

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Homeless Education Program (HEP) was designed to serve homeless students and their families, primarily within the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD). The purpose of the HEP was to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and academic success of homeless students. Primary program services included Drop-In Centers at 15 Dallas ISD high schools, removing enrollment barriers for homeless students, and working with the Dallas ISD Student Transportation Services to ensure homeless students could attend their schools of origin. The HEP also provided homeless students with tools to help them succeed, such as school and hygiene supplies. Additionally, the HEP provided mentoring experiences and afterschool programs. Tutoring services were provided through After8toEducate (After8). Finally, the HEP strove to reduce the stigma and stereotypes surrounding homelessness. The HEP staff members helped educate teachers, school staff members, and the community on the rights and issues of the homeless and services that the HEP provides.

The HEP is federally funded through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which is a U.S. federal law that provides funding and protections for homeless individuals. The total budget for the 2019-20 school year was \$499,329, an increase from \$424,028 during the 2018-19 school year. The 2019-20 budget included \$317,435 from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and \$181,894 from Title I, Part A (as of February 28, 2020).

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation was to describe the context, process, and outcomes of the HEP program in 2019-20.¹ Specifically, the evaluation reports 1) characteristics of the Dallas ISD homeless students, 2) services the HEP provided, and 3) changes in the status of homeless students from 2018-19 to 2019-20.

The evaluation intended to assess the academic achievement for homeless Dallas ISD students in kindergarten through grade 12, but in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas Education Agency² and Dallas ISD,³ cancelled most spring assessments.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Students were classified as homeless if they and/or their families fit into one of four categories: 1) two or more families living in one home because of financial issues, domestic violence, or other factors (i.e., “doubled up”); 2) family living in motels, often paying on a week-to-week basis; 3) family living in homeless shelters; or 4) unaccompanied youth with no guardian or permanent residence (e.g., couch surfing⁴ or living out of a car).

Students classified as homeless were flagged as either “homeless” or “McKinney-Vento” in the Dallas ISD district database. For the purposes of this evaluation, there were no substantive differences between the Dallas ISD students identified as homeless and those identified as McKinney-Vento.⁵ Thus, these students were combined into one group of students for this evaluation.

Once students were flagged as homeless and/or McKinney-Vento, they retained that flag for the remainder of the school year, regardless of whether the student transitioned out of homelessness. That flag was then reevaluated at the beginning of the following school year.

Because of the transient nature of homeless students in the Dallas ISD, this evaluation reports data for homeless students who were enrolled at any time during the school year. Thus, homeless student analyses were conducted using the end-of-year (EOY) district demographic file (May 29, 2020). Districtwide analyses were conducted using active students enrolled on the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) date (October 31, 2019).

¹ Portions of this report were adapted from Rowles (2019).

² <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/correspondence/taa-letters/cancellation-of-staar-testing-for-the-remainder-of-the-school-year>.

³ The district transitioned to at-home learning on March 23, 2020 and continued through the end of the school year. Students could have enrolled in the district at any time, regardless of the learning environment.

⁴ Couch surfing refers to staying temporarily in a series of others' homes, often without paying.

⁵ Staff members were funded by McKinney-Vento funds or Title I, Part A funds. The funding source of the staff members with which each homeless student interacted determined the classification of the student.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What were the characteristics of Dallas ISD homeless students?

Methodology

The evaluator conducted descriptive analyses to summarize the characteristics of homeless students using the district demographic file dated May 29, 2020.

Results

Throughout the 2019-20 school year, 3,964 homeless students enrolled in the Dallas ISD. The largest percentages of homeless students were in prekindergarten, ($n = 519$, 13%), grade one ($n = 343$, 9%), and grade nine ($n = 341$, 9%; Table 1). Homeless students made up about three percent of the total district population. A larger percentage of homeless students were in early childhood through grade five (61%) than the district overall (52%). The percentages of homeless students during the 2019-20 school year were similar to the percentages during the previous school year for students in early childhood through grade five (61%, 2019-20; 60% 2018-19; Rowles, 2019), grade six through grade eight (18%, 2019-20; 19% 2018-19), and grade nine through grade 12 (21%, 2019-20; 21% 2018-19).

Table 1: 2019-20 Homeless Student and District Student Enrollment by Grade

Grade	Homeless Students ($N = 3,964$)		District Students ($N = 153,494$)	
	n	%	n	%
Grades EC-5				
EC	14	0.4	531	0.3
PK	519	13.1	10,938	7.1
K	309	7.8	11,788	7.7
1	343	8.7	11,229	7.3
2	331	8.4	11,063	7.2
3	304	7.7	11,135	7.3
4	288	7.3	11,364	7.4
5	324	8.2	11,974	7.8
Total	2,432	61.4	80,022	52.1
Grades 6-8				
6	280	7.1	11,089	7.2
7	232	5.9	10,974	7.1
8	190	4.8	10,300	6.7
Total	702	17.7	32,363	21.1
Grades 9-12				
9	341	8.6	12,860	8.4
10	197	5.0	10,666	6.9
11	138	3.5	9,258	6.0
12	154	3.9	8,325	5.4
Total	830	20.9	41,109	26.8

Source: PEIMS demographic file dated 10/31/19 and EOY demographic file dated 05/29/20.

