013-2014 identified as living in these same temporary situations in three previous school years. Excludes students in temporary housing attending charter schools.
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Two-thirds of Students in Shelters in 2013-2014 Had Been in Shelter for Multiple Years
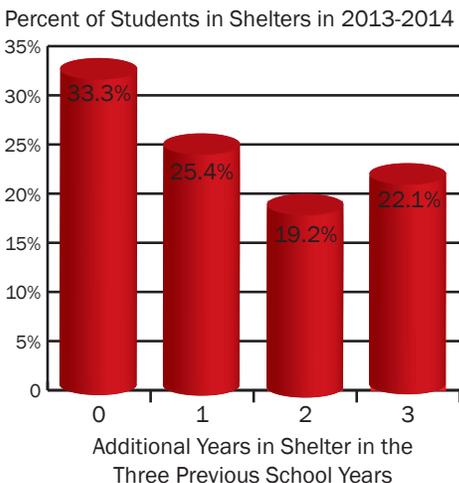
Percent of Students in Shelters in 2013-2014

Additional Years in Shelter in the
Three Previous School Years

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTES: Percentages are of all students identified in shelters and doubled-up housing in 2013-2014 identified as living in these same temporary situations in three previous school years. Excludes students in temporary housing attending charter schools.
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number of stays in a shelter) were identified as living in shelter for at least part of a single school year.

Similar results were found for students living in doubled-up housing in 2013-2014:

- 10,012, or 20.7 percent, were identified as living in doubled-up housing in each of the three previous years of data.

- 7,854, or 16.2 percent, were so identified in 2 of the 3 previous years.
- 11,893, or 24.6 percent, were so identified in 1 of the 3 previous years.
- 18,577, or 38.4 percent, were identified in doubled-up housing for only the 2013-2014 school year.
- Over the four-year period, 82,056 unique students were identified as living doubled up for at least part of a single school year.

Student Characteristics Vary by Housing Type. The vast majority of students residing in shelters were either black (53 percent) or Hispanic (42 percent). In doubled-up housing, Hispanics accounted for the largest share (57 percent). Asian and Pacific Islanders made up a much larger share of students in doubled-up housing (14 percent) than of students in shelters (1 percent). By way of comparison, among those students in permanent housing, 39 percent were Hispanic, 28 percent were black, 16 percent were Asian, and 15 percent were white.

Of students identified as residing in doubled-up housing, 33 percent received English language learner (ELL) services compared with 10 percent of students living in shelters and 13.5 percent of students living in permanent housing. Nearly 30 percent of students identified as living in shelters received special education services as outlined in their individualized education plans (IEPs) compared with 18.4 percent of students identified in permanent housing and 14.0 percent of students identified in doubled-up housing.

Students Living in Shelters and Their Concentration in Schools. In school year 2013-2014, 30 percent

Selected Characteristics of Students by Housing Type, 2013-2014

	Housing Type		
	Doubled Up	Shelter	Permanent
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian/Pacific Islander	13.9%	1.2%	15.9%
Black	23.4%	52.8%	27.9%
Hispanic	56.7%	42.4%	39.4%
White	4.9%	2.4%	15.2%
Receiving ELL Services	32.8%	10.3%	13.5%
Students with IEP	14.0%	28.3%	18.4%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Excludes students in temporary housing attending charter schools.
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Students in Shelters Are Concentrated in a Relatively Small Share of Schools, 2013-2014

Percent of Students in Shelters

Percent of New York City Schools, Districts 1-32
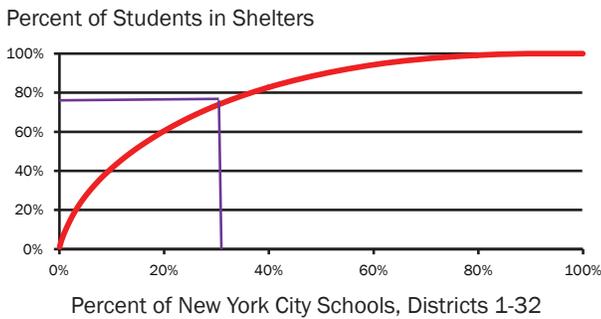
SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Based on 1,669 schools; does not include students in alternative education programs (District 79), special education schools and programs (District 75), and charter schools (District 84). Schools ranked in descending order by number of students in shelters.

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of schools in Community School Districts 1-32 (500 schools) served 73 percent of students identified in shelters in those same districts. Of those 500 schools, 50 percent were located in 7 school districts (districts 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12 in the Bronx and 17 and 19 in Central and East Brooklyn). Another 17 percent were located in districts 11 (Bronx), 5 (Harlem), and 16 and 23 (East New York and Brownsville).

Temporary Housing and School Attendance Rates. The attendance rate is calculated by dividing the number of

days that students are present in school by the number of total school days they are enrolled in the school year. IBO found differences between the attendance rates of all temporarily housed students and their permanently housed peers at every grade level in 2013-2014. In general, temporarily housed students had attendance rates about 5 percentage points lower than permanently housed students. While students in doubled-up housing generally attended school only slightly less frequently than students in permanent housing, students in kindergarten through eighth grade living in shelters showed significantly lower attendance rates than their peers in either doubled-up or permanent housing.

Average attendance rates for groups of students can mask whether many different students are each missing a few days of schools or if a relatively small number of students are missing many school days. The graph on page 5 exhibits rates of chronic absenteeism (missing more than 20 days, which is about 10 percent of the school year) as well as severe chronic absenteeism (missing more than 40 days, or 20 percent of the school year) by housing status. Students living in shelters had the highest rates of both chronic absenteeism and severe chronic absenteeism compared with students in doubled-up housing or those in permanent housing. Almost a third of students in shelters were chronically absent and another third were severely chronically
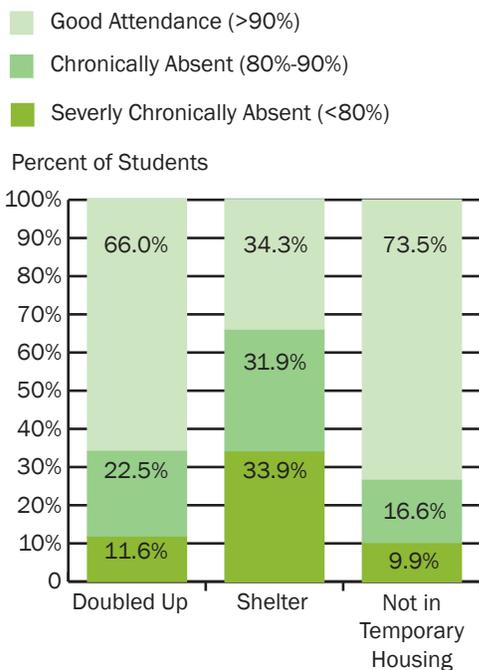
Lower Attendance Rates for Temporarily Housed Students, 2013-2014

Grade	Doubled-Up Housing		Shelter		All Temporary Housing		Permanent Housing	
	Number	Average Attendance Rate	Number	Average Attendance Rate	Number	Average Attendance Rate	Number	Average Attendance Rate
K	5,592	88.9%	2,409	80.0%	8,356	86.2%	68,960	91.5%
1	5,616	90.6%	2,723	82.2%	8,767	87.9%	72,669	92.8%
2	4,528	91.4%	2,541	83.7%	7,469	88.7%	69,776	93.4%
3	3,935	92.0%	2,422	85.0%	6,775	89.4%	68,220	93.9%
4	3,561	92.3%	2,137	85.6%	6,073	89.9%	66,495	94.1%
5	3,325	92.6%	1,870	85.9%	5,590	90.3%	64,598	94.1%
6	3,161	92.3%	1,830	84.0%	5,398	89.4%	63,612	93.6%
7	2,747	91.5%	1,830	83.4%	4,980	88.3%	65,050	93.3%
8	2,572	90.7%	1,818	81.1%	4,854	86.6%	67,226	92.0%
9	3,163	85.1%	2,177	68.5%	6,033	77.8%	80,215	85.0%
10	2,610	86.2%	1,549	71.8%	4,702	80.1%	76,644	85.9%
11	1,777	86.7%	939	73.6%	3,101	81.5%	64,556	87.2%
12	1,507	79.0%	854	69.7%	2,784	74.6%	68,922	81.7%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Excludes students in alternative education programs (District 79), special education schools and programs (District 75), and charter schools (District 84).

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Students in Shelters Have Highest Rates Of Chronic Absenteeism, 2013-2014

- Good Attendance (>90%)
- Chronically Absent (80%-90%)
- Severely Chronically Absent (<80%)

Percent of Students

	Doubled Up	Shelter	Not in Temporary Housing
Good Attendance (>90%)	66.0%	34.3%	73.5%
Chronically Absent (80%-90%)	22.5%	31.9%	16.6%
Severely Chronically Absent (<80%)	11.6%	33.9%	9.9%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Students grades K-12 only. Students in Districts 75, 79, and 84 were excluded from this analysis.

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Students in Shelters Have Lowest Rate of Good Attendance, 2013-2014

	Good Attendance		
	Doubled Up	Shelters	Permanent
Male	66.2%	34.5%	73.4%
Female	67%	34.8%	74.3%
Asian	82.8%	53.9%	88.1%
Black	61.9%	36%	67.5%
Hispanic	64.3%	32.1%	68.2%
White	67.6%	38.7%	82.3%
Free/ Reduced Price Lunch	66.5%	34.6%	71.4%
U.S. Born	61.7%	33.4%	73.7%
Foreign Born	76.1%	56.1%	75.7%
English Language Learner	73.9%	40.9%	73.2%
Students with Disability	63.6%	29.8%	52.6%
Overage	58.7%	27.6%	63.6%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Excludes students in alternative education programs (District 79), special education schools and programs (District 75), and charter schools (District 84).

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absent in 2013-2014. While students in doubled-up housing were almost twice as likely as their peers in shelters to have good attendance (greater than 90 percent), 34 percent were chronically or severely chronically absent compared with roughly 27 percent among students in permanent housing.

For All Major Demographic Categories, Attendance Is Poorest for Students in Shelters. Regardless of their demographic characteristics, students living in shelters struggled more with attendance than students in doubled-up housing and those in permanent housing. In 2013-2014, only 34 percent of male students living in shelters had good attendance (attending school more than 90 percent of the time) compared with 66 percent of males in doubled-up housing and 73 percent in permanent housing. Only 39 percent of white students living in shelters had good attendance records,

compared with 68 percent of whites in doubled-up housing and 82 percent in permanent housing. Fifty-four percent of Asian students living in shelters had good attendance records, compared with 83 percent of Asians doubled up and 88 percent in permanent housing.

Forty-one percent of students in shelters receiving English language learner services were good attenders compared with roughly 74 percent of students who were either doubled up or in permanent housing. Thirty percent of students in shelters receiving special education services maintained good attendance compared with 64 percent in doubled-up and 53 percent in permanent housing. Students who were overage for their grade and resided in shelters had the lowest rate of good attendance, nearly 28 percent.

What Factors Contribute to Higher School Absenteeism Rates Among Students in Shelters?

Knowing that—with a few exceptions—students in shelters are absent significantly more than their permanently housed peers and that they have higher rates of chronic absenteeism and severe chronic absenteeism poses the question of whether the circumstances associated with living in shelters make school going more difficult and if so why. A recently updated study of chronic absenteeism in the city's schools by the New School's Center for New York Affairs touched on a couple of the challenges associated with homelessness that impact students' schooling experience such as the frequent relocation of families as well as transportation difficulties.[14] There was also a report from former Mayor Bloomberg's chronic absentee task force that generated specific strategies for increasing the attendance of students in temporary housing including a data sharing agreement by the city's education and homeless services agencies.[15] IBO's study of how homelessness affects schooling is based on 100 interviews with DOE school staff at 12 schools and 6 focus groups comprised of close to 30 public school families. The interviews and focus groups were conducted over an eight-month period, from December 2014 through August 2015.

Students residing in shelters were identified as having the most attendance difficulties; therefore the balance of this report is primarily focused on them. In general, students living in shelters are also identified more easily than students in doubled-up housing, making the study's findings more robust. Because the definition of doubled up is somewhat vague in the federal law, it was not surprising that the school staff we interviewed differed in how they characterized families as doubled up. Some considered whether the family had the security of a lease, others whether there was more than one family living in the space; still others zeroed in on whether the child slept in a bed. Some school staff expressed apprehension about the doubled-up categorization given that New York City has been a key immigration portal for over a century, and as a result many families have had the experience of sharing housing. Given this variation in definition, it is likely that the students identified in the doubled-up category include a wide mix of housing arrangements with some more likely to have negative consequences for schooling than others.

It is important to note that students and their families who live in shelters funded by the city encompass a wide range of living situations. In 2013-2014, the city's Department of Homeless Services (DHS) placed families with school-aged children in close to 200 shelters with different service models including Tier II shelters, cluster sites (previously referred to as scattered or scatter sites), converted hotels and motels, and housing for survivors of domestic violence. Tier II shelters provide housing and services to 10 or more families. Cluster sites provide shelter in privately owned residential buildings that can house both private rent-paying tenants and DHS clients. Participating landlords are required only to provide shelter, not social services. Concerned about the poor conditions and lack of services, the city has pledged to end the use of cluster sites to shelter the homeless.[16] In school year 2014-2015, the city also used commercial hotels

that serve paying guests as well as those placed by city agencies. DHS has resumed placing families in commercial hotels as an emergency measure due to shortages elsewhere in the system. In April of 2016, the city announced the consolidation of the city's DHS and Human Resources Administration (HRA) programs to combat homelessness.[17]

Qualitative Data Sources

This study focuses on how living in a shelter affects children's schooling, particularly as it pertains to attendance. The qualitative data in this section derive from research conducted by IBO from December 2014 through August 2015 via interviews and focus groups with DOE staff in 12 schools and families with children in the city's public schools.

These included:

- Seventy-seven unique interviews with staff at 12 New York City public schools.
- Twenty-two interviews with staff from DOE's Students in Temporary Housing (STH) unit.
- Two focus groups comprised of school principals.
- Six focus groups comprised of families living in shelters for a total of 28 parents.

IBO requested to see the process at the Department of Homeless Services' Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) family intake center but officials did not respond. DHS staff did respond to IBO's requests for information and clarifications on regulations and procedures. While the report is informed by information from DHS, the perspectives or viewpoints of DHS staff are not presented here.

Data Coding/Analysis. Interview transcripts and notes were entered into a software package and coded to provide an initial analysis of data collected. To examine the prevalence of particular themes across schools and respondents in the sample, we generated simple counts—the number of schools where a specific practice, contextual feature, or challenge

is reported, as well as the number of respondents that made reports. We then applied a set of decision rules that defined standards for inclusion: reports have to be made in at least three schools and at least three respondents have to report any given practice, with no dissent from other respondents. In cases where respondents reported divergent views, those differences are noted. When reporting information is provided by only one respondent group (for example, DOE family assistants staff), that group is identified as the source of that information.

Data Use in Text. Throughout the report, IBO has incorporated direct quotations from study respondents as they enhance the clarity and relevance of the findings. These data uniquely provide detailed, contextual information that can convey meaning through illustrative examples from among the responses selected for inclusion in the study. They are meant to enrich a particular finding about respondents' reported experience. Note that when we are reporting on respondent's perceptions we are not vouching for the accuracy of their statements, rather, we are reporting their own perception of their experiences.

All direct quotes are from audio recordings. Paraphrasing is from notes rather than recordings and often originated from follow-up interviews that were not recorded, although a few are from original interviews that were unrecorded if respondents requested. Some quotations derived from focus group discussions are presented in the report's text as the actual conversations that unfolded among participants.

Tables of interview and focus group respondents organized by school are included in the appendix.

Data Anonymity. In accordance with the proposal submitted and approved by the DOE's Institutional Research Board, all schools and participants in this study are anonymous. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary.

THE SHELTER SYSTEM ENVIRONMENT CONTRIBUTES TO SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM AND HAMPERS SCHOOL SUCCESS

This section discusses four factors unique to shelters that can contribute to school absenteeism:

- Shelter system rules and procedures that conflict with parents' responsibilities for taking their kids to school.
- Transience within temporary housing that is destabilizing for children and disruptive to schooling.
- Greater difficulty accessing critical services such as laundry and child care while living in shelters, which had repercussions for school attendance and success.
- The overall shelter environment that creates additional burdens for families and interferes with school preparation and readiness.

For Families in Shelters, Conflicting Responsibilities.
Students in temporary housing situations can face a myriad of barriers that make regular school attendance difficult and sometimes secondary. The barriers are particularly formidable for those living in the shelter system. School staff interviewed recognized that the challenges for parents in getting their children to school were in many ways particular to each family's circumstances, but a frequent challenge involved mandatory appointments for parents in the shelter system. Families dependent on assistance can be required to be present for the maintenance of that assistance—often with their children. Families applying for housing assistance are required to bring their children to the application process. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for families in shelters to also be participating in programs through the Human Resources Administration. Some HRA appointments can interfere with school pick-up.

