



1 in 4 Homeless Children Are Missing From School

Request: The flexible structure of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund is not serving children experiencing homelessness effectively. Therefore, the Alliance for Excellent Education and SchoolHouse Connection request \$500 million in direct funding for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program in the next COVID-19 relief bill.

Rationale:

- (1) **Homeless children are not being effectively served under ESSER.** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) allows, but does not require, ESSER funds to support homeless children through EHCY. Evidence suggests this flexible approach is not serving children experiencing homelessness effectively.

In a survey of 1,444 school district homeless liaisons conducted in September and October of 2020, only [18 percent](#) indicated that CARES Act funds were being used to support homeless children. In addition, an analysis conducted by the Center for Reinventing Public Education found that only 17 percent of the district COVID-19 plans they analyzed described strategies to support homeless students, "[signaling that these students are not being prioritized for assistance.](#)"

In part because the CARES Act did not specifically allocate funding to support children experiencing homelessness, [one in four homeless children \(420,000 homeless children\)](#) have gone unidentified and unenrolled in public schools. These students are [disproportionately students of color](#), English learners, and students with disabilities. Without direct funding (not just an allowable use), these children are not being enrolled in school. Homeless children are too easily overlooked among competing demands.

- (2) **ESSER breaks precedent; EHCY usually receives direct funding during national emergencies.**

Because of the unique challenges facing children experiencing homelessness, EHCY usually receives targeted funding in legislation responding to national emergencies. For example, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided an additional \$70 million for EHCY. Relief legislation responding to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and wildfires have provided targeted funding for EHCY. Even the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 included support for EHCY.

- (3) **Other homeless aid proposed by the Biden administration is unlikely to support many homeless students.** This is because the definition of "homeless" used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) excludes 84 percent of the homeless children identified by public schools.ⁱ EHCY is the only federal program that removes barriers to school enrollment, attendance, and success caused by homelessness. EHCY could also be used to help this highly mobile population gain access to vaccinations when they become available.

- (4) **\$500 million – less than half of one percent of the \$130 billion proposed by the Biden Administration for education** – would dramatically increase the number of local educational agencies receiving EHCY grants. Currently only [23% of LEAs](#) receive EHCY subgrants.

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ⁱ In general, HUD's definition of "homeless" excludes children and families who have lost their homes and are temporarily staying in motels or with others. In 2018-2019, 76.7% of homeless children were "doubled up" and 7.1% were staying in hotels or motels according to the [National Center for Homeless Education](#).