Note: EC = Early childhood. PK = prekindergarten. K = kindergarten. Grade level percentages may not sum to the total because of rounding.

A larger percentage of homeless students were African American (47%) compared to the district overall (21%; Table 2), and a smaller percentage were Hispanic (45%) than the district overall (70%). A smaller percentage were considered English learners (29%) than the district overall (51%). Other characteristics of homeless students were similar to the district overall.

Table 2: 2019-20 Homeless Student and District Student Characteristics

	Homeless Students ($N = 3,964$)		District Students ($N = 153,494$)	
	n	%	n	%
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	22	0.6	1,794	1.2
African American	1,872	47.2	32,627	21.3
Hispanic	1,772	44.7	108,063	70.4
Native American	7	0.2	301	0.2
Hawaiian/PI	6	0.2	54	<0.1
Two or More Races	135	3.4	2,829	1.8
White	150	3.8	7,826	5.1
Sex				
Female	1,926	48.6	74,976	48.8
Male	2,038	51.4	78,518	51.2
Special Student Populations				
SPED	427	10.8	14,478	9.4
EL	1,154	29.1	78,030	50.8

Source: PEIMS demographic file dated 10/31/19 and EOY demographic file dated 05/29/20.

Note: PI = Pacific Islander. SPED = special education. EL = English learner. Totals may not sum to 100 percent because of rounding.

What services did the HEP provide in 2019-20?

Methodology

The evaluator collected information about HEP services through interviews with program staff members and document and website review.

Results

The HEP worked with Dallas ISD Student Transportation Services, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), and the transportation services of nearby districts to ensure that all homeless students had consistent transportation to their school of origin. In 2019-20, the HEP fulfilled 365 in-district transportation requests.⁶ In addition, the HEP split transportation costs with other school districts to transport 250 students that either lived within the Dallas ISD boundary and attended other school districts or lived within other school district boundaries and attended the Dallas ISD.

In partnership with Promise House⁷ and Focus on Teens,⁸ two Dallas-based non-profit organizations, the HEP also supported 15 Drop-In Centers at Dallas ISD high schools. The Drop-In Centers served as hubs for homeless students

⁶ No bus passes were issued after the district transitioned to at-home learning on March 23, 2020.

⁷ For more information, see <https://promisehouse.org/>.

⁸ For more information, see <https://www.focusonteens.org/>.

to access helpful and necessary materials, such as backpacks, uniforms, hygiene items, and school supplies. The HEP assisted 582 students by providing materials. Drop-In Center leaders also referred students to additional services (e.g., mental health services) and organized presentations from outside agencies about numerous topics (e.g., college admissions, career options, etc.). The Drop-In Centers also worked with Food and Childhood Nutrition Services to provide students with healthy breakfasts, because they previously had been providing students with unhealthy options like donuts. Beyond the Drop-In Centers, the HEP worked to ensure that homeless students were provided the same enrichment-filled opportunities and experiences that other students received, including access to sports teams, afterschool programs, and summer camps.

The HEP worked with After8,⁹ a center supporting unaccompanied high school youth in Dallas. In addition to providing drop-in services and tutoring, After8 helped students move into transitional housing or to reunify with their families.

The HEP assisted homeless students and their families through efforts to reduce the stigma and stereotypes surrounding homelessness. The program provided training sessions and videos to help educate teachers, campus staff members, and the community on the rights and issues of homeless individuals, the services the HEP provides, and what role individuals can play in assisting the homeless community.

After the district transitioned to at-home learning, homeless students were left without regular Internet access and were unable to access instructional resources online. While most mobile Wi-Fi hotspots were distributed by campuses, the HEP worked with the Information Technology Department to ensure students homeless students obtained the technology. HEP staff members also worked more intently with Food and Child Nutrition Services and Student Transportation Services in addition to DART, shelters, and area hotels to identify delivery sites for meals, school supplies, and hygiene items.

What was the status of homeless students in 2019-20 as compared to 2018-19?

Methodology

For homeless students during the 2018-19 school year, the evaluator used frequency analyses to determine if homeless students stayed within the Dallas ISD, moved elsewhere, or changed homeless status for the 2019-20 school year.