Every family that applies for temporary housing placement funded by the city must go through the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) center—one centralized facility that is located at 151 East 151st Street in the Bronx. Under Department of Homeless Services procedures, families arriving at PATH are interviewed by a DHS family worker who reviews the services that may be available to help them avoid entering the shelter system and obtains information about their prior living situations. Online, DHS lists a number of documents that families may need to submit as part of their application and explains that "families may be assigned a conditional shelter placement for up to 10 days while the department investigates whether any other housing is available to the family."[18]

Principals and teachers across schools reported that they did not know much about what happened at PATH or during the intake process, just that families were required to be present with their children and that the initial appointment could take up to several days, with children missing school for the duration of that time period. DHS attempts to complete the initial appointment in one or two days, noting that families who apply for a shelter placement after 5 p.m. may be asked to return to PATH the following day. Sometimes the process takes longer because families are missing documentation; there have been complaints that DHS has not been especially clear on what paperwork families need to bring for their application to be considered complete.[19]

While all family members must be present for the initial application appointment, to minimize school absences DHS written statements previously noted that "children do not have to return to PATH for appointments or conferences, unless specified." In four focus groups with parents living in shelters, however, parents uniformly reported that they had not been explicitly told not to have their children present at subsequent appointments at PATH after the initial application. As the process continued over several days they faced a choice between sending their child to school and completing the shelter application process. On the one hand, they risked their child(ren) missing school. On the other hand, parents risked losing their place in line for a shelter placement. Some parents did not have a way to both get their children to school and to complete the application process, especially if their child(ren) attended school far from the location of PATH. Across these focus groups, parents said that they had no clear directions on what the application process would entail, or how long it would take.

School staff said they understood families had to abide by DHS policy that children be present so that the housing application process could be completed. One parent coordinator commented that families had no

good reason to send their children to school during the intake process no matter how long because it would put their temporary housing application at jeopardy. As a parent coordinator at School 9 in Brooklyn said, "They are sometimes sitting two or three days in PATH... it's two or three days that the child can't leave [PATH] because if the child leaves then [the family is] not counted. And if they're not counted, then they become ineligible [for housing placement] and then they have to start all over."

Parents also expressed concern about a lack of guidance on how to navigate schooling decisions during the housing application process and during their conditional placements. Families are asked to provide the name and address of their youngest child's school as DHS attempts to make a shelter placement in the same borough as that school (an increasingly difficult aim with an overburdened system, as we will discuss). There is, however, only one part-time DOE official placed at PATH and meeting with that staff member is not a mandatory step in the process for families with school-aged children. Not one parent who participated in the focus groups and had gone through PATH had met with DOE staff or discussed their child's schooling with any other staff at PATH.

Families were then reliant on the availability of Department of Education Students in Temporary Housing staff at the shelter where they are conditionally placed to learn about their educational rights under the federal McKinney Vento law—including their rights to keep their child in their "school of origin" (the school they were previously attending before losing housing) and to transportation assistance (in New York City, generally a MetroCard) to the school of origin should they be placed far from it.[20] School staff interviewed communicated a very practical concern about how parents could be expected to get their children to school during the conditional placement, especially if the placements were not near their children's schools. Some families were delayed with enrollment or transportation assistance if they were placed in a facility not fully staffed by DOE because there is not a sufficient number of STH staff to cover every shelter with school-aged children. Families in conditional placements far from their children's schools could also wait out the 10-day period rather than make burdensome school travel arrangements.

In addition to concerns that families participation in the housing application process could interfere with children's schooling, school staff who participated in this research also frequently cited families' appointments with other agencies (especially the Human Resources Administration, which runs the public assistance program) as an impediment to their children's school attendance. HRA's multiple step application process for families seeking public assistance benefits was jokingly referred to by a contracted community organization partner at School 6 as "death by appointment." Appointments could interfere with parents' abilities to be at school on time for drop-off and/or pick-up and in those instances families could opt not to send their children to school. Some school staff recognized that the lack of structural supports for homeless families—for example, proximity to appointments—also contributed to difficulties these families face in both attending mandatory appointments and keeping their children in school. A high school guidance counselor pointed out that families in temporary housing can have their case file in their previous borough of residence, far from where they are temporarily placed. Often the mandatory appointment is not close by, noted the guidance counselor at School 11 in the Bronx, so parents take their children with them if they cannot drop them off or pick them up in time.

One other issue highlighted by the data collected for this study is the extent of the rules individual shelters can impose on families. For example, a few schools learned that in some cases shelters were requiring that parents be present for inspections of the families' living quarters at any time of day or night including times that conflicted with getting children prepared for school. A parent coordinator at School 5 in Manhattan questioned why a nearby shelter was requiring inspections at the exact time parents needed to focus on getting children dressed for school: "Sometimes [the parents] can't come to school...or the students will come here late. I mean, like, two hours late in the morning because they have to wait for the shelter people to inspect the apartment. Now, you know the kids attend school, so why don't you inspect, inspect it in the evening?"

The issue of shelter inspections that conflicted with schooling also came up in two of the focus groups with families residing in shelters. In both, parents

discussed that inspections happened without warning and interfered with schooling when they were held late at night, disruptive to children's bedtime and consequently their wake-up time, or early in the morning. "You have to leave everything neat and tidy, but the amount of time they give us to get up, to get the children ready for school, to make breakfast, to wipe bums, and to leave the place clean [is not enough]," said parent 4 in focus group 6 in Manhattan.
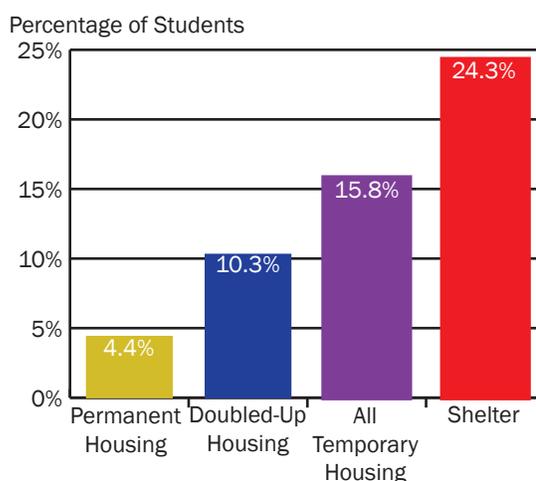
In summary, families' participation in the DHS shelter application process—including the time in conditional placements—resulted in children missing schooling. While children are required to be present with their families for the intake process, meeting with the DOE is not a mandatory part of the application process. HRA can also require parents to be present at the same times that they would need to travel to pick their children up from school. Shelters themselves can also make additional demands on families such as inspections, that when poorly scheduled can conflict with school. Lack of service coordination by the various agencies can result in families being overburdened and having to choose between tending to their own requirements and their children's requirement to attend school.

Transitory Nature of Temporary Housing Is Disruptive for Schooling. Transience is an involuntary component of temporary housing that spills into school life. The instability of temporary housing placements—which can involve moves from shelter to shelter and therefore school to school—was cited as interfering with school attendance and to educational success overall. In the 2013-2014 school year, 15.8 percent of students in temporary housing attended two or more schools compared with 4.4 percent of students in permanent housing.[21] Of the students in temporary housing, students in shelters were most likely to frequently change schools. In this same year, 24.3 percent of students in shelters attended two or more schools compared with 10.3 percent of students in doubled-up housing. Due to data limitations, we cannot say if any change of school occurred at the same time (or close to the same time) as a shelter placement or at some other point during the school year. Nevertheless, almost 1,500 students, or slightly more than 5 percent of students in shelters in the 2013-2014 school year, attended three or more schools, a phenomena that is rarely observed among the permanently housed (0.5 percent).

Overall, school staff interviewed for this study reported not understanding why families in temporary housing were changing schools so frequently. Educators were worried about the impact on individual students, as transience seemed to yield frequent and longer-term absences; they also acknowledged that missing children had an impact on the school—as their absence was included in a school's average attendance rate and their test scores figured in the averages used to help measure a school's performance. School staff inquired whether more could be done to keep schooling stable while students and their families were experiencing precarious housing situations.

Reasons for School Moves. Movement of families into and among shelter facilities may correspond with changes in school enrollment. When families with school-aged children move into the shelter system or move from one shelter facility to another, they can face a difficult choice regarding schooling, especially if they are placed in a shelter far from their child(ren)'s schools. This could force a parent to choose either to transfer their child to a school that is closer to the new shelter address—thus uprooting their child from the school that they were attending and know—or to continue at the school of origin but subject their child to a lengthy travel time from the new shelter to their original school.

Multiple Schools Attended by Housing Status: Percent of Students Attending Two or More Schools In 2013-2014

Percentage of Students

Permanent Housing	Doubled-Up Housing	All Temporary Housing	Shelter
4.4%	10.3%	15.8%	24.3%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data
NOTE: Prekindergarten students were eliminated from this school moves analysis. Of 82,807 students identified in temporary housing this year, 4,856 were removed (4,787 of which were in pre-K). A further .075 percent of students were removed due to data irregularities.

New York City Independent Budget Office

Families found eligible for shelter placement may still experience movement among shelters if they were placed when no other unit was available. In an overburdened shelter system, families are given whatever unit is available when they are approved, even if it does not meet their immediate needs. This can result in another move if and when a more suitable unit opens up. For example, a family with a member who is mobility impaired might have initially been placed in a walk-up. A change in family composition could also result in a move to another shelter.

Movement among shelters and among schools can also result when DHS finds families ineligible. In school year 2013-2014, from 1,800 to as many as 2,700 families with children under the age of 18 applied for shelter each month; of those applicants an average of 53 percent were found to be ineligible.[22] According to DHS, families initially found ineligible can appeal the decision and request a fair hearing within 60 days of that decision, or reapply for shelter by returning to PATH. If families are found ineligible because the city has identified a housing resource during the eligibility review, the family can be denied a placement during the appeal process. If families were found ineligible because there was not enough information to determine eligibility during the initial review, the family may be provided another conditional placement, although not necessarily the same conditional placement they had been previously given.

There are also time limits for some shelters. For families in domestic violence shelters, which are run by the Human Resources Administration rather than DHS, there is a maximum length of stay totaling 180 days, although some can be for less time. Once families in domestic violence shelters exhaust their approved number of days in the facility, they can then be transferred to another shelter. Other shelters in the city, such as those funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development, also have time limits.[23]

Lastly, families can request a transfer to another shelter. DOE's Students in Temporary Housing staff said that they worked with families to request shelter transfers for a variety of reasons, including proximity to their children's schools. Of course, schooling continuity is only one variable for which families request accommodation—proximity to medical or employment resources are others.[24]

The Link Between Short-Term Placements and School Moves. School staff interviewed understood the dilemma families faced when moved far from their children's schools, and were empathetic that families could change their minds after trying out a school and travel arrangement and finding it too cumbersome to sustain. School personnel, however, were less clear and less patient for other reasons students in shelters seemed to be transient. The vast majority of principals interviewed for this study questioned why students in temporary housing could be attending as many as three or four schools in one school year. Many perceived that school changes were being driven by the shelter system itself and were frustrated that more could not be done so students could be supported to stay in one school for the length of the school year. Without this kind of a policy, principals pointed out that any rotation within the shelter system meant a revolving door at school.

The frequency of school movement cited by principals can likely be traced back to the city's response to a large increase in the family shelter population during the 2014-2015 school year. In addition to placing families with school-aged children in cluster sites, DHS started to rent rooms in commercial hotels on a short-term basis as no other units were available.[25] While the data we obtained from the DOE does not allow us to observe the length of stay for families with school-aged children in individual shelters, DOE's Students in Temporary Housing program staff said that families were placed in commercial hotels for 30 days or longer. Indeed, much of the movement schools were experiencing with students seemed to be connected to DHS placement of families in these short-term placements. By the following school year, education department STH staff reported that the numbers of school-aged children placed in hotels had increased; at least 700 families with school-aged children were placed in commercial hotels in 2015-2016. But staff warned that this number could be an undercount as they may have missed additional students for whom they could not achieve a data match with DHS.

School administrators also expressed frustration that more and more families seem to be moved into short-term placements, which increased disruptions to schooling. As one principal commented, students and families were increasingly uprooted during a process that was intended to help them find a more secure

placement, bringing even more stress. "I think [it's] a really big issue that [families] literally have temporary placement before their temporary placement, said the principal of School 12 on Staten Island. "It seems more and more I'm hearing parents stressing about it because the kids are stressed about it. They are losing their home for whatever reason, which obviously is a whole upheaval to their lives, and then they go somewhere only for a few days to go somewhere else, and they're not even sure if they're going to remain there."

Parents interviewed were willing to share their personal experiences with moves in and out of and within the shelter system. The reasons they gave for moves were mostly similar to those aforementioned—shelter term limits, shelter availability, and ineligibility. Some said they were not given clear reasons for being moved. Families who were moved commented they had less than 24-hour notice, not enough time to pack their belongings. A few lamented that even involuntary moves meant that they had to go through the application process at PATH again.

What was striking was the number of temporary housing moves families made and the havoc it created for their children's schooling, regardless of whether they chose to change schools as a result. One parent said that she had experienced five moves across three boroughs, with impacts to her daughter's schooling. Parent 2 in focus group 3 in Brooklyn recounted: "I mean it's just moving around with [my daughter] is kinda hard. Because the first shelter we went to was an emergency shelter that was in Harlem. And the Tier II was in the Bronx. And the other shelter was in Sheepshead Bay. Then they sent us to Queens where I told them I could not be in Queens. First, because it was filthy. So, then afterwards they sent me to Bed Stuy... ."

This parent was placed conditionally in Harlem for an extended time totaling four and a half months. She subsequently received a placement through a domestic

> *"You know, I think my biggest gripe with the system is this whole rotation. So I don't know what it is that [families] can't stay in shelter for [the year]. There's a timeframe. And I understand that. But at least if there are school-age children let the timeline be for the year of the school... so that you're not disrupting the education of those children. And I don't think, because we're adults, we don't think about what that 8-year-old goes through...So you're asking this 8-year-old, midyear, pull up, go into a new school, meet new friends, and right before exams."*
>
> —Principal, School 10, Brooklyn

violence program for a little over a year in the Bronx. As the time limit was approaching, the caseworker there tried to get her an apartment but was unsuccessful. When she went back to PATH she was told she had lost her domestic violence residency status because it was determined she was no longer in danger. She was eventually moved to a family residence shelter in Sheepshead Bay, although this was delayed by damage the shelter sustained during Hurricane Sandy. She resided there for almost a year, and then was evicted for violating shelter rules—a charge the woman disputes. She went back to PATH a third time and was transferred to a shelter in Queens for a couple of days before being moved to a family shelter in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The mother said she did all she could to not change her daughter's school multiple times as she wanted her to have one constant in her life—her school and her teachers. The stress of school travel, however, had its own consequences including difficulties getting her daughter to school every day and keeping up with homework.

A second parent (parent 3, focus group 2 in the Bronx) said bluntly that she was forced to change schools with each temporary housing move because the travel to the previous school took a physical toll on her and her four children. For this parent, it was more realistic to send her children to the zoned school for each shelter but that meant her children had attended up to four schools during their elementary school years. The family, who had been living in a southern section of Brooklyn, entered the shelter system after being evicted. They were initially placed in a shelter in a central part of Brooklyn and the mother traveled with two school-aged children to their school of origin while the father worked.

After two years, it appeared that the family was going to move to an apartment using a housing subsidy but after the program lost funding the family returned to PATH and was placed in the Bronx. The two youngest children, both diagnosed with autism (and now school-

aged), had door-to-door transportation based on their special education status; the school system provided borough-to-borough travel, a long bus ride of two hours each way, back to the school of origin. The mother realized, however, she could not make the two-hour commute back to the same school for the two older children, so she moved both into one of the schools zoned for the shelter in the Bronx. A year later, after a domestic dispute, the mother received a domestic violence transfer to a shelter in east Brooklyn, an area new to the family. The location was too far to either of the previous schools, the first school in southern Brooklyn or the most recent school in the Bronx, so the mother enrolled the two oldest children in a third school zoned for the new shelter. (The two younger children reenrolled in their original Brooklyn school and got busing from the DOE.)

The family got a break the following April when they were able to rent an apartment. She and her four children made their fourth move—this time out of the shelter system. Her two oldest children finished out that school year returning to their previous school in the Bronx, and her two youngest remained in the original school in Brooklyn. Altogether her oldest daughter had attended four elementary schools (and transferred five times) by the time she was 11.

The average length of stay in shelters for families with children in 2013-2014 was 427 days, or about 14 months, an increase of 14 percent from the previous year.[26] DHS does not provide data on the number of moves families make while in the system (including both moves between shelters as well as moves between rooms or buildings within the same shelter). DHS also reports that 12.5 percent of families with children who exited to permanent housing returned to shelter in that same year, suggesting that some of these families experience frequent moves even when not in shelters. Regardless of the reason for a shelter move, it increases the likelihood of school moves.

Delays in School Enrollment for Students in Temporary Housing. When families with school-aged children arrive at PATH, schooling information for the youngest child is collected by the DHS family worker and entered into their data system (CARES). Optimally, any family with school-aged children should be directed to the DOE staff person. For a variety of reasons this is often not the case: until recently there has only been

one part-time DOE staff person at PATH and families have not been directed to meet with that staff person unless they specifically ask for help with a school-related matter. As a result, the family's first discussion about school arrangements often takes place at the conditional placement, with the DOE family assistant, the liaison between schools and shelters.

It is the Department of Education's expectation that families are seen within 24 hours of arrival if possible. DOE Students in Temporary Housing staff said that there were other variables that can make meeting families within 24 hours to discuss schooling difficult. One scenario is if parents work and the family assistant's hours at the shelter are over by the time the parent returns. Another scenario is if the family is located at a shelter where there is no full-time family assistant. Families who arrive at a conditional placement where there is no full-time family assistant can be directed to another staff member called the content expert (the DOE borough manager), the DOE Enrollment Center, or a shelter caseworker. Families who are placed in cluster sites do not have access to full-time staff so DOE tries to make alternate arrangements to meet with these families.

