



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE HOMELESS

During the 2018-19 school year, more than 114,000 New York City students experienced homelessness. Approximately 34,000 of these students—a population larger than the entire enrollment of the Buffalo public school system—spent time living in the City's shelters. They face numerous obstacles to school success:

- » **More than half (53%) of students living in the City's shelters are chronically absent**, missing at least one out of every ten school days. Combined, they lose 325,000 days of instruction every year.
- » **More than a third of elementary school students and more than one in four middle schoolers in shelter transfer schools mid-year**, meaning they lose the stability of familiar teachers and classmates in addition to a stable place to call home.
- » **Only 17% of 3rd–8th graders in shelter are reading proficiently**, and of students who stay in shelter at some point during high school, **only 45% graduate in four years**.

We appreciate that the City has taken a number of positive steps in recent years to directly support students who are homeless, including placing 100 “Bridging the Gap” social workers and more than 100 Students in Temporary Housing Community Coordinators in schools with high numbers of students who are homeless. These staff are helping connect students and their families to much-needed resources and are working to address the obstacles that prevent regular school attendance. However, **only one in four children in shelter attends a school with a Bridging the Gap social worker or Community Coordinator**—meaning about 25,000 students in shelter lack this school-based support.

Furthermore, **as the number of family shelters and commercial hotels has grown, the number of shelter-based DOE staff has not kept pace, meaning that some students and families have no DOE support at their shelter at all**. Currently, there are approximately 117 DOE Family Assistants who work in shelters. In addition to being stretched thin by rising caseloads, the Family Assistants are not required to have a college degree and many lack the skills needed to address chronic absenteeism and help families navigate the City's complex education system.

BUDGET RECOMMENDATION:

Add shelter-based DOE Community Coordinators to help students who are homeless (\$5M).

It is critical to have qualified, trained professionals on the ground at the City's shelters who can better address barriers to school attendance and success and provide more robust support to families with issues such as enrollment, transportation, and special education. In the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, the City should include and baseline \$5 million for at least 50 DOE Students in Temporary Housing Community Coordinators to work in shelters to focus on meeting the educational needs of students who are homeless, as well as three managers to supervise and support the work of the Community Coordinators.