Results

Of the students who were homeless in 2018-19 (n = 3,306), 2,588 (78%) stayed in the Dallas ISD in 2019-20 and 718 (22%) were no longer enrolled. Of the 3,964 Dallas ISD students who were homeless in 2019-20, 554 were also

flagged as homeless in 2018-19 (14%), and 3,410 were newly flagged as homeless (86%). Of the 3,410 students who were newly flagged as homeless in 2019-20, 1,851 were in the Dallas ISD in 2018-19 (54%) and 1,559 were newly enrolled (46%).

How did attendance rates, discipline referrals, and graduation rates for homeless students in 2019-20 compare to 2018-19?

Methodology

The evaluator conducted descriptive analyses to compare 2018-19 and 2019-20 attendance rates, discipline referral rates, and graduation rates for homeless students in the Dallas ISD.

Results

The 2019-20 semester 1 attendance rate for homeless students was slightly below 92 percent (Table 3), which was comparable to the semester rates during the 2018-19 school year (93%, semester 1; 92% semester 2). The rate was lower than the overall district rate of 95% for semester 1 2019-20.

For discipline referrals, nearly four percent of homeless students earned at least one discipline referral in fall 2019-20; this rate was slightly lower than in fall or spring 2018-19 when over four percent and six percent of homeless students earned at least one discipline referral, respectively (Table 3). This was also slightly higher than the fall 2018-19, spring 2018-19, and fall 2019-20 (all 3%) discipline referral rates for the district overall. The most common type of discipline referral during each semester was fighting. Homeless students were referred 69 times for fighting in fall 2019-20 (37% of homeless student discipline cases), compared to 72 times in fall 2018-19 (33% of homeless student discipline cases), and 107 times in spring 2018-19 (38% of homeless student discipline cases).

⁹ For more information, see <http://after8toeducate.com/>.

Table 3: 2018-19 and 2019-20 Homeless and District Overall Attendance and Discipline Rates

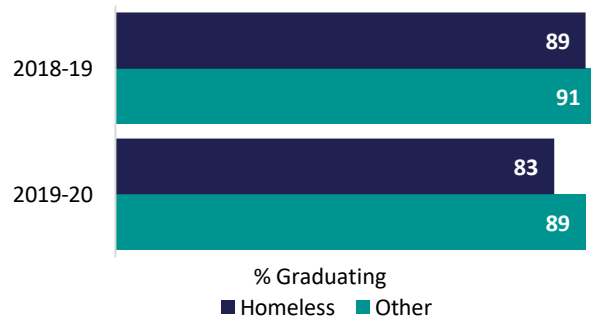
District Overall Attendance and Discipline Rates					
Year	Sem	Homeless		District	
		N	%	N	%
Attendance					
2018-19	Fall	3,306	92.5	151,700	95.5
	Spring	3,306	92.2	151,700	95.2
2019-20	Fall	3,964	91.9	153,416	94.9
Discipline					
2018-19	Fall	3,306	4.4	155,237	3.1
	Spring	3,306	5.5	155,237	3.3
2019-20	Fall	3,964	3.5	153,494	2.9

Source: District PEIMS data files dated 10/26/18 (2018-19) and 10/31/19 (2019-20). EOY demographic files dated 05/28/19 (2018-19) and 05/29/20 (2019-20). District attendance files dated 06/04/19 (2018-19) and 01/24/20 (fall 2019-20). District discipline files dated 07/18/19 (2018-19) and 01/16/20 (fall 2019-20).

Note: Sem = Semester.

Of the 110 homeless seniors enrolled at the end of 2019-20, 83 percent graduated (Figure 1). This rate was lower than in 2018-19, when 89 percent of the 130 homeless seniors graduated, and the 2019-20 rate for district students overall (89%).

Figure 1: 2018-19 and 2019-20 Homeless and District Overall Graduation Rates



Source: District PEIMS data files dated 10/26/18 (2018-19) and 10/31/19 (2019-20). EOY demographic files dated 05/28/19 (2018-19) and 05/29/20 (2019-20). District graduation files dated 07/08/19 (2018-19) and 06/17/20 (2019-20).

Note: Homeless student graduation Ns and rates include only seniors that were enrolled at the end of the year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue to provide necessary services to homeless students. The HEP provided many services to homeless students and their families during the 2019-20 school year. The HEP fulfilled 365 within-district and 250 inter-district transportation requests; cooperated with community organizations to provide shelter, clothing, and supplies; and operated Drop-In Centers for support and supplies at 15 high school campuses. It is important that these supports continue in 2020-21.

Explore approaches to engaging homeless students in learning when they cannot physically be at a campus. While the graduation rate for the District overall remained consistent with previous years, the rate for homeless students dropped six percentage points from 2018-19 after the District transitioned to at-home learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The HEP staff members should develop means to continue engaging homeless students – especially students near obtaining a high school diploma – when in-person learning is not possible.

REFERENCE

Rowles, S. (2019). 2018-19 Evaluation of the Homeless Education Program. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

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