Whether the initial schooling information meeting happens during the conditional placement or at the shelter where the family has been placed once they have been deemed eligible, the assigned family assistant will review with families their rights under the federal law. The family assistant will encourage the family to send their school-aged children to school during the conditional placement period, but for those who are placed far from their child's school of origin this can be extremely difficult to achieve during an already stressful and uncertain time. Some parents prefer to wait to see where they land before making school decisions.

The primary purpose of the initial meeting with families is to explain their educational rights and to aid in initial transportation to school if necessary. The family assistant can send a notification letter to the school each child is attending, requesting that the school update the student's record in the education department's Automate the Schools (ATS) administrative system. But in most cases schools depend on parents to notify them that their address has changed. This update is critical as it officially identifies the student in temporary housing and opens

the way for additional rights under the federal law (such as transportation; Title I, Part A set-aside of $100; and free school meals).

Although there is a federal requirement that enrollment be processed promptly for students in temporary housing, it can involve numerous delays. The most common complaint from parents was being asked to provide a residency letter from the shelter (a letter to verify their residence at a homeless shelter) in order to register their child in the new school. By federal law, schools are supposed to immediately enroll children in temporary housing without a residency letter, but there were frequent complaints of schools not adhering to this requirement. School staff (the pupil accounting secretary or other assigned staff) in charge of school registration can be delayed in making contact with staff at the shelter to verify the family's residence—ostensibly a straightforward request—but more complicated when school and shelter staff are not in routine communication. In some instances, school principals resist enrolling students in temporary housing. Staff at the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing unit said they intervene when a school principal refuses enrollment; they invoke the federal law (and they report that they do so more often than they would like). Sometimes the matter will be elevated to the district superintendent or the head of the Office of Safety and Youth Development for resolution. Although Renewal Schools are excluded from requirements that other schools have to enroll students after the October 31st deadline if they have open seats (often referred to as "over-the-counter"), they are directed to enroll students in temporary housing at any time of the year.[27]

Once enrollment is completed, attendance at a new school can be further delayed for students living in temporary housing if they are in need of transportation assistance. The federal McKinney-Vento Act protects families' right to keep their child in the school of origin and requires that local education authorities provide students with transportation to and from their new location. This means providing a MetroCard unless the student meets eligibility criteria for bus transportation. Multiple steps are required to arrange bus transportation: a specific transportation request has to be completed at the new shelter. The student's file on the DOE's Automate the Schools administrative system

has to be updated. A shelter code has to be entered and transportation then has to be requested and then arranged by the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation. Reports from school staff as well as from STH staff indicated that this often took weeks.

There are additional complications. For students with disabilities, enrolling in a new school proved to be particularly problematic as it required coordination of mandated services in the new school among new personnel, regardless of what programs and services were available at the new school. These students have individualized education plans describing the services and supports they are mandated to receive; the IEP is supposed to travel with the child but there can be a gap in services when a student moves from one school to another and the new school lacks the resources to provide the required services and supports. For example, there might not be an occupational therapist at the child's new school and it can take time to find a therapist who is available. A student requiring a 12-1-1 special education classroom placement (one certified special education teacher and one aide in a classroom with 12 students) might enter a new school where the 12-1-1 classroom is already full or such a classroom does not exist. Students with pending evaluations may be delayed or waitlisted as they are assigned to a new evaluator. The new school can also start a whole new evaluation, which can even further delay services. Adding to this complexity, the DOE continues to have difficulty with the data system used to track and document IEPs and cannot reliably report whether students are receiving the services to which they are entitled.[28] Given that students in shelters are more likely to have an IEP, this is a particular source of concern.

Effects of Student Transience on Students and Schools. Regardless of the reason underlying a school transfer, from the perspective of school staff there are consequences for school life. Overwhelmingly, educators interviewed for this study said that transience made it extremely difficult to support the educational success of students in temporary housing. Students arrived in the middle of the year, at the end of the year, sometimes they left and returned. Attendance teachers interviewed pointed to instances when students would "disappear;" it was not uncommon, as an attendance teacher at School 5 in Manhattan

stated, to observe families who have been in and out of shelters and children who "have not returned to school in over a month." Often the school would have no way to locate the family—no working number and no new address—to check on the child's well-being or to officially discharge the student from the school roster if the family had indeed moved. None of the principals who participated in this study knew to contact the DOE staff member who could look up students' information in the DHS data system CARES to see if perhaps the student and family were living in another shelter.

The impact of this kind of transience on academics was profound, according to school staff. It not only had immediate academic ramifications for the individual children but it amounted to a loss of building blocks for future learning and confidence—especially disastrous for those children already academically behind. The principal at School 7 in Brooklyn contended that transient students more easily slipped through the cracks: "It does become alarming when you start to see like midyear many families coming here and they are in temporary housing. And what's concerning is when we have families who have already been in one or two different places and they're getting moved again, and their child is going on their third or fourth school for the school year…It's really, it's really concerning because then what happens to those children. Those are the children who slip through the gaps and those are the children who have the same expectations as everyone else who are in stable homes possibly."

Classroom teachers were keen to point out that the impact of a school move went beyond just academics—it affected the student's interpersonal relationships with their teachers and peers and their overall school experience. Some teachers as well as other school staff expressed concerns about what frequent school moves did for students' ability to make and trust social ties. They also underscored the sensitivity in working with transient children; they relayed stories of other schools that had withheld distributing books out of concern that children would leave with them never to return.

A few speculated that students' experience with transience and the disruptions caused by it contributed to students acting out in school. Students in temporary housing situations—particularly those in shelters—were suspended more than their permanently housed classmates. In school year 2013-2014, 6 percent of

students in shelters were suspended, almost 3 times more frequently than doubled-up students (2 percent) and more than twice as often (3 percent) as their permanently housed peers. When pressed, administrators, teachers, and other staff reiterated that they did not know how to work effectively with students who were in and out of school and who were possibly dealing with trauma.

Transience was also destabilizing for the school as a whole. A couple of administrators noted that high transiency rates among students in shelters had consequences for the schools they pass through, which are expected to make progress with all students despite their limited time in school. The vast majority of participants in this study stated that they took pride in serving children no matter their attendance rates and test scores, but also said that they had to remain vigilant for emerging academic problems, given the high turnover of families in temporary housing. They learned to be alert to children who did not show up to school for three days in a row, and they would work with the family to discuss a school transfer if they had been moved to another location and as a result had difficulty with regular school attendance. Staff acknowledged that missing children also affected some key measures of a school: their absence was included in a school's average attendance rate and their test scores included in the averages used to help measure a school's performance.

In summary, transience within temporary housing was believed to be detrimental for a child's educational progress and well-being. Students in shelters made the most school moves compared with students in doubled-up and permanent housing. School staff and families were unclear about the reasons for moves within the temporary housing system itself but many signs point to an overburdened system. Short-term placements seemed to be linked to school moves. There can be delays to enrollment and to attendance. Transience had a negative impact on students' academic and emotional growth. The impact is also on their teachers, classmates, and the school as a whole. Educators for the most part do not place blame on parents and are more or less sympathetic to the circumstances of students in temporary housing, but are put in a vexing spot, especially given that they are accountable for the academic performance of their students.

Lack of Services at Shelters Had Repercussions for Student Attendance. "Invisible Child: Dasani's Homeless

Life," a five-part series published by *The New York Times* in December 2013 that chronicled the daily challenges of a 12-year-old girl, her parents, and her seven siblings renewed attention on the substandard conditions in the shelter system—rodents, mold, nonfunctioning appliances—the same conditions Johnathan Kozol wrote about nearly 30 years ago.[29, 30] We learned through interviews with school staff as well as from families living in the shelters about specific circumstances that had ramifications for children's readiness for school such as lack of hot water in the morning hours and loud conditions that prevented a good night's sleep.

Parents who participated in focus groups echoed reports of poor conditions cited regularly in news accounts, in a March 2015 report from the Department of Investigation, and in the city Comptroller's audit of family shelters in December 2015.[31, 32] The accounts from parents as well as those from school personnel also pointed to a lack of comprehensive services in shelters with direct repercussions for their children's attendance in school. Concerns centered on three main issues that had direct impacts on schooling:

- Lack of access to laundries contributed to school absenteeism as parents were ashamed to send their children to school in soiled clothes.
- The poor condition of kitchen facilities and lack of quality food in some shelters resulted in students going to school hungry and undernourished.
- Limited access to child care at or near shelters for younger children created difficulties in getting school-aged children to and from school.

While these are problems for many low-income families, they present even greater challenges for those residing in shelters. The distance between shelter and school for shelter residents exacerbated some of these hurdles as did the location of some shelters in commercial areas lacking services more traditionally found in residential areas. Additionally, the rules of the shelter and social service system created competing demands on time for shelter residents.

Forget about the shelter don't have laundry. None of these [shelters] are near laundry. Forget about not having the money for yourself. Who's going to watch your kids so you're also paying for transportation for everyone to go do laundry? So the burden is on you.

—Parent 4, focus group 3, Brooklyn

Dirty Clothes Are a Deterrent to Going to School. The lack of laundry facilities in shelter buildings was a source of concern for student attendance. While the landmark 1979 state Supreme Court *Callahan v. Carey* decision stipulated that shelters for single adults must provide laundry facilities, there is no such requirement for family shelters.[33] Access to clean clothes or clean school uniforms for homeless children came up by at least one staff member at every school who participated in this study. Parents who participated in focus groups also discussed lack of clean clothes as a challenge when sending their children to school.

Five of six parent coordinators interviewed said that they noticed that not having clean clothes could discourage families from sending their children to school. As the parent coordinator from School 2 commented, "Their mothers and fathers don't have money to wash their [children's] clothes and would prefer not to send them [to school] because they're dirty."

Schools can provide a free uniform or school shirt and pants for children who need them; but one uniform is not enough for the week if washing is a hardship. Individual teachers said that at times they offered to perform laundry services at their own homes for children who needed clean clothes. A couple of high school staff members, including the principal of School 11 and assistant principal at School 4, said they offered students money to do their own laundry to support students to come to school in a clean uniform.

In two focus groups, parents said that even when laundry facilities at shelters were available, they were not necessarily functioning. They found alternative ways to wash clothes such as using the sink in the common floor bathrooms but those could be filthy, and in tight room quarters there was not necessarily room to hang clothes to dry. It was not just the lack of facilities in the shelter sites that was onerous for families: shelter rooms come with basic furniture but not bedding sheets or towels (and homeless families are less likely to own their own bedding and towels). One parent who was previously homeless stressed that

many shelters were located in parts of the city that lack important amenities like laundries and groceries and this was an additional burden to families.

A couple of schools arranged to purchase laundry machines using their school's budget resources. At School 5 in Manhattan, the parent coordinator explained that the laundry room was easily accessible and that parents could sign up for a private time when they could use the washer and dryer. Use of the machine is free; parents are only asked to bring soap. The coordinator also said that if the family was having additional hardships, the school would also provide soap.

Laundry machines were a source of pride among staff throughout this school and named as a key support for student attendance. The school's community schools director said that the service was not just an economic relief for families but an example of the school's commitment to caring for their basic needs. A parent could now wash their child's sweatshirt, for example, efficiently and conveniently, and this alleviated one area of stress for families. The DOE's community schools initiative has heralded school laundry machines as one successful intervention to reduce chronic absenteeism.

This initiative was not without hitches. In its first few months of operation, the school's parent coordinator noticed that parents were not using the machines as expected; in follow up conversations, families indicated that they had difficulty staying in the school for longer periods of time because they had other appointments to keep.[34] "Some of the parents they can't stay because now they're in these mandated programs," said the parent coordinator at School 5 in Manhattan.

In response to this dilemma, the school made adjustments; parents are still encouraged to sign up for scheduled times, but the parent coordinator voluntarily performs laundry services to be of further assistance to families. A couple of other schools voiced interest in purchasing laundry machines, but were stalled as they realized that installing the needed plumbing would be too costly.

Homeless Students Often Arrive at School Hungry. In addition to the need for laundry services, staff in every school in our study expressed concern that some of their students in temporary housing and their families suffered from hunger. Staff observed that while growing children are often hungry, students experiencing homelessness seemed to arrive at school more hungry than other students. School personnel also emphasized that students could not concentrate on school work when they were hungry. The lack of quality food and cooking facilities in the shelter system came up in both interviews and focus groups with parents.

Families in many of the Tier II facilities have access to cafeterias, and most placed in cluster sites have access to cooking facilities. Those families without access to either receive a food allowance. Parents in focus groups uniformly expressed disgust with food served in Tier II shelter cafeterias that was of poor quality and caused sickness, as well as frustration when basic items like juice were not available. One unfortunate response was for families to spend limited funds on much more expensive take-out food. Other families discussed limitations of depending on the shelter's sole microwave (where there were long lines and functionality wavered). There were parents managing with ingenuity: for example, the mother who was known for "cooking a slamming pepper steak in the microwave," said parent 1 at School 12 on Staten Island. This mom benefited from a grocery store close to the shelter and training from her own mother who had cooked. Some of those placed in sites with access to cooking facilities spoke about needing pots and pans and other basic items that many homeless families do not own, or did not have with them in the shelter. Parents interviewed did not use the word hungry but as the parent coordinator at School 6 explained, families might not feel comfortable discussing their hunger "because famil[ies] don't want somebody else to know about that. They come here [to the school and tells us] and very quietly."

For children who do not get enough food outside of school, meals at school are critical. An initiative started by the Bloomberg Administration to adopt universal school breakfast and to allow children to eat breakfast in their classrooms has continued with the de Blasio Administration.

The DOE Office of School Food reported serving 30,000 students breakfast in just about 350 elementary schools with their Breakfast in the Classroom program.[35] Schools have adopted their own practices, keeping their cafeterias open so children can get a hot meal even after designated breakfast hours and offering breakfast-to-go bags.

Staff interviewed for this study said they also took it upon themselves to address the hunger needs of their students and their families. Teachers bought and stowed away snack favorites (granola bars, fruit snacks, cheese and crackers, etc.) in their desks. Principals working with parent coordinators said that they collected donations and used their school's credit card (officially known as a procurement card or p-card) to buy groceries for families they knew were struggling.[36] Two schools in our sample initiated partnerships with local food banks to supply more food.

Insufficient Child Care Contributes to Poor School Attendance. In addition to a lack of laundry facilities and quality food, the lack of child care arrangements was a concern raised by families living in shelters and also by school staff. Although Tier IIs are required under state regulations to provide child care services, DHS does not report on the availability of these resources in its shelters, or the percentage of families that use child care services when offered. DHS makes child care available at some Tier IIs as well as by providing slots at some neighborhood centers and through the use of child care vouchers. (Cluster sites are not required to offer residents any social services.) Parents said that not having adequate and convenient child care made it difficult to meet work and school demands; there was insufficient time to drop off their children and then get to work on time given the longer distances they often had to travel from their shelter than when they had been permanently housed. They also said that being placed far from their network of informal support put them at a disadvantage when dealing with school schedules. School staff recognized that lack of child care for younger children was an impediment for parents taking their school-aged children to school. In particular, it created challenges for families in getting their children to school and picking them up on time. Lastly, DOE Students in

Temporary Housing staff added that lack of child care was an emotional hardship for families, especially single parents with multiple children.

Parents interviewed said that not having adequate child care for their younger children impacted schooling for their older children. For working parents, there was also an inevitable tension between having to travel to and from work and with children to and from school, particularly if the family chose to continue at a school of origin that was remote from the shelter. Other times, the family sought to continue with the same child care provider they had used before entering the shelter system. One father living in a cluster site discussed the challenges of not having convenient child care. The cluster site where they resided did not provide child care so the family elected to stay with their baby's caregiver in the borough where they previously lived. Their two older children went to school close to the cluster site in their new borough, but there was not anyone else who could walk them to school early in the morning. The father, parent 3 at School 1 in the Bronx, said that getting children to school on time required another set of hands. He explained that the children's mother worked nights and he picked her up very late. While the mother slept in the morning, he would take the baby to child care and then take the older children to school.

Another parent who participated in the focus groups echoed the need for child care for families so that they could work and bring their children to school. The Tier II shelter where she stayed did provide child care but it only ran from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. This mother said she was fortunate that she had family in the area to tend to her two younger children but she still had to manage getting her two older children to and from school while she was expected to be at work.

School staff also stated that many families in shelters juggling multiple children, and/or work and other

> *It's hard to do it both ways, especially if you don't have family support close by...child care and transportation, the time and the money. You got to go to the program but first you got to drop off the baby to then get on a train or bus, which is time consuming for parents. We're starting the day burned out before going to work and then we have to come back to school. Not every parent is able to spend money to get their kids to school for the week. You try to take the bus there and take the train on the way back... we try to economize ourselves. Child care and transportation cost on your little paycheck is hard and overwhelming.*
> —Parent 1, focus group 4, Brooklyn

requirements, struggled with getting to school on time in the morning and for dismissal. On this note principals and teachers communicated staying in the school for longer hours unofficially in order to help parents with a later time to pick up their children. Staff at the couple of schools in this study that offered after-school programs said that their school's extended day was a big help to families in this regard.

DOE Students in Temporary Housing program staff added that insufficient child care could be additionally taxing for families with younger children in the shelter system where there were competing demands. A content expert explained that parents are trying to find new jobs to meet work requirements, deal with appointments, and apply for public assistance. This includes a lot of meetings and paperwork all while their children are in tow. This content expert underscored the stress single parents especially carry simultaneously attending to the multitude of appointments and caring for children. Often times the appointments are not close to where parents are temporarily placed, causing another complication.

Overall, the lack of services at shelters created additional burdens for families and interfered with students' regular attendance at school. Lack of laundry services made it difficult to provide students with clean clothes, discouraging some parents from bringing their children to school. Lack of quality food had repercussions; school staff reported needing to provide more nourishment for homeless children while they are in school. Child care offered in shelters was not sufficient from the perspectives of parents interviewed in this study nor were school hours often long enough, even though schools staff recounted staying late to help parents out. Cluster sites, which are not required to provide social services, introduce even more stress to residents. Traveling to access services can pose more disruptions to school routines.

Shelter Policies and Environment Can Present Obstacles to Schooling. In addition to a lack of comprehensive services, parents reflected on other challenging aspects of living in the shelter system, directly connecting their child's situation of not being settled in housing to not being settled in school. Parents who participated in this study discussed the traumatic aspects of living in the shelter system. Many said the emotional duress their children experienced in the shelter environment carried into the school day. A few touched upon the environmental dynamics of living in the shelter system, such as isolation, that caused difficulties for their children, and that they believed made adjustments to school more difficult.

The majority of parents interviewed for this study described the shelter environment as uncomfortable places for their children and detrimental to their children's ability to function well in school. Parents felt that this discomfort in the shelter could cause their children to arrive at school distressed. For example, one mother supposed that her kindergartner was often a handful at school because she did not have more coping mechanisms. "She has a lot of built up anger because she practically grew up in the shelter," said parent 1 in focus group 5 in Manhattan. "I came in when my daughter was 3 months old and my daughter is gonna be 6 years old. So it's like all of that is like building up in her so she takes, the only way she knows how to do it is retaliate out when she's at school." She praised the school for its patience with her child and all the children "other schools don't want to deal with." In this school and others, staff wondered if schools provided a means for children to act out their anger, sadness, and frustration.

Some parents observed their children's relationship to schooling change once they were living in the shelter. Parent 2 at School 12 described the change in her high school-aged son, previously a consistent school-goer, just a few weeks after they took residence in the shelter, three-quarters into the school year. "He was going to school up until right around Easter, and then like he didn't want to go anymore." He eventually dropped out. A second parent, parent 4 in focus group 2 in the Bronx, said that her middle school-aged child withdrew from school since moving into the shelter. This mother said she had a difficult time getting her daughter to board the school bus on a daily basis.

Teachers across schools noted that students residing in shelters tended to need more emotional support in the classroom and this often took precedence over academics. A second grade teacher from School 6 in Manhattan learned to address students' emotional concerns before getting into academics. "So I find myself being more of a mother than I am their teacher. Once I build that trust and relationship with them and let them know I'm here and everything is fine then I can move to what it is they do know or don't know, I can move to lesson," said the teacher.

While some teachers communicated being able to meet their students' emotional needs, many more attested that they could use training in trauma sensitivity. They also recommended more supports be provided for schools to hire social workers and guidance counselors, a point to which we will return.

The impact of living in shelter on younger children was particularly jarring to school staff, especially when they responded by expressing a desire to leave school to take on full-time employment. There were several stories like the one recounted by an elementary school's guidance counselor at School 10 in Brooklyn: "I have a student in temporary housing, and the gas has been off for the last month. He says to me, 'I need to get a job.' I said, No, what you need to do is finish school. He's in the fifth grade. [He replied] 'Well, maybe I can get a part-time job.' You're 12. You can't get a part-time job, baby. 'Well, Mommy needs my help.' So what happens when he leaves here to go to junior high school? Will he continue school or will he continue to feel like my mom needs my help, so I need to just do what I need to do to get the gas on?"

Parents in two focus groups raised a specific shelter policy they found to be problematic for their children and their children's ability to function more productively in a school setting: a no visitors policy. A no visitors policy means families living in the shelter are not allowed to have guests from the outside, including their own relatives, in their room.[37] Families living in the same shelter can also be discouraged from congregating with one another; some shelters have rules where residents are not allowed to be in one another's rooms.

While there are understandable reasons for having strict visitation policies for families who may be in dangerous situations, several parents discussed the emotional toll this kind of sequestration had on their children. Parent 3 in focus group 1 in the Bronx remarked, "I can't have nobody inside my house. Nobody's allowed to stay over, none of that. So [my son's] a 6 year old. He's by himself all the time. So it's hard...." Because some shelters also have strict rules for signing in and out of the building, as well as enforce curfew times, parents said their children have limited exposure outside of their room including the opportunity to socialize with their peers.

> "I notice [students in shelters] need a lot more emotional support before I can get to the academics, a lot more reassuring them they're fine...I will be here. I find that kids in the shelter can shut down because they're trying to figure out who's who and where do they belong. It requires more nurturing from me."
>
> —Teacher, School 6, Manhattan

Parents said that as a result no visitors policies complicated their child's adjustment to the school environment where they are expected to socialize with their peers and to respond appropriately to adults. In two instances, parents linked their children's isolation in the shelter to their acting out in school. A parent interviewed at School 1 in the Bronx described her third grade son's deprivation and stress for not being allowed to have his friends or father visit him. "I'm having a lot of problems with him acting out in school. The shelter situation is very stressful on everyone," the parent said.

Another mother echoed that her son did not understand why he could not be like other children and have his friends over to play. She described the adjustment to school every day as very difficult as her son did not feel included nor knew how to communicate his desire for inclusion. "My son is isolated, my son has no friends, because living in the shelter, you don't have privilege to do the things you want to do," explained parent 5 in focus group 2 in the Bronx. "And I tried to explain to [the school], this is the reason why my son is acting this way because he's in an environment he feels like everybody don't want him. And he cannot express himself."

Parents also discussed the impact of the no visitors policy for themselves as homelessness carries an unwelcome solitude. They expressed feeling like children in their temporary homes, and deprived of natural kinship with neighboring families experiencing similar situations.

School staff and parents raised concerns about the temporary housing environment and its impact on children. Parents spoke personally about the emotional strain and distance temporary housing environment created between them and their children, and that they believed also was created with schooling. Families

shared their observations of their children's withdrawal from and anguish in school. While school staff understood that students' living conditions affected their behavior and performance in school, many did not always know exactly what students and their families were experiencing in the shelter system, and how they could help. Lastly, parents in two focus groups expressed concern that no visitors policies in some shelters make the adjustment to school for homeless children even more difficult.

Difficulties in Coordinating Temporary Housing Placement with Schooling Contributes to Absenteeism

The Department of Homeless Services attempts to place families with school-aged children near their youngest child's school to facilitate their ability to continue attending their school of origin. This can be difficult to achieve, however, in a shelter system that is at maximum capacity. This section discusses four consequences for school attendance and success.

- Long commutes between shelters and schools result in difficulties for families getting their children to school regularly and on time. Long commutes also extend the noninstructional day for students and their families, and thereby contribute to cumulative disadvantages with schooling. Students who come late to school miss out on more instructional time and fall further behind educationally.
- Adequate transportation supports have not been readily available for many families traveling great distances to their child(ren)'s school of origin. MetroCards are not a viable form of transport for longer distance travel—especially for younger students traveling solo. Busing has been cumbersome to coordinate, particularly across longer distances and where previous routes do not exist, although a new DOE initiative is making yellow bus service more readily available for students in grades K-6 living in shelters.
- An overburdened shelter system that places families far from their children's schools makes it extremely difficult for parents to exercise their federal right to have their children remain in their schools of origin. While many families agree that keeping their children's schooling stable during housing instability is ideal, long commutes prohibit many families from doing this.

- Placing families in shelters far from where they resided previously also undermines families' social ties and networks that can be supportive of their children's education, including providing assistance getting them to school.

Long Commutes to School Mean Added Challenges, Long Days. Ten of twelve school principals interviewed pointed to the distance and travel between the location of a family's shelter placement and a child's school as an obstacle to students' ability to get to school regularly and on time. Long commutes were primarily a problem for families living in shelters far from their children's schools. DHS has reported that in the last four years there has been a decline in the percentage of families it has been able to place by their youngest child's school, a downward trend the agency explains due to a lack of capacity.

In 2011, DHS reported successfully placing 83.3 percent of families based on their youngest child's school. By 2015, that share had dropped to 52.9 percent.[38] Note that this percentage is out of 8,265 families placed in shelter that year that could potentially be placed in the borough of the youngest child's school. DHS explains that there are valid reasons that some families are not able to be placed close to school due to safety concerns, medical issues, or those arriving from outside of New York City.

From the perspective of many principals and staff, traveling long distances deterred families from bringing their children to school on days with inclement weather and on days they were juggling other responsibilities. Long distance travel also contributed to extreme tardiness. Schools reported that students could be up to two or three hours late—missing significant instructional time. In interviews and focus groups, the frequency of long commutes from shelter to school and its correlation with high absenteeism and tardiness resulted in questions about how DHS assigns families to shelters and why schooling was not a more central part of the placement process.

While distance is not the only reason for absences and lateness, several school staff recognized that as a result of longer travel times to school, many students residing in shelters had to wake up earlier than their permanently housed peers, and spend time commuting that their peers got to spend in school learning. Several school principals noticed a pattern of absence among students

who were traveling to the school from another borough. The principal of School 5 in Manhattan remarked that at weekly attendance meetings staff noted that the children they were concerned about were coming from other boroughs. "[They're traveling long distances [to our school]...and so it just becomes a challenge," said the principal. "It is also not good for the student to be waking up at 5:00 in the morning to travel two and a half hours to get here...they're getting here every day at 11:00 a.m. ...they're missing half of the school day." Other principals noted similar challenges for those students traveling long distances within the same borough.

Students' long commutes to school, whether intraborough or interborough, raised questions about how to both ensure students in temporary housing their federal right to remain in their school of origin and ensure them quality learning time at school. A few school administrators questioned whether protecting students' right to remain in their school of origin was ultimately in the students' best interest—especially in cases when the distance traveled affected the student's regular attendance or qualitative experience in school. "When you think of it, it's actually counter-intuitive because the idea was that you're protecting students and you're making sure that they have the right to remain in their school [of origin]," said the principal of School 5. "So ideally it sounds great, you know, we're making sure the students have a right to stay...but then when you're enforcing their right to stay above what's in the student's best interest you think, well then they're not learning and they're getting held over and they're not performing because they're not actually in school. How is that in [their] best interest?"

There was not total agreement among principals about this matter, however. Two principals interviewed said outright that having school consistency (where the

child knew adults) was in the best interest of the child, whether or not the school was in close proximity for the child and family, and whether or not the child was able to get to school regularly and on time as a result.

School staff and families were concerned about long commutes, not only because of absenteeism or tardiness, but because they extend the noninstructional day for students. Parents interviewed who commuted long distances to get their children to school discussed the travel hardship not just in terms of getting to school on time, but in terms of the effects felt throughout the day. For example, one parent shared that traveling intraborough had been extremely difficult for her middle-school son, because it added another four hours to the day. The impact of the travel times are intensified when students participate in after-school activities.

A parent at School 2 explained that long travel times complicated the tasks of completing homework and providing a nutritious meal for her child so he could be alert in school. The shelter they were assigned to did not have cooking facilities, further hampering her efforts to provide her son nourishment to get through an 11-hour day. These additional food challenges found their way into the classroom. "Coming back from the Bronx, we're doing homework on the train. Living in Brooklyn for that whole year and a half, I did not cook. We ate everything on the train. We had McDonald's, Burger King, pizza, sandwiches, that's, that was our breakfast and our dinner," she said. "So it was difficult because, you know, there were days that [my son will] get to school and he'll fall asleep. And so trying to give [him] something that's not—like besides a donut or waffles or whatever's quick, trying to give them a decent meal so they don't crash in the middle of the day was very difficult. So his grades were up, they were down, they were up, they were down."

A parent of an elementary school student stated that additional hours in transit meant her daughter not having the time or stamina for homework or for routine school projects such as the science fair. "It's kind of hard for her to be moving over and over and over. That's why I tried to keep this school as stable as possible [but the travel is hard]...'Cause I mean sometimes by the time we finish traveling, I'm not going to force her to sit up and do homework. She's never done a science fair project because by the time we get in the house, we don't have time," said parent 2 in focus group 3 in Brooklyn.

Time spent commuting to and from school at the expense of being able to be present in school or to do homework resulted in cumulative disadvantages for students living in shelters. Students who come late to school miss out on more instructional time and fall further behind educationally.

Trouble With Transportation Assistance. Staff from 9 of the 12 schools who participated in interviews raised concerns about access to transportation supports for students in temporary housing—supports that are required under McKinney-Vento. Students in grades K-12 who reside in temporary housing are exempt from age and distance regulations set by the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation.[39] Students in grades K through 6 are entitled to yellow bus service if an available bus route exists. If no available route exists, these pupils and those in grades 7 through 12 are entitled to receive a full-fare MetroCard. Students with disabilities, who are temporarily housed, like their permanently housed peers, are supplied door-to-door bus service, if written into their individualized education plan.[40] Generally, school staff expressed concern that transportation supports were adequately implemented for students in temporary housing. A new DOE initiative promises yellow bus service to all students in grades K-6 in shelter.

Many school staff in our study questioned the MetroCard as a feasible form of transportation. The school staff were skeptical of elementary and middle school children traveling long distances on the subway or bus, especially if they were traveling solo. Some parents also stated not feeling comfortable with their children traveling alone on the subway or bus. On the other hand, yellow bus service seemed very difficult to arrange, especially for those students traveling long distances. Several staff from one school inquired why requests made for busing for students in shelters traveling longer distances had been denied. Staff from nearly all of the schools in our sample that

> *"We left from living in the Bronx to moving into temporary housing, but they had us in Brooklyn. So we were traveling from Brooklyn all the way to the Bronx every day, two-hour ride, constantly every day. So, with [my son], it impacted him a lot because we were leaving, we were waking up at 5:00, leaving the house at 6:00 a.m., just to get to the Bronx for him to get to school on time... and then coming home. He likes basketball. So when they had basketball games, we're getting home at 10:00 at night. So it was difficult."*
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> —Parent, School 2, the Bronx

had transportation requests approved said that bus service took an exceptionally long time to coordinate. Chancellor's Regulations specify that busing be arranged within five days. School staff reported it could take weeks. DOE Students in Temporary Housing program staff who also make transportation requests on behalf of families at shelters had the same complaint. Shelter addresses have to be verified and requests processed by the education department's Office of Pupil Transportation. This was all the more cumbersome if there was not an existing route or a busing route has to be adjusted to accommodate a new pick-up location.

Pupil transportation officials also said there could be difficulties in verifying shelter addresses. They added that there could be lag time in transportation requests made at shelters. During the peak time of summer when families most frequently enter shelters, no DOE staff members are present. The education department relies on DHS to give it a file of individuals in shelter ages 4-22 (and entitled to schooling) to begin routing at the start of school.

DOE staff can request transportation variances for students in temporary housing who do not meet grade or distance eligibility requirements. A June 2015 Office of Pupil Transportation data snapshot of these cases showed 3,398 students in grades K-6 residing in shelters and eligible for transportation supports that month. Close to one-quarter of students were eligible for door-to-door service per their IEP requirements (818), 9 percent (300) for yellow bus service, and 67 percent were eligible for MetroCards.

The Office of Pupil Transportation was unable to provide data on transportation services received by students. A representative explained that this data was incomplete as school staff did not regularly update students' ATS files with the transportation information the office provides them. The transportation office representative also said that the office had difficulty in providing

bus service for those students placed in shelters in remote areas of the city, traveling long distances and out of borough to their schools. An Office of Pupil Transportation administrator voiced frustration about the lack of coordination between shelter placement and transportation to school, noting that the office is never asked about the implications in terms of transportation options when a child is placed in a specific shelter.

In January 2016, the Department of Education announced that all children in shelters enrolled in grades K-6 would be guaranteed busing to any school they attend if parents desired.[41] The DOE's transportation office reported that it contracted for 182 new buses at an estimated annual cost of $24 million to service an additional 2,200 K-6 students (previously given MetroCards as buses had not been available). The Preliminary Budget for 2017 added funding for more than 30 administrative positions in the Office of Pupil Transportation. These positions are funded roughly at an annual cost of more than $3 million including fringe benefits. Of that total, $85,000 (including fringe) was earmarked for a transit coordinator specific to students in temporary housing. There was also $233,000 added for other than personal expenses.

Concerns were also raised in reference to the availability of transportation assistance for parents taking their children to school; under DOE policy, families in temporary housing are entitled to a MetroCard to accompany their children to school if the children are in sixth grade or under (and also receive a MetroCard). Here one issue was how to successfully distribute MetroCards to parents. Almost all schools that participated in our study raised concerns for those families living in cluster sites because those families typically did not have access to DOE staff who distributed MetroCards. Department of Education staffing had not been able to keep pace with the increase in families with children applying for shelter placement during the time frame of this study or the rapid proliferation of cluster sites and the use of commercial hotels. Indeed, most cluster-site buildings do not have full-time DOE staff on site; many also lack even part-time DOE staff. Still, there were individual cases of DOE staff making arrangements to distribute MetroCards to parents outside of their scheduled work hours and at alternate locations.

A lack of transportation assistance for families affected their ability to bring their children to school as well as their participation in their children's schooling. A family worker at School 10, an elementary school in Brooklyn, noted that one could not assume that families have the money for their own transportation to accompany their child to school. "Transportation [is an issue]. Let's say, we have [a family] that lives in a scatter site in East New York. [Mom's] issue is I don't have money to get on the bus and bring my son over here," said the family worker.

Families could also lack travel funds to attend school meetings such as parent teacher conferences. Some staff learned that parents were reliant on the MetroCard the DOE had provided to attend their own appointments as well as get their children to and from school.

Lack of access to transportation assistance for families was highlighted in focus groups with parents living in cluster or scatter sites. A few shared that they did not receive transit assistance even though their children met eligibility requirements. One mom recounted at focus group 3 in Brooklyn that she received a MetroCard in the Tier II shelter where she previously lived. She said the cluster site she is currently residing in does not provide it and this has been a hardship for her. "The shelter I [live at], they don't provide MetroCards. So, I buy my own MetroCard," the mom said. "They don't provide it at that shelter at all. The one in the Bronx did, because I used—I remember actually signing for it every week. I mean, thankfully, the fact that I'm on SSI. It's a half-fare. But still it is a strain every month to pay that bill."

The DOE Office of Pupil Transportation suggests that in the case where there are no staff in the building where families are housed to distribute MetroCards, the family contact the Students in Temporary Housing program staff or visit their borough offices. But that assumes parents can make the trip. One parent disclosed that she opted not to redeem transit assistance at the borough offices because the effort to retrieve it did not seem worth it. "You know my shelter is a scatter site. I have to go to the [borough] office. I don't go because I don't have the funds to go over there, and they don't supply you with transportation so I don't go," explained parent 2 at focus group 2 in the Bronx.

There were other parents, however, who did make the trip to the borough offices to receive a weekly

MetroCard; at the time of our visits, there were between 50 and 60 parents visiting the Bronx borough office on a weekly basis to collect MetroCards. Family assistants interviewed said that they spent significant time with MetroCard distribution. Parents are asked to sign a book for the card, and return the card for a replacement. There is a number on the back of the card that is recorded in the book and is checked upon return.

Students are encouraged to stay in their school of origin but access to ready transportation can be limited. Like commuting to school via public transit, district-provided bus transportation presents logistical challenges. Some questioned if MetroCards are a sufficient form of transportation assistance for younger children. Busing can take time to coordinate. If there is not an existing bus route from the student's residence to school address, the process of adding a route can be arduous. For the system there are concerns about how to meet the transportation needs for a population that can be placed in remote areas of the city. Families in temporary housing express need for transportation assistance to support their children's educational success—not just to take their child to school but to attend meetings. Those living in cluster sites often do not have access to MetroCards. Providing more DOE staff and more transportation service would require additional budget resources, but as one school family worker succinctly noted there was also the cost of not providing transportation assistance: absentee children.

Limits on Ability of Parents to Keep Their Children in School of Origin. Choosing between providing stable schooling for their children—especially critical at a time while they were experiencing unstable housing—and easing the navigation to and from school was not exactly an easy choice, parents said, but it was one they still had to make. While some families elected the school of origin even with a long commute, others found long commutes too taxing and chose the zoned school for the shelter. Most families who participated in interviews and focus groups agreed that long travel times to schools could make succeeding in school that much more difficult. But for some the long travel time was worth it in order to provide school stability for their children.

In two focus groups with families, the conversation revolved around how they made decisions about school selection for their children given their housing instability. In one group parents concurred on why they were traveling from borough to borough in order to keep their child in their school of origin. Their children's positive experiences—as well as their own sense of comfort, familiarity with the school, and relationships with school staff—spurred the parents to stay with the school of origin.

In another focus group, families said that the commute to and from the school of origin was too much of an additional weight to bear. For these families, school choices were effectively limited to schools close to the shelters where they were placed. This did not feel like a choice; in the words of one parent, she was forced to the assigned school for the shelter. "When I first came to the Bronx, we were in a shelter, we, we were from Brooklyn. They put us in a shelter [in the Bronx] and I tried to keep bringing [my kids] back to Brooklyn, but it was two and a half hours," said parent 3 in focus group 2 in the Bronx. "We live[d] in Coney Island and it was just too much. So I was forced to put my children to school right up the block, which is the assigned school for that shelter."

Choosing the zoned school and saving the commute was also not a win, this group of parents said, if the school close by did not provide the necessary academic and social supports. One parent found this out after she pulled her two middle-school children

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PARENT 2: "I used to live across the street. Now I live in Manhattan. Before I lived in Manhattan I lived in the Bronx [but] I never took my kids out."

PARENT 3: "We wake up at 5 a.m., leave by 6:30 a.m. and we're [here]. It takes two trains and [then 15 minutes of walking]."

PARENT 4: "This is like the best school for them, you know, of all the other schools. Now we live up in the Bronx and to me it is like an hour and 45 minutes to our home."

PARENT 5: "I'm coming from Brooklyn. It takes me 1 hour 15 minutes. They like it here, they're comfortable."

PARENT 4: "She said the same thing all of us feel, you heard? We're comfortable."

—From parent focus group 5, Manhattan

from their school of origin and put them instead in the school near the shelter. By the end of the year, she was researching a third school and expressed feeling lost. "When I arrived to the country, I went to a shelter in Brooklyn and sent [my kids] to a school nearby. I stayed two months at the shelter and I [am now] in the Bronx," explained parent 1 in focus group 2 in the Bronx. "The kids were still going to school in Brooklyn, but it was very difficult to get them up—for example, they had to leave at half past five to be able to arrive at school on time…It was very difficult and I decided to pull out at least the two that are in middle school [and put them in the school nearby]…to be honest, I kind of feel like lost, because they make you believe that they will provide all the services, and then when have them in, they don't provide all the services."

Overall, parents expressed a desire for more support in making school decisions during their temporary housing placement. As mentioned earlier, none of the parents who participated in interviews or focus groups and who had gone through the PATH intake office had interacted with staff there about their children's schooling. Some also did not have the opportunity to meet with a DOE staff person at the shelter in which they were placed—especially those placed at cluster sites. The federal law stipulates that liaisons identify students in temporary housing, immediately enroll them in schools, provide them with transportation supports, and review rights with families. Moreover, state law requires that shelter staff assist parents with deciding whether to keep their child in the same school or to transfer schools, and help the parents who elect to transfer schools to do so within two days of placement in shelter.[42] But in a system where there are not enough Students in Temporary Housing program staff to meet with families, some parents are left alone to deal with school questions.

Some parents who had not met with DOE staff during the placement process followed instructions outlined in a letter from the Department of Education's enrollment office that notified them of the zoned school for the shelter address. Others relied on information about schools from caseworkers at the shelter where they were placed. In particular this was the case for those families in our study whose shelter placement was in close proximity to the zoned school (on the same block). In cases where no information had been

provided or had not been clear, parents reached out to other sources for assistance with school selection. One mother sought the counsel of a community-based organization active in educational issues in the district. A few other parents said they relied on staff at the DOE's borough enrollment office to direct them. For example, one mother said she depended on the advice of the enrollment office staff member with whom she met: "I went to One Fordham Plaza and I asked the lady, 'please, I know where I live is not the best neighborhood-wise [but] I would like the best for my child school-wise,'" said parent 2 in focus group 2 in the Bronx. The mom continued, "She just told me the two schools are my zone school and I asked her which one do you think is best…and she did tell me [the one that] is better."

This raises questions about the protocol borough enrollment centers are following when meeting with families in temporary housing about their children's schooling. The borough enrollment centers are supposed to give parents a list of all schools for which the shelter address is zoned and where there are open seats in that grade. In districts that use a form of school choice for elementary and middle school, families are supposed to get the list of all schools in the district that have open seats in that grade. Another concern that has been raised is that some schools game the process—capping their seats or finding other ways to turn away students who require more supports. There is also the reality that schools vary in the number of seats they have open; schools with more open seats will be assigned more over-the-counter students. A few principals in the study were suspicious that the borough enrollment centers were sending students to schools that were already serving a disproportionate share of students in temporary housing, contributing to the concentration of these students in specific schools and districts. This research project did not extend into the borough enrollment offices or the enrollment process itself.

Providing school guidance to families in temporary housing on school selection is not easy or straightforward. An elementary school principal pointed out that part of the challenge families in temporary housing face when selecting schools is that they do not know how long they will remain at the shelter to which they have been assigned. This can make school

selection particularly difficult. Given the uncertainty of how long the family will remain in any shelter placement, parents do not necessarily know how best to proceed or may hesitate to make different decisions even if their child's schooling experience is not working out.

"I had a family here from Brooklyn and they're placed in a shelter in [the Bronx] and they decide to keep their son here," said the principal of School 10 in Brooklyn. "He [had] to get up by 5:00 a.m. because he needs to be on a train by 6:00 a.m. in order to get here by 8:00 a.m. He was a second grader. He's traveling with his older middle-school brother, because the parents have to go to work. I had three meetings to counsel them [about] a school closer to the shelter in the Bronx. Their response to me is, 'I don't know how long I'm going to be there.'"

Again, DOE policy is to follow the federal law that protects parents' right to keep their child in the school of origin but for some the commute to that school is untenable. When families' initially move into the shelter system or when their shelter placement is changed, they often did not know how best to proceed with their children's schooling. It was evident from talking with parents that not all had the opportunity to sit down with education counselors to discuss their children's school options and what these choices would entail. Based on our focus groups of parents, meetings with DOE staff did not happen at the PATH, and at times, meetings did not happen at shelters where families were placed. The DOE's limited temporary housing staff combined with multiple demands on parent schedules made conversations about schooling sparse. Generally, parents said they would have appreciated more hands on support both in making schooling selections and addressing their children's educational needs while they were dealing with the woes of housing instability.

There was considerable variation in how parents made school selections for their children while in shelter and many constituted a lose-lose situation. Some were happy to stay with their school of origin, even if it required a long commute. For these parents, this felt like a choice, albeit a difficult one. For others, the long commute was too much of a burden and as a result, they were reliant on schools that were closer to their new temporary location. This did not feel like a choice, especially if those schools did not seem like the right fit for their child. Families generally said they did not receive much guidance in making their

school selections. Moreover, given uncertainty about the duration of a family's stay in any specific shelter, parents' school choices were often influenced more by their immediate needs rather than their longer term goals for their children's education.

Shelter Placements in Unfamiliar Neighborhoods Can Cut Social Ties That Aid Schooling. A fourth concern posed by the frequent disconnect between a family's shelter placement and their children's schooling is the importance of geography, neighborhood know-how, and social ties for families. This problem was raised by both school personnel and families. Many questioned why there was not more effort to place families in shelters close to their home communities. Families' local knowledge and social networks—what Putnam and others refer to as "social capital"—assist them in pursuing not just their children's educational success but also their own personal advancement.[43] Not having these toolkits undermines and further disenfranchises families.

In interviews and focus groups, school staff emphasized the importance of families' familiarity with the neighborhood and schools. Families' knowledge of place and local resources was perceived as an asset worth preserving. While there was acknowledgement that the city was contending with space constraints on where to place families needing housing, most school staff believe temporary housing placements ought to align with areas of the city where families had previously lived. These opinions emerged strongly in the districtwide focus groups with principals hosted by IBO. In Brooklyn, principals deliberated on what they perceived as different norms by schools and communities and boroughs and concern for those families who were moved to locations far from what they knew. Principals emphasized the importance of local support networks, not just familiar locations, and questioned why temporary housing placements were not made with these networks in mind. They also agreed that support networks would be helpful specifically in getting children to school, but also helpful more generally given the difficulty and stress of being in temporary housing.

In the focus group in Manhattan, participating principals agreed that students and their families would be better served being placed closer to their schools, but they wondered about the feasibility of placing

> **Principal 1**: "Families are moved so far from what is familiar to them. They don't know the laundromats and the banks and the parks like they did in their own communities. They don't know the schools. They also assume that schools have the same schedules. They don't know that schools have the flexibility to determine their own hours. They may have gotten used to a program at one school that is not at another school. Or a similar program might just be closed by the time they arrive. There are different norms for every school and likewise for every community and borough."
>
> **Principal 2**: "We've had families [from Brooklyn] who have had to go to PATH, and then they wind up being re-established in let's say Queens…Then you have families from Manhattan and the Bronx coming to Staten Island. So it doesn't really, you know, make sense because families are leaving their families or their friends close by, which is a support system which they need, especially considering, you know, their situation, whatever it may be."
>
> **Principal 4**: "If a family is used to, gets used to this environment, this community, is there some kind of arrangement to help them find affordable housing in the community they spent [their] years? Why then uproot them and tell them they have to move to Parkchester? They don't know the, the subway system, they don't know the traveling."
>
> — From principal focus group 7, Brooklyn

more families in Manhattan. "The problem is [the city] doesn't have enough temporary housing—I mean most of the houses for the students in temporary housing are in the Bronx and Queens, in Far Rockaway and Brooklyn, so it's kind of difficult. That's where they have the space. They don't have it here [in Manhattan]," said a principal in focus group 8 in Manhattan.

Parents across interviews and focus groups agreed that being placed in an area of the city that was unfamiliar and void of recognizable supports contributed to their feelings of isolation and made getting their children to school even more difficult. The mom who spoke explicitly about the challenges of traveling with her middle-school student across boroughs also discussed the challenges of being placed far from most of her family and her doctor: "My family lives in the Bronx. I'm from upstate New York. I only have my aunt and my grandmother here," said the parent from School 2 in the Bronx. "And I'm like, I know nothing about Brooklyn. What am I supposed to do? So they put you in a place where you have to find hospitals, doctors, everything, and then it becomes an issue of [dropping your children off or] picking up your children on time from school…There's no support system, no support system whatsoever."

Overall, both local knowledge of geography and social networks emerged as important considerations for temporary housing placement. School staff and families interviewed generally concurred that the

temporary placement process should take into account families' own resources, including their knowledge of neighborhoods, how to travel, where to seek assistance, as well as their own contacts and relationships.

In summary, temporary housing placements that are uncoordinated with schooling contribute to school absenteeism and hinder school success in a multitude of ways. Placements far from the location of the children's schools without providing sufficient transportation supports result in long travel commutes, increasing both absenteeism and tardiness. Too often families must choose between long commutes to keep their children in a familiar school or transfer to a school near their shelter, regardless of the school's programs and services. Removing families from the neighborhoods, districts, and boroughs they are familiar with not only entails longer travel; it deprives them of their networking and social capital resources that they could use to support their children's schooling and potentially to move beyond their temporary housing placement. The education department's new initiative to provide yellow busing to all children in grades K-6 in shelters is aimed at addressing the lack of adequate transit supports. Even with these additional transportation supports, travel time to school is likely to be long, particularly for students trying to remain in their school of origin.

For Students in Temporary Housing, a Lack of Resources and Agency Coordination

This section delves into resource availability and coordination for students in temporary housing at multiple levels of the system and discusses three major findings:

- Department of Education Students in Temporary Housing unit staffing and resources have not kept pace with the increase in students identified in temporary living situations or the number of temporary housing facilities for families with school-aged children that have opened. There are challenges in distributing staff to serve varying numbers of families in shelters spread across the city. Families placed in cluster sites and commercial hotels have been particularly difficult to reach.
- A lack of coordination between city housing and education agencies exacerbates staffing and resource shortages. This was evident in three areas. Historically, DHS has not informed DOE when new shelters open, which can delay coordination of school services for families. DOE has provided mixed message on the extent to which their data system is integrated with that of DHS. Finally, the coordination of their respective roles and responsibilities for monitoring and improving attendance are unclear.
- Resources available at the school level are minimal. The Department of Education's Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula, which determines the largest block of resources in school budgets, does not allocate additional resources for students in temporary housing. The DOE simply requires schools to set-aside $100 from their existing Title 1, Part A allocation for each child identified in temporary housing. School staff interviewed overwhelmingly stressed that these dollars fell far short of the funding needed to address the significant academic, mental health, and social challenges facing students without stable housing. School staff who participated in this study emphasized the need for counseling, attendance, and family engagement tools.

As part of the $30 million commitment recently announced by the de Blasio Administration to address a growing homeless student population, $10.3 million will be directed to provide literacy programs in shelters, place social workers in schools with 50 or more homeless children, hire attendance specialists to work with shelter staff where students have significant school attendance problems, conduct enrollment workshops to assist homeless families with the middle and high school application processes, and subsidize physical and mental health care for homeless students in school-based clinics.[44]

Background on the Department of Education Students in Temporary Housing Program. The New York City Department of Education Students in Temporary Housing unit falls within the larger Office of Safety and Youth Development division along with 17 other areas of focus. The set up for STH is guided both by the federal law and by the Department of Education's organizational structure. The McKinney-Vento Act requires all Local Education Authorities (LEAs), which includes all school districts,

charter schools, and Board of Cooperative Educational Services to designate an appropriate staff person to serve as liaison to homeless children and youth. The LEA liaison is sometimes referred to as the McKinney-Vento or homeless liaison. In New York City, the LEA liaison is referred to as a content expert.

When the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was passed in 1987, New York City had already employed one homeless liaison. It grew to 32 positions (one for each community school district) in 1990 and then was collapsed to 10 positions in 2003, when the Department of Education was reorganized into 10 regions. It has remained at 10 liaison positions through several subsequent structural changes at the DOE. The content experts, who serve as directors of policy and programming for students in temporary housing, are divided equally by borough (there are two per borough). Currently, STH also employs four central personnel: a data specialist, a program manager, a senior program manager, and the director.

The borough-based content experts report directly to the central STH office at DOE, but they function more regionally in response to local conditions of temporary housing placements and homelessness, which vary across the city. The Bronx has the most cluster housing sites of any borough; Queens and Manhattan do not have any. Manhattan and Queens are home to a number of domestic violence units, as well as hotels. Brooklyn has a mix of all types of temporary housing. Staten Island has only one Tier II shelter and until recently there were no hotels. Linking content experts to specific geographies has helped to provide local knowledge about schools and shelters as well as available community resources. Distributing content experts equally by borough, however, has been a source of contention because of the uneven distribution of homeless families across the city. The Bronx serves more families with students in temporary housing than any other borough.

The STH content experts advocate for families who encounter barriers to enrolling their children in schools or getting them adequate transportation, and troubleshoot when complications arise related to issues such as special education services or disciplinary matters. They also conduct training sessions for school and shelter staff to understand the rights of families and liaise with other DOE central
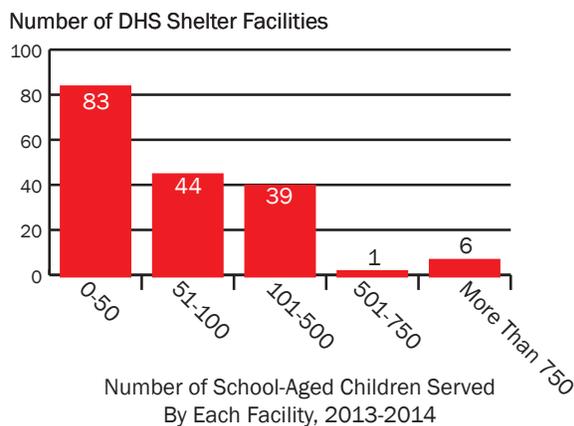
and borough-based staff to facilitate services. With a small grant for shelter and school-based programming, content experts design and implement after-school programming for roughly 1,500 students. Perhaps the content experts' most significant responsibility is to supervise DOE family assistants who, in turn, liaise between shelter and school sites.

Family assistants are frontline workers with a very wide range of responsibilities. These include interviewing families in the shelter system and informing them of their rights under McKinney-Vento, what is referred to as shelter intake; assisting families with school enrollment, transfers, and transportation; and more generally communicating with schools concerning students' attendance. Family assistants also spend their time facilitating after-school activities for children and youth in shelters as well as special events for families. Interviews among a range of STH staff suggest that given the wide range of tasks assigned to the family assistants, some responsibilities—namely communicating with school staff on attendance—can suffer.

Limited Staffing and Resources. With an increasing homeless student population, the DOE Students in Temporary Housing program has found itself short-staffed with only 10 borough directors responsible for oversight across 32 community school districts and just over 100 school-shelter liaisons. In school year 2013-2014 there were 117 family assistants employed across the five boroughs: 40 in the Bronx, 38 in Brooklyn, 25 in Manhattan, 13 in Queens, and 1 in Staten Island.[45] In total they were responsible for almost 30,000 school-aged children in close to 200 DHS-funded family shelters citywide. Although family assistants primarily work in the field at one or more shelters, they are each assigned to a school and required to clock in and out at this school, which can result in considerable time lost going back and forth between shelter and school.

Staffing for the STH program is mostly backed by state aid in the form of Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention funding (AIDP). According to the state aid handbook for AIDP, New York City was required to "set aside from its Total Foundation Aid the amount it set aside in the base year for programs and services related to attendance improvement and dropout prevention."[46] Since 2007, AIDP has remained constant at $50.5 million, as has the share of these funds

Nearly Seventy-five Percent of Shelter Facilities Had Beds for 100 or Fewer Students

Number of DHS Shelter Facilities

Number of School-Aged Children Served By Each Facility, 2013-2014	Value
0-50	83
51-100	44
101-500	39
501-750	1
More Than 750	6

Number of School-Aged Children Served
By Each Facility, 2013-2014

SOURCE: Department of Homeless Services
New York City Independent Budget Office

allocated for students in temporary housing. From school years 2009-2010 through 2013-2014, the city's STH program received the same $8.3 million in AIDP funds each year. In 2013-2014, 68 percent of the funds were used to cover the salaries of 117 family assistants ($5.6 million). The remaining $2.6 million covered the salaries of the 10 borough-based managers, and 4 central staff as well as other than personal service expenses split among the five boroughs.[47]

School districts can apply for grant funding provided by the U.S. Department of Education through the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program authorized by McKinney-Vento every three years. The city has applied as one district for the past two rounds (2010-2013, 2013-2016). While previously community school districts in New York City applied separately, the city now applies as one district because the DOE has become more centralized. The DOE's Students in Temporary Housing program received approximately $4 million for the 2013-2016 grant cycle—about $1.5 million on average per year. That money has mostly gone to academic enrichment programming for students in temporary housing. Although this represented a small increase from the prior round, at the same time, STH also had to absorb the loss of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars that it received in school years 2009-2010 through 2011-2012.[48] McKinney-Vento grant money will remain constant for the next three-year federal grant cycle (2017-2019), but there has been an additional $2.2 million in federal grants made available for those Local Educational Authorities or Board of

Cooperative Educational Services with more than 4,000 students identified as homeless.[49]

Beyond funding constraints, another challenge for the STH program is figuring out how to distribute staff given the mix of small, medium, and even very large facilities spread throughout the city and the numbers of families with school-aged children who reside in them. At the end of June 2014, the DOE reported that there were 18,764 school-aged children residing in 173 family shelters funded by DHS.[50] Fifty percent lived in Tier II sites, closely followed by 39 percent in cluster sites, and 9 percent resided in hotel/motel buildings that had been converted into shelters. These facilities are of various sizes—half of them ran between 1 bed and 50 beds for school-aged children, but the six largest had more than 750 beds each. These very large facilities are all cluster sites.

Moreover, a single shelter facility can encompass multiple buildings and locations. These 173 shelters were spread over more than 500 addresses, stretching DOE's limited capacity even further. With respect to the work of family assistants, this means that they can be assigned to multiple sites, depending on number of school-aged children who reside in each location.

A corresponding challenge is that the numbers of families with children in specific shelters constantly fluctuates. Families move for many reasons known and unknown and shelters see daily increases and decreases in their census. At times shelters can change the populations they serve, for example accepting school-aged children one year but not the next. Sites also open and close, change management or take over other sites, making deployment of DOE shelter staff more difficult to plan and execute. It also has repercussions for supervision as family assistants are spread across multiple and changing locations.

Significantly, the movement of family assistants in response to these population fluctuations in turn complicates their ability to make introductions and build relationships with school staff and families—both necessary to address educational challenges like attendance. Content experts interviewed for this report agreed that adding more family assistants seemed like a logical step to meeting the demands of more families in the system; they presumed that adding more family assistants could also help achieve more consistent

staffing across shelters. However, several content experts emphasized the need to hire family assistants with training in social work so that they could more effectively serve families in temporary housing.

The relatively low pay for family assistants was seen as a potential impediment to recruitment and retention. Their starting salary is $13.22 an hour, although they may be eligible to apply for raises based on college credits and/or after one year based on experience. This makes it hard to attract candidates with more advanced training. The hiring of family assistants is made more difficult by contractual union rules requiring that any District Council 37 member who has been excessed from their job within a community school district be given preference for any vacant family assistant position (or any other job represented by District Council 37). Many of these excessed employees had been school-based family workers. Despite the similar sounding names, the responsibilities are dissimilar from those of family assistants. Family assistants interviewed by IBO frequently noted their low pay relative to their job responsibilities; while they unanimously described it as rewarding to be of service to many families, several offered they were struggling financially in their own right.

Without sufficient staff, the STH program has struggled to cover cluster sites, especially in the Bronx. Many of these facilities are not fully staffed or staffed at all. As a result families residing in them do not seem to have ready access to supports to which they are entitled and that would bolster school attendance. This concern was brought up both by STH and school staff. Guidance counselors across multiple schools also stressed that they did not know how to follow up with students and families living in cluster sites when there was no family assistant to call if the student was absent or tardy or if the family needed transportation support to accompany their child to school regularly and on-time. Follow-up with these families often did not happen. "Cluster sites do not have that [point] person," explained a guidance counselor from School 5 in Manhattan, "So it's hard to get things like busing. It's hard to talk to somebody about attendance. Hey, picking up the phone and saying: This family's late, 3 out of 5 days. We need help in trying to get a hold of this family or meeting with this family."

Attendance teachers contended that the problem

working with the cluster sites was not just that there was often no DOE family assistant on site, but that there was often no official shelter staff or security officer present, either. This made it virtually impossible to arrange home visits. As an attendance teacher at School 4 in the Bronx explained, "There's no one to call and when you make a home visit to the building. The trick is how to get in. Oftentimes you can't get in. You can't leave a note, because where do you leave the note. There's no bell. Everything is locked." This attendance teacher said that sometimes the only options would be to wait until a resident was leaving the building to see if that would gain entry and if that did not work, to call Administration for Children's Services. On that note, the attendance teacher wondered if barriers to building entry actually increased calls to the Administration for Children's Services as often there was no other channel available to locate the family and to learn what was going on. This attendance teacher added that reaching out to the Administration for Children's Services could be "more of a straight track to accountability" but that it also meant losing the opportunity to directly engage the family in improving their child's attendance.

Staffing for the Students in Temporary Housing program has been the same since 2003. With limited staff serving more families spread out across multiple locations, building effective relationships between schools and shelters is difficult to achieve. Deployment of staff is also perplexing given the many moving pieces—shelter openings, closings, and redesignations, not to mention the movement of families from one shelter to another. Family assistants are also relatively low-paid workers asked to perform various duties that can leave little time to track student attendance. Content experts indicated that staff with more advanced training could be better equipped to analyze attendance data and work with families to develop attendance improvement plans. More effective staffing would also be contingent on lowering the ratio of DOE staff to families with school-aged children.

Lack of Agency Coordination. Beyond the challenges of limited resources and authorized staffing levels being too low for the tasks required, interviews with the Department of Education staff suggested that persistent communication barriers between city agencies have been another impediment to serving

homeless families, not to mention a source of conflict. Throughout this study, IBO heard that there was little coordination between the two agencies in the daily work of addressing shelter families' needs. Historically, the Department of Homeless Services has not informed DOE when new shelters open, which can delay school services for families. Despite several years into a data match, their systems are not yet integrated but work is underway to improve the quality and timeliness of the data exchange to better serve the families they have in common. Lastly, it is not clear how they align their respective responsibilities to promote attendance.

Department of Education staff interviewed said that generally DHS has not given timely notice regarding the plans for and location of new shelters; consequently there have been cluster sites or hotels that DOE staff did not know existed until after families with school-aged children moved in. Last year and again this year, DHS has had to rely on commercial hotels to house families, as existing shelter sites are at capacity. This has only served to exacerbate DOE's challenges with staff shortages and planning.

One content expert interviewed called it a "cat and mouse game" in which DHS does not know how many families are going into the PATH intake center and DOE does not know when a new shelter or cluster site is opened. "It's crazy," the content expert continued, noting that even as the education department is moving family assistants around to meet the needs at shelter and cluster sites, families are also being located in commercial hotels. This content expert supposed DOE could better strategize how to staff family shelters with better coordination with DHS.

A second area of disconnect concerned data collected and matched regarding families with school-aged children. In early 2011, DOE and DHS signed a memorandum of understanding to share data about school-aged children in shelters. The information DOE provided DHS would facilitate DHS ability not just to make shelter placements by the youngest child's school of origin (at the time, determined by the community school district), but also would facilitate the ability of case workers to provide services to help support regular school attendance. The plan was for DOE to permit authorized DHS personnel to access data on students whose families were found eligible for shelter by entering

the student's identification number, also referred to as an OSIS number. It also allowed the education department to access DHS's data system, currently called CARES, in order to retrieve shelter information.

To date, DHS and DOE's matching process has been somewhat clunky. DOE has given mixed reports on the accuracy of the match. The CARES data system has not included a student identification number, or OSIS number, so DOE tries to make a match on name, gender, and date of birth—not an ideal matching process for a system as large as the city's. DHS has acknowledged shortcomings and reports that progress is underway to achieve a systemwide data match that will allow it to store a student's OSIS number in CARES.

A report of the Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and School Engagement that was organized during then-Mayor Bloomberg's tenure highlighted that the two agencies had built an infrastructure for future data sharing.[51] The task force made several recommendations to improve attendance specifically for students in temporary housing. These included monthly attendance reports shared by schools and shelters as well as regular meetings between the two agencies to review attendance. Several content experts who were interviewed by IBO said that those meetings stopped short of the task force's recommendations. There was no funding tied to the initiative and no support to fully implement it.

DHS confirms that it currently provides monthly school attendance reports to each shelter (where school-aged children reside), which include a detailed attendance summary for each student. The report is meant to help shelters track their performance in terms of school attendance. At the same time, DOE does its own calculation of attendance from the monthly roster of school-aged children it receives from DHS, though this process suffers from the general difficulties in merging information from the two agency data systems described above.

In addition to the difficulty that staff faces in getting accurate and timely information out of the two separate data systems, family assistants interviewed said that there were not in-depth discussions about attendance with DHS staff at the shelters. While a few family assistants said they were asked to run attendance reports and provide them to shelter staff, they were

unaware of what was done with the information in those reports. One content expert we interviewed said that caseworkers had to include attendance reports for compliance reasons. Many family assistants perceived that shelter staff invoked confidentiality concerns to keep them out of the Independent Living Plan meetings where attendance was discussed. From what we did observe, it was not clear who exactly was accountable for analyzing attendance data or for developing or implementing attendance improvement plans once reports were generated.

There also appears to be duplication of efforts in data collection: there are three separate points of data collection for each family found eligible for shelter. As outlined earlier in the report, family information (including the name and address of the youngest child's school) is first entered into the CARES data system at the PATH intake center. When families move in to a shelter, on-site DOE family assistants enter information including schooling into the DOE data system, Automate the Schools. To make matters more complicated, school personnel (typically the pupil accounting secretary) also enter the students' information into ATS but on a different screen. (The school's data entry appears to be the most consequential. If the school does not properly enter the student into ATS then that student is not counted as being temporarily housed. This can be problematic for requesting transportation or any other services to which the student is entitled.) ATS does have the capacity to generate reports from these different screens, but based on interviews with both DOE Students in Temporary Housing program staff as well as school staff who use these systems, it was not clear who was responsible for comparing data. Duplication of efforts therefore did not necessarily ensure more accuracy. DOE staff admitted that data processes also could be streamlined.

A third area demonstrating lack of coordination between city agencies concerned accountability for attendance. There were disagreements between staff at schools and shelters on their respective responsibilities. In some instances, staff at schools and shelters each saw the other as being responsible for attendance. On the school side, there was frustration with DHS social workers and case workers; staff across schools expressed concern that not enough was being done about attendance at the shelters where students reside. Although the stated mission of DHS does not include educational goals, the department recently posted an education plan on its website and hired its first staff member to focus exclusively on education.[52]

The gap in accountability between city agencies regarding attendance was particularly pronounced at shelter sites where there were staffing shortages or turnover. For example, an elementary school principal at School 3 in the Bronx lamented that the school's attendance rate had dropped precipitously from 93 percent to 88 percent after its share of temporarily housed students spiked from 10 percent to 40 percent when a new shelter serving a few hundred families opened a block away. The principal expressed dissatisfaction that the "shelter isn't doing much to get kids to school, nor get students to school on time even though it's one block away."

In this instance and others, there was a lack of clarity in how institutional roles and responsibilities were defined. A family with a school-aged child signing out of a shelter in the morning hours indicating they're leaving to take the child to school was marked by the shelter as attending school. School staff, though, does not mark students present until they walk into the school building. Between the time the child leaves the shelter and the child arrives at school it is not clear who is responsible for getting the child to school (if it was not the parent). There was also a basic problem of lack of communication.

Communication was also strained among DOE staff. Generally, for school staff and STH program staff there was a lack of awareness of each other's work. In the earlier example of an attendance teacher being unable to contact a chronically absent student residing in a locked cluster-site building where no staff was present, the attendance teacher was not connected to STH program staff. There did not appear to be a process through which information about the student's living situation could reach the attendance teacher in the field from the STH office.

School staff told IBO they frequently did not know the name of the family assistant assigned to shelters where students resided, or what this role entailed. Some did not even know there was a position called family assistant. The family assistants reported that they did not always know who to reach at the school;

on the school side, there has not always been a designee. Recently, schools have been mandated to designate a staff member to serve as a students in temporary housing school-based liaison in their consolidated plan, but this is in addition to the staff member's other responsibilities.[53] Many principals assign staff already in communication with families (parent coordinators, guidance counselors, or the pupil accounting secretary) but not necessarily those with experience working with this population. In the past two years the school-based liaison has been required to attend annual McKinney-Vento training provided by the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students.[54] Staff in the Students in Temporary Housing unit reported that only 50 percent of school-based liaisons attended the training this past school year. In our interviews, there were instances of both school staff and family assistants expressing interest in learning each other's day-to-day work and how to better cooperate.

In cases where there was a disconnect, it was not surprising that at times there was finger-pointing between school staff and family assistants, both DOE employees. At an attendance meeting, a principal voiced annoyance that the family assistant at a nearby shelter was not doing enough to address attendance and tardiness. "I don't understand how could there be a liaison in the shelter and then there's so many kids that are absent or so many kids that are late. You know who these families are and you know that children have to be in school. And if you're working for the Department of Education, why? Why are they not in school on time?" said the principal of School 9 in Brooklyn. The principal continued: "It's as though everything is left up to the school, the school to do, the school to do. There should be some accountability for them to reach out to the school to say, okay, these are my children that are attending your school. I've come to pick up reports for attendance and for lateness. [The family assistants] should be required to do those things as well."

A family assistant at a Brooklyn shelter serving close to 500 families wanted to spend more time on attendance, but had a different take on why that was not happening: there was not enough time in the day. "The principal blames us for attendance but doesn't get all we have to do," said the family assistant who then ticked off

a number of time-consuming tasks in addition to attendance tracking: enrolling new families in the shelter, discharging families who were leaving, getting families the residency letters that schools required, dispensing MetroCards, and responding to emergency calls.

Family assistants told IBO they do monitor the attendance of students by knocking on the doors of shelter residents, giving attendance reports to caseworkers, being present at any attendance meetings they are invited to with shelter staff, and answering school staff calls about attendance. They also reported that their responsibilities for shelter intake and transportation (both making and following up on busing requests, and distributing MetroCards) at times crowded out their work on attendance. Some of the tasks family assistants are assigned come as the result of steps not having been taken care of earlier in the process at PATH: school enrollment, letters to confirm shelter residency, and arrangements for transportation.

There were other areas where the lack of interagency coordination obstructed the work of serving students and families in temporary housing. For example, DOE staff reported that shelter contracts do not stipulate that there be a room provided for the DOE staff at the shelter, nor Internet or phone services. Most shelters do provide at least a desk for DOE staff, but there are some that do not even do that. Not having Internet service made any attempts by family assistants to follow up on attendance futile.

Minimal School-Level Resources for Temporarily Housed Students. Federal law requires that all school districts receiving Title I, Part A funds set aside funding annually for every student identified as living in temporary housing. This includes students in shelters, doubled-up housing, and other temporary living situations. There is no mandated formula for calculating Title I set-aside funding and as a result districts across the country use different approaches. Some methods include identifying homeless students' needs and funding them accordingly; obtaining a count of the students who are homeless and multiplying that number by the Title I, Part A per-pupil allocation; reserving a specific amount of funds greater than or equal to the amount of the district's McKinney-Vento sub-grant; and reserving a specific percentage based on the district's poverty level or total Title I, Part A allocation. New York City requires that all schools

set-aside a minimum of $100 per child in temporary housing per year. For schools receiving federal Title I funding, the set aside is drawn from the school's Title I allocation. For non-Title I, Part A schools, the set aside is funded using other sources. The money is not given directly to students or their families; rather it is spent by the school on the student's behalf. The DOE's Students in Temporary Housing unit issues a set of guidelines to schools on acceptable uses for spending the funds set aside.[55] They should be used primarily for educational services, but emergency supplies can be covered too.

Among the schools participating in this study, 11 out of 12 used the set-aside to make bulk purchases for students, such as school uniforms, sweatshirts, and school supplies. One school proposed directing monies based on individual students' needs, but found it difficult to implement even when following the instructions provided. After noticing that high school students were not wearing the sweatshirts provided by the school, the school's social worker instead wanted to use some of the funds to purchase glasses for a student who was at risk for glaucoma. The social worker and the principal reviewed the guidelines but got stuck when they went to get the purchase approved by the school network's business services manager. "[The business services manager] says things like no you can't use a P-card [the school's credit card] but then you look and the FAQ on monies says yes a P-card can be used," said a social worker at School 8 in Manhattan. "I do not want to have to navigate how we're paying for these things. I understand compliance and audits but this is taking so much energy for [the principal], for me," the social worker continued. "It's slowing down the work...We are told we have a school P-card but it's for emergencies. So toner is an emergency but glasses are not. The BSM told us to bulk buy umbrellas instead." School staff interviewed underscored unanimously that there was not much a school could provide by way of educational services with funding of $100 per student for the year.

Schools found additional funding sources to meet the immediate need for clothes, warm coats, and food. Staff across schools at times used their own funds to make direct purchases for students, as well as organized clothing, coat, and food drives to assist families in need. Staff saw these efforts as

instrumental, although piecemeal. Because of the lack of basic services at the disposal of families in temporary housing, what schools offered by way of support for clothing, food, or school supplies went a long way. A few parents in the focus groups expressed appreciation for funds made available for their child's prom pictures or class field trip. But the majority of parents that participated in this research did not know about the Title I, Part A $100 set-aside. When informed of the set-aside and asked how it should be used, parents most frequently suggested that the money be directed to activity fees; a few parents also mentioned using the funds for language translation.

The majority of school principals in this study—serving a student population with high percentages of students in temporary housing—pointed out that they were not receiving additional supports. There is no weight in the Fair Student Funding formula specifically for students in temporary housing. The consensus was that they did not know how to meet unique needs specific to not having stable housing without the necessary additional supports. This came up in nine interviews and both of the focus groups with principals. In one focus group a principal with more than 30 percent of the school's enrollment in temporary housing felt perplexed about this: "For other indicators, a student with IEP or ELL you get additional services, but for some reason with this, indicator of students in temporary housing, you're not getting instructional support, that [staff] person to be there and say, oh you missed a breakfast but I'm going to help get you breakfast," said the principal in focus group 8 in Manhattan. "You're not getting an additional guidance counselor allocation. And when your students are that many, I don't know why we're not." School staff said they needed counseling, attendance, and family engagement supports that would require significantly more funding.

Lastly, school principals expressed concern that the Title I, Part A funding set-aside is based on the number of students in temporary housing as of October 31 of the previous school year. Principals reported that given the fluid housing arrangements of these students, it is very common for students to switch schools during the year, often after the October 31 deadline has passed. The DOE has responded that generally those fluctuations are not that significant. While schools do not receive additional funding as new students enroll after October 31, they do not lose funding for students

who leave after October 31.[56] The funds are also reliant on accurate updates in the system.

More Resources for Counseling Needed. Across all 12 schools, principals emphasized the need for counseling—a service that costs much more than $100 per child.[57] School staff were not sure what kinds of counseling supports were available for families in the shelter system, as they discussed at length their concerns not just for the mental well-being of the children that they served but the mental wellness of families. Principals also drew attention to the fact that neither they, nor their staff, had specific training in trauma to effectively address the challenges some of their students struggling with housing stability were facing both in and out of school. The city has budgeted $16 million in fiscal year 2016 and $27 million for fiscal years 2017 through 2019 for DHS to add counseling resources. This money is for contracts with social workers at all family shelters at a ratio of 1 to 25 families. DOE has also recently announced a Bridging the Gap initiative to provide additional social work services to schools.[58]

Guidance counselors were in short supply. For those schools that had a full-time guidance counselor, their hours were dedicated among staff to students with mandated counseling services outlined in their individualized education plans. That did not leave room for seeing other students who might have a crisis or just need support, but did not have an IEP for mandated counseling. All 12 schools in our sample employed a guidance counselor or social worker. A few benefited from School Improvement Grant (SIG) money to pay for an additional part-time counselor or social worker, or community-based partner organization that filled the gaps.

The starting salary for guidance counselors is $53,000, with higher pay dependent on experience and additional training.[59] Social workers and psychologists also start at the same salary amount, but there are far fewer of them in the school system.[60] One principal estimated what it would cost to add a guidance counselor, based on the cost of the school's part-time counselor: $11,949 for one day a week with a caseload of 20 students. (Most mandated counseling is for two sessions a week for 30 minutes per session; this school counselor would group students for an hour to meet this demand.) The principal estimated that an hour of counseling service would come to just about $600 per student—much more than the Title I, Part A set-aside for students in temporary housing. Adding counselors was not just a budgetary concern for this principal. Mandated counselors have to be drawn from the excess pool; a bilingual counselor for the school's majority Spanish-speaking population was not available.

No Systematic Approach to Addressing Absenteeism Among Homeless Students. Schools that face high levels of absenteeism and chronic absenteeism typically use attendance personnel, attendance meetings, and meetings with families as strategies to identify students who are chronically late or absent, isolate the causes of absence and lateness, and help the family devise or improve strategies to get their children to school. In particular, attendance teachers play a number of critical roles in this area: monitoring attendance reports; investigating "407 reports;" making home visits; and mediating between families, schools, and other agencies involved in tracking attendance.[61] More often than not, however, schools do not have full-time personnel to address attendance. While some schools do employ in-house attendance teachers, most schools simply assign responsibility for attendance to one or more staff members who have other responsibilities, including parent coordinators, family workers, pupil accounting secretaries, guidance counselors, social workers, and paraprofessionals. In the view of many principals, having full-time dedicated staff for this purpose was a step in the right direction to boosting attendance rates but funding that staff meant not funding something else.

At the time that data for this study were being collected in 2014-2015, the DOE employed about 360 full-time attendance teachers systemwide.[62] Attendance teachers were organized by network, which meant they worked across several districts or even boroughs. Each was responsible for as many as 25 schools. Most of the schools that participated in this research study could only rely on an attendance teacher who visited one day or even a half-day a week. At that level of staffing, it is not feasible for an attendance teacher to track down all the missing students in a school or put a plan in place to facilitate individual students getting to school. Currently attendance teachers are organized by community school district and report to seven borough field support centers.

Attendance teachers also do not necessarily focus on students in temporary housing situations. While students who appear on the chronic absentee list can be in those arrangements, it is really up to each school to determine which cases the attendance teacher follows up. While students living in shelters are absent more frequently in every grade level than their permanently housed peers, to date there has been little to no systematic outreach effort specifically for this subpopulation of students. "In my experience absenteeism is higher among [students in temporary housing] but I don't always focus on [those] students. I only focus on what's in front of me," explained an attendance teacher at School 2 in the Bronx. "Every school has different needs. Schools with high numbers [of students in temporary housing] will assign me attendance cases. Other schools won't. If schools have an AT [attendance teacher] in house they can focus more on that. Some schools don't have an AT in house and I come once a week to trouble-shoot. I can't be an in-house AT coming once a week. You don't know everything that goes on. I'm attending to whatever is identified at that time."

The kind of investigative work involved in tracking students when they do not show up for school for long periods of time can be thorny. School staff members were conflicted about whether to use the city's Administration for Children's Services as a tool to improve attendance. On one side, ACS was the only lever schools felt they could pull to compel attendance. On the other side, calling ACS was also a risk: it did not necessarily help locate the student and in fact, it could push families further away. In the words of the principal of School 1 in the Bronx: "As a principal you have to understand that you are really obliterating the relationship with a family whenever you call ACS. So calling ACS on a family that's in a shelter, it's like they see it as one more thing on top of them, and they don't see it as us trying to protect their child. And when you call in a case, either they don't take the case, it's closed in 30 days, or ACS tells us oh, there's already a case opened on this, here's the case worker's name and number, and they're like yeah we've been looking for that family for a couple of weeks. Okay we've been looking for that family a couple of weeks too, so what's the next step?"

Without an attendance teacher or full-time staff

working on attendance, many school staff did not know where to turn when students were chronically absent. Teachers would often ask the guidance counselor or parent coordinator who would check in with ACS caseworkers or other staff at the shelter including the family assistant. At many points, school staff seemed resigned to not having an answer. A guidance counselor at School 9 in Brooklyn expressed frustration that there was not clarity on what could be done for a student who was not attending school. "I had a teacher stop me this morning [and say] 'this child got to school today at 10:25.' And I said to the teacher, I'm doing the best that I can. I'll call the shelter later and find out what's going on," said the guidance counselor. The recollection of the conversation continued, "I'll call the case worker. But at the end of the day, if ACS can't do anything about it there's not much we can do. But to just say, can we call the shelter and ask the case planner to please go knock on the door and ask mom to get her kids up and out?" This counselor presumed the issue was with the mother, but admitted not knowing with certainty.

Some schools sought to partner with community-based organizations that could provide staff to help with attendance but at times found those programs staffed by younger, inexperienced workers who were not strong in family engagement. "It's really about the interaction with the families and we find that if you're not really highly trained to deal with a variety of people then it's really hard to get our major goal across without us kind of micromanaging the situation and hand holding, which unfortunately we can't do," explained an assistant principal from School 7 in Brooklyn. Strong family engagement models were desired but lacking.

Like the larger STH program, schools used ad hoc and patchwork approaches to addressing attendance issues by stretching limited resources. It was clear that a variety of individuals were engaged in and responsible for attendance (the attendance teachers, family assistants, community-based organizations, as well as DHS caseworkers) but they each held different pieces of the puzzle and they were not in regular communication—or communication at all. There was also no systematic way to share programs or strategies that work. A lack of systems seemed to perpetuate piecemeal work. Most detrimentally, a lack of systems, processes, and communication meant that families seeking help with attendance often could not get it.

One school-shelter meeting we observed was illustrative of this. School staff reached out to a nearby shelter to have a meeting with families residing there about attendance challenges. More than 40 parents attended the meeting. The meeting consisted of the principal, parent coordinator, and content expert reviewing with parents the importance of school attendance. At the end of the meeting, one parent raised her hand and requested assistance to get her child up for school because of her late hour work schedule. No one seemed to have an answer or solution for this parent nor did there seem to be a process for follow up.

Shortcomings in Family Engagement. Finally, staff interviewed across schools said that there were other critical supports needed to address attendance that could help—namely family engagement strategies. These included training staff who can be a consistent figure interacting with the child and parent to build relationships with the family, and to help develop intrinsic motivation. Parent coordinators emerged as critical brokers with families. They were often the go-to person to learn more about a family's particular circumstances and specific obstacles to school attendance. They were the staff who principals trusted to engage with families during home visits, and they were willing to work with families in areas beyond their job responsibilities inside and outside of school walls, including meeting parents to pick up and drop off children, opening up their offices for parents to sit on the couch and talk, helping families to find jobs, coordinating food drives and delivering food, and doing laundry. Here, too, knowledge of the local community mattered in successfully engaging families. At times, staff from the school neighborhood could more readily relate to families and get to the bottom of their attendance challenges, the stories attendance teachers and others sometimes did not get.

Commonly used avenues to reach families are not necessarily successful with those living in shelters. Transient families and families without financial resources are forced to change addresses and phone numbers frequently. Schools often struggle to update family contact information, making it that much harder to reach chronically absent students. Drop-off time and pick-up time can serve as substantive and regular points of contact with families but those who do not have transportation support to travel with their children

to school or have other obligations during these times lose an opportunity to meet with school staff and vice versa. Parent teacher conferences generally were not as well attended by families in shelters, according to school staff interviewed. Meetings in the evening might better accommodate working families but do not work for families living in shelters, who can be required to adhere to curfew times to maintain their housing. There is also a need for transportation supports for parents to be able to attend meetings reliably.

It was not clear how successful parent leadership structures like parent associations, school leadership teams, and community education councils were in engaging families in temporary housing. Some representatives said they offered to give workshops for parents at shelters themselves but were told they could not due to shelter rules. A few were also told that workshops were provided directly by the shelter providers but had not met any parent who had attended one. As the president of a Community Education Council succinctly put it, "The missing link is who is responsible for meeting with parents living in shelters." This observation highlighted yet another example of a gap in services for families residing in the city's temporary housing system.

One content expert interviewed remarked that DOE's entire STH program could benefit from family engagement strategies as sometimes staff in the office did not realize how their decisions affected students and their families. The current operation, this content expert added, was geared more towards responding to emergencies than developing protocols and procedures—and it was not clear that addressing one emergency at a time was working well. This content expert used an example of MetroCard distribution to families. In many cases, handing them out at designated times was problematic because many parents work and have other obligations that prevent them from being available at those designated times. Staff are left to scramble to deliver cards at other times.

The content expert suggested that developing more systems might itself be an engagement strategy as it would facilitate more effective partnerships with families. Not engaging families better to keep their children in school and on track academically meant putting an additional burden on families already dealing with a highly precarious and disrupted life.

In summary, school staff overwhelmingly stressed that budget resources have been far short of what is necessary to provide comprehensive and coordinated counseling, attendance, and family engagement services. Since we completed our focus groups and interviews the city committed $10.3 million for the current fiscal year to provide literacy programs in shelters, place social workers in shelters with 50 or more homeless children, have attendance specialists available to work in shelters where students have significant school attendance problems, offer enrollment workshops to assist homeless families with the middle and high school application processes, and give subsidies to schools to provide physical and mental health care in clinics. As of now, there is no funding for these programs budgeted for future years.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

In school year 2013-2014, nearly 83,000 students in the city's public schools spent at least some portion of the year living in temporary housing—an increase of 25 percent since 2010-2011. Based on our quantitative and qualitative research, residing in temporary housing can burden students, their parents, and teachers and school administrators with a unique set of challenges. These challenges are most striking for children who are housed in the city's homeless shelters and may substantially affect their ability to succeed in school. Indeed, for many of these students just getting to school is an obstacle, as evidenced by the high rate of absenteeism among students housed in homeless shelters.

Our report finds that there are a number of factors that contribute to the chronic absenteeism for many students living in shelters. Parents often face conflicting demands in terms of where their children must be. Meetings with the homeless services agencies requiring the whole family's presence were often scheduled during school hours. Another barrier to school attendance is simply logistics. Families are often placed in shelters a considerable distance from the school their children had been attending. Switching to a nearer school, especially mid or late in the school year, can be very disruptive for a child's academic success and social adjustment. Practical matters such as not having clean clothes because there are no laundry facilities on site or near where a family is sheltered also may inhibit school attendance.

The lack of coordination by city agencies, specifically between the Departments of Education and Homeless Services as well as within the education department, can also compound the challenges. The two agencies have separate and sometimes redundant procedures and data systems that can lead to duplicative intake processes, fragmented service provision, and inefficient use of staff time. Both agencies track school attendance among children living in the shelters, yet it is not clear how they are working together to better understand and address attendance challenges. While there is a memorandum of understanding between the agencies that aims to better coordinate responsibilities and services, at the time of our field research there was little evidence that suggested progress.

The report also documents challenges more broadly for students living in temporary housing—whether in shelters, doubled up in housing with other families, or other impermanent situations—and for the schools they attend. One such challenge for the schools is funding. Although students in temporary housing may have special needs, the city's Fair Student Funding formula provides no specific allocation that could help schools meet these needs. Schools are required to set aside $100 from their federal Title 1, Part A allocation for each student in temporary housing—an amount school administrators and staff emphasized is inadequate.

In the months since IBO undertook the research for this report, the de Blasio Administration has taken steps to address some of the findings we present here. In January, the Mayor announced an expansion of yellow bus service to make it feasible

for more children in shelters to continue attending their original schools if so desired. More recently the Mayor allocated $10.3 million for the current fiscal year to station attendance specialists in shelters where there are substantial numbers of children with high rates of absences from school. The funding also supports several other efforts such as assisting homeless families with the middle school and high school application processes. But the funding for these and other programs is currently only budgeted for this fiscal year. In addition, the de Blasio Administration has announced a change in rules that required all children to be present when families applied for shelter, a process that often takes multiple visits and reapplications. As of November, children will not need to again accompany parents to the shelter system's intake center if the family had applied in the previous 30 days.

While these measures address some of the issues raised by our findings, many other challenges remain. Ongoing issues range from improving the coordination of efforts by the education and homeless services departments to meet the needs of students in temporary housing to ensuring schools have the necessary resources to assist these students—especially in schools with high concentrations of homeless children. Addressing these and other challenges could help homeless students overcome the unique obstacles they face in getting to school and achieving classroom success.

Appendix: Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative Data Methodology. With the approval of the city's Department of Education's Institutional Research Board, IBO conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with DOE staff and public school families during school year 2013-2014, to more fully understand the range of challenges to school success for students identified as living in temporary housing. Data collection efforts are described below.

Qualitative Sample. A total of 1,834 schools were ranked in descending order by percentage of their population identified in temporary housing in school year 2012-2013, the most recent data available at the time of qualitative sample determination. The top 50 schools had more than 25 percent of their population identified as students living in any temporary housing category as recognized by federal law. A 51st school in Staten Island was added to the sample, as it served a population where nearly 25 percent of students (24.9 percent) were identified as living in temporary housing, and was the only borough not to have representation in the top 50.

Fifty-one schools were then formally invited to participate in the study, which entailed one-on-one interviews with staff and observations of any relevant programming for students in temporary housing.

Eight of the 51 schools invited agreed to participate (16 percent). Subsequently, IBO focused on outreach

to three community school districts. Twelve schools eventually participated. The demographics for each of the 12 schools in the study are included in a table on page 46.

School Sample Descriptors. The table on page 46 offers descriptive statistics for each school in our sample, including demographics and attendance rates in school year 2012-2013, the year the sample was determined.

Interviews with School Administration, Staff, and Families. Participants were told that the study focus was on the educational outcomes of students in temporary housing and schools' efforts to support their success. There was an initial request for one- or two-day visits to the school to include up to 10 interviews with staff:

- the principal;
- assistant principal;
- the temporary housing liaison or staff such as pupil accounting secretary in charge of identification of students in temporary housing;
- guidance counselor and/or social worker;
- Staff who oversee and/or provide special education services;
- Staff who oversee and/or provide English language learner services;
- Classroom teachers;
- Community-based organizations that partner with the school to provide services to students in temporary housing; and
- Families of students in temporary housing.

Although there was a wide range of participants, each was asked the same questions about general population trends, distinctions in school performance among students in various temporary housing types and compared to permanently housed students, and specific challenges and available resources for this population. Interviews on average lasted 60 minutes.

Sample Schools, by Borough				
Borough	Sample Number	Percent of Sample	All Schools	Percent of All Schools
Manhattan	18	36.0%	363	19.8%
Brooklyn	8	16.0%	585	31.9%
Queens	4	8.0%	361	19.7%
Bronx	20	40.0%	447	24.4%
Staten Island	1	0.0%	78	4.3%
TOTAL	51		1,834	
New York City Independent Budget Office				

Demographics of Participating Schools

School	Borough	Grade Level	Percent						
			Temporary Housing	Overall Attendance	Black	Hispanic	Students With Disabilities	English Language Learner	Free/ Reduced-Price Lunch
1	Bronx	PreK-5	32.7	89.5	15.3	82.9	18.0	47.5	98.1
2	Bronx	6 -8	21.9	88.6	26.7	70.8	19.6	32.0	95.2
3	Bronx	PreK-8	36.9	89.6	48.9	49.3	21.3	13.1	96.9
4	Bronx	6- 8	20.2	84.4	24.9	72.6	12.2	27.0	96.8
5	Manhattan	PreK-5	47.2	91.4	36.0	53.3	28.9	11.7	89.8
6	Manhattan	PreK-8	43.9	86.7	27.5	65.5	21.6	16.4	87.7
7	Brooklyn	PreK-8	12.3	88.5	22.8	58.9	28.3	5.0	83.9
8	Manhattan	9 -12	29.2	87.5	10.7	43.6	3.1	89.3	86.9
9	Brooklyn	PreK-5	39.9	84.6	69.0	26.0	19.0	1.6	96.1
10	Brooklyn	PreK-5	19.7	87.9	79.8	18.1	15.8	3.7	91.0
11	Bronx	9 - 12	6.5	78.6	31.5	57.8	18.6	20.6	81.2
12	Staten Island	PreK-5	8.9	90.0	25.0	56.3	21.5	29.7	95.2

NOTE: Statistics provided for schools participating in the study.

New York City Independent Budget Office

In total, 77 staff across 12 schools participated (two of the staff changed schools and were interviewed at both locations). Additionally, we conducted 22 interviews with central and district staff in the Department of Education's unit for Students in Temporary Housing, including content experts and family assistants.

Focus Groups with Parents. Focus groups with New York City public school parents experiencing homelessness were added once the school interviews

School Staff Interviews (66), 4-7 Visits per School

	School 1	School 2	School 5	School 6	School 9	School 10
Principal	1	1	1	1	1	1
Assistant Principal	1			1	1	1
Pupil Accounting Secretary	1			1		1
Social Worker		1	1	1		
Guidance Counselor	1	2	2		1	1
Parent Coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	
Special Education Services Coordinator	1		1	1		
English Language Learner Services Coordinator	1	1	1	2		
Classroom Teacher			Grades 1 & 3	Grades Pre-K & 2		Grade 1 (2)
Family Worker	1	1				1
Parent	3	1	1		1	2
Attendance Teacher	1	1	1	1		
DOE Family Assistant					1	1
Other Staff (Security)						1
Community Partner Including CEC Members	1	2	1	1		1
Total Interviews	**13**	**11**	**13**	**11**	**6**	**12**

New York City Independent Budget Office

School Staff Interviews (13), 1-2 Visits per School						
	School 3	School 4	School 7	School 8	School 11	School 12
Principal	1		1	1	1	1
Assistant Principal		1	1			
Parent Coordinator						1
Parents						2
Social Worker/Guidance Counselor/Attendance Teacher		1		1	1	
Total Interviews	**1**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**4**

New York City Independent Budget Office

were complete because the visits to the 12 schools only yielded 10 interviews. Focus group participants engaged in a broad discussion of educational concerns related to their experiences navigating schooling during their time in temporary housing, including the school selection processes, travel to and from school, and their children's overall school experiences.

Focus groups included four to six parents and were conducted in English and Spanish. Groups were coordinated in conjunction with schools already participating in IBO's research, with the assistance of community-based organizations and district community education councils. Focus groups on average lasted 70 minutes. In total, 28 parents participated across six focus groups.

Focus Groups with Principals. Focus groups with New York City school principals in two districts were added to gain perspectives from leadership. Focus group participants engaged in a broad discussion of experiences and perspectives of effectively serving students in temporary housing.

Eight Focus Groups Involving 36 Parents				
Focus Group Number	Borough	Language	Hosting Organization	Number of Parents
1	Bronx	Spanish & English	School 1	4
2	Bronx	Spanish & English	Community-Based Organization	6
3	Brooklyn	English	CEC	4
4	Brooklyn	English	CEC	4
5	Manhattan	English	School 6	5
6	Manhattan	Spanish	School 6	5

New York City Independent Budget Office

Interviews With the Department of Education Students in Temporary Housing Program Staff (22 Staff)						
	Office of Student in Temporary Housing	Bronx	Brooklyn-North	Brooklyn-South	Manhattan	Queens
Central Staff	4					
Content Experts		2	2	2	1	2
Family Assistants		6	2	1	0	
Total Interviews	**4**	**8**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**2**

New York City Independent Budget Office

Two Focus Groups Involving 10 Principals					
Focus Group Number	Borough	Temporary Housing Type	Language	Host	Number of Principals
7	Brooklyn	Shelter/Doubled Up	English	Superintendent	6
8	Manhattan	Shelter/Doubled Up	English	Superintendent	4

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Endnotes

[1] US Department of Education data. Retrieved October 1, 2015 from http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm/tab/data/deid/5353/

[2] SIRS data on student homelessness. Retrieved October 1, 2015 from http://www.nysteachs.org/info-topic/statistics.html

[3] http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/mediadocs/280.pdf

[4] NYC schools are asked to disseminate this questionnaire to every student at the beginning of each school year, and again to any student who reports a change in residency status. There is no information collected on duration of temporary housing, so an indicator of temporary housing is for at least one point of the year. DOE says the data from the questionnaire pertaining to students in shelters is matched with the data collected by DHS with a success rate of 90-95%. This data is not matched with data collected by HRA or DYCD. There may be additional students who reside in a shelter during this time period who did not self-identify on the questionnaire.

[5] The McKinney-Vento Act was originally authorized in 1987, and most recently reauthorized in December 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf

[6] 42 U.S.C. 11434a(2)(B)(i).

[7] Changes to the Mckiney-Vento Act effective December 10, 2016 will exclude children awaiting foster care placement from the definition of students in temporary housing.

[8] These numbers do not include those students in categories formerly listed nor do they include NYC students enrolled in charter schools which do not use the Residency Questionnaire and report their STH numbers separately to New York State.

[9] Miller, P. M. (2011). A critical analysis of the research on student homelessness. Review of Educational Research, 81(3), 308–337. doi:10.3102/0034654311415120

[10] Buckner, J. (2008). Understanding the impact of homelessness on children. American Behavioral Scientist, 51(6), 721-736; Masten, A. S., Heistad, D., Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., Obradovic´, J., Chan, C-K., & Long, J. D. (2008, summer). Academic risk and resilience in homeless and highly mobile children in Minneapolis. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) Reporter; Obradović, J. et. al (2009). "Academic achievement of homeless and highly mobile children in an urban school district: Longitudinal evidence on risk, growth, and resilience." Development and Psychopathology, 21, 493-518; Wong et. al (2009). McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Subtitle B-Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program: Turning good law into effective education. Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy, 16, 53-98.

[11] Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (2012). The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social organization of Schools. Allensworth, E. & Easton, J. (2007). What matters for staying on track and graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago school research.

[12] Although self-reported data comes with limitations, its use allowed IBO analysts to merge this indicator with other biographic and academic information at the student level provided to us by the NYC Department of Education.

[13] This category includes students awaiting foster care placement, students residing in hotels and motels, and students living in all other temporary housing situations.

[14] Nauer, Kim; Nader, N., Robinson, G., Jacobs, T. (2014, November). A Bigger Picture of Poverty: What Chronic Absenteeism and Risk Load Reveal About NYC's Lowest-Income Elementary Schools. Center for New York City Affairs at the New School.

[15] http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NYC-Chronic-Absenteeism-Impact-Report.pdf

[16] http://observer.com/2016/01/city-to-end-use-of-cluster-homeless-shelter-units; http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/24/nyregion/temporary-homeless-plan-grows-and-so-does-the-bill.html?pagewanted=1;

[17] http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/12/nyregion/new-york-city-mergingagencies-for-homeless-and-welfare-services.html?action=click&contentCollection=N.Y.%20%2F%20Region&module=RelatedCoverage&region=EndOfArticle&pgtype=article&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&_r=0; http://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-city-makes-new-moves-to-help-homeless-1460421989. The Human Resources Administration (HRA) Office of Domestic Violence previously administered a separate shelter system for survivors of domestic violence which is comprised of emergency residential programs as well as transitional housing programs. Families with school-aged children who reside in HRA programs were not included in this study.

[18] http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/shelter/families/families-with-children-applying.page

[19] Ibid.

[20] http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf. See also DOE Office of Pupil Transportation exemptions to transportation eligibility: http://optnyc.org/ServicesAndEligibility/exceptions.htm#housing. In NYC students may remain in the school of origin or the local school until they have graduated from that school even if the family has moved into permanent housing outside of the district or Region (Chancellors Regulation, A-780)

[21] Prekindergarten kids were eliminated from the school moves analysis. A further .075% of students were removed due to data irregularities. Of 82,807 students identified in temporary housing this year, 4,856 were removed (4787 of which were in PreK).

[22] http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/temporary_housing_report.pdf. DHS does not report solely on the eligibility rates of families with school-aged children. Data was not available for the month of October 2013.

[23] Shelters for runaway and homeless youth (RHY) have a thirty-day maximum stay but that can be extended to 60 days. There are also RHY transitional independent living programs (TILs) that are considered temporary housing and have a maximum length of stay of 18 months.

[24] According to Legal Aid Society, DHS tracks family requests for reasonable accommodations.

[25] http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-homelss-population-tops-59k-record-high-article-1.2099150

[26] Mayor's Management Report retrieved from http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2015/dhs.pdf

[27] http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/RenewalSchools/default#plan

[28] http://www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov/news/articles/major-court-ruling-favor-pa-james-will-force-doe-answer-its-failures-students; http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2016/02/01/james-sues-city-for-not-properly-tracking-services-for-students-with-disabilities/#.V6zKlfkrJD8

[29] http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/invisible-child/#/?chapt=1

[30] Kozol, Jonathan (1988). Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America. New York, NY: Random House.

[31] Retrieved March 15, 2015 from: http://www.nyc.gov/html/doi/downloads/pdf/2015/mar15/pr08dhs_31215.pdf

[32] http://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-audit-department-of-homeless-services-places-families-with-children-in-shelters-with-deplorable-conditions/

[33] http://www.legal-aid.org/media/147457/callahan%20consent%20order%20signed.pdf

[34] As a condition of eligibility for temporary housing, any individual or family must develop and meet requirements set within an Independent Living Plan that can include mandatory appointments with caseworkers, participation in jobs programs, and compliance with shelter rules. https://otda.ny.gov/programs/shelter/documents/NYCRR-352-35.pdf

[35] City Council Committee on Education Hearing, January 25, 2016

[36] P-card limit for schools is $5,000 twice a year.

[37] It is important to note that policies can vary by shelter and it is not clear what oversight there is across the city.

[38] http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2015/dhs.pdf. Note that this percentage is out of 8,265 families placed in shelter that year that could potentially be placed in the borough of the youngest child's school. DHS explains that there are valid reasons that some families are not able to be placed close to school due to safety concerns, medical issues, or those arriving from outside of New York City.

[39] http://www.optnyc.org/ServicesAndEligibility/exceptions.htm#housing. Also see Chancellor's Regulations A-780 and A-801.

[40] Transportation supports can also be specified in a 504-plan.

[41] http://www.nbcnewyork.com/investigations/School-Bus-Children-New-York-City-Denied-Buses-Investigation-Shelters-New-York-City-363376401.html; http://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2016/02/4/education-department-rolling-out-yellow-buses-to-get-younger-students-living-in-homeless-shelters-to-school.html

[42] N.Y. Education Law Section 3209(2)(d).

[43] Putnam, Robert D. (1995). "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." Journal of Democracy 6 (1): 65–78. doi:10.1353/jod.1995.0002

[44] http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2016/04/

de-blasio-to-commit-30m-to-address-growing-homeless-student-population-101058 (paywall)

[45]http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/allocationmemo/fy13_14/FY14_PDF/sam48.pdf

[46]https://stateaid.nysed.gov/publications/handbooks/handbook_2013.pdf (see page 35).

[47]http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/allocationmemo/fy13_14/FY14_PDF/sam48.pdf

[48]In New York State, in 2009, 27 school districts including NYC received $6.1 million in grant money from ARRA to support eligible activities under McKinney-Vento. This meant that in addition to the basic McKinney-Vento annual grant of $1 million, DOE also received $4.9 million in ARRA funding for STH for those three years. They used that money to hire borough-based program managers.

[49]http://www.p12.nysed.gov/funding/2016-2019-nysed-mckinney-vento-grant/home.html

[50]This number comes from the matched data file that DOE runs with DHS on a monthly basis-they report accuracy of 90%. DOE and DHS have reported that while there have been concerns with the accuracy to date, progress is on the way to be able to do a system-wide data match.

[51]http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NYC-Chronic-Absenteeism-Impact-Report.pdf

[52]http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/public-education-plan-2015-2016.pdf

[53]A compliance item, as outlined in Chancellor Regulation A-780.

[54]http://www.nysteachs.org/

[55]http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/8D99859A-AE04-40EA-A462-5363F87E67E9/0/FAQTitleISetAsideFY14.pdf

[56]http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/Calendar.aspx. Testimony by Deputy Chancellor Rose, February 4, 2016.

[57]http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/allocationmemo/fy15_16/FY16_PDF/sam01_1b.pdf

[58]"City adds social workers to schools with large homeless populations," https://www.politicopro.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2016/08/city-adding-social-workers-to-schools-with-large-homeless-populations-104694

[59]http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/B6284591-4EA9-4B18-B786-5DF2626ED7DC/0/CounselorSCHEDULEMAY12015Corrected.pdf

[60]http://www.uft.org/files/attachments/secure/school-psychologist-socialworker-schedule-2013-2018.pdf

[61]Attendance referral forms that are generated once a student is absent for more than ten consecutive days, twenty days aggregate over a four month period, or eight consecutive days if there has been a prior 407 form completed.

[62]Our data shows 355 Attendance Teachers in 339 schools (228 in Community School Districts 1-32). Attendance teachers are also employed in District 79.