



## Historic increases in the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness in United States and Pennsylvania

*24,504 Children and Youth in Pennsylvania and 1,301,239 in the United States experienced homelessness in the 2013-2014 School Year -- reading and math scores dramatically declined*

The number of children and youth experiencing homelessness in both Pennsylvania and in the United States has increased over the past three years. For the first time in American history, the number of homeless children and youth exceeds 24,000 in Pennsylvania and 1.3 million in the United States. People's Emergency Center compiled recently published reports on children and youth who experience homelessness to inform the region's leadership about the increasing numbers of this vulnerable population.

### Highlights of recent reports:

- There was a 6.7 percent national increase in the number of homeless students *enrolled* between the School Year (SY) 2012-2013 and SY 2013-14, and a 14.9 percent increase in the three-year period SY 2011-12 to SY 2013-14 [NCHE 2015a].
- Pennsylvania reported that 24,504 children and youth who experienced homelessness were *served* in SY 2013-14, an 8 percent increase from SY 2012-2013 [PDE 2015].
- Most homeless students are living doubled up and *not* in shelters or outdoors. Nationally, 76 percent of students were reported as living doubled up. In Pennsylvania, 63 percent of homeless students lived doubled up [NCHE 2015a; PDE 2015].
- The *Federal Data Summary School Years 2011-12 to 2013-14 Education for Homeless Children and Youth*, provides evidence that students experiencing homelessness scored lower in standardized reading and mathematics assessment tests than in the previous year [NCHE 2015a].
- Reading and math scores by Pennsylvania's homeless students grades 3-8 have declined by 9 and 14 percentage points, respectively, suggesting a serious problem. For those in high

school, scores are increasing.

Who should read this policy brief?

Social service providers working with children and youth who experience homelessness, advocates, educators and policy makers in Pennsylvania.

Sources:

- Pennsylvania Department of Education: *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2013-14 State Evaluation Report*, January 2015 <http://bit.ly/1TcsG2l> [PDE, 2015]
- National Center for Homeless Education: *Federal Data Summary School Years 2011-12 to 2013-14 Education for Homeless Children and Youth*, November 2015 <http://1.usa.gov/1m3YxbC> [NCHE, 2015a]
- National Center for Homeless Education: *Guide to Reporting Federal Data*, August 2015 <http://bit.ly/1lznSjp> [NCHE, 2015b]
- Data for School Years 2009-2013 comes from PEC's previous summary reports, <http://bit.ly/1OHfuPf>

What does this summary contain?

Key indicators found in the reports cited above include:

- The number of homeless children and youth enrolled and/or served by the education system and/or other community-based services.
- The academic achievement of these students, measured by standardized testing.
- Nighttime residency statistics for students experiencing homelessness.



## Numbers of students who experience homelessness:

The education system reports two different numbers of homeless children and youth: those *enrolled in school* and those *served* by the schools. The term *enrolled* includes all children and youth who are identified as meeting the education system's [McKinney-Vento Act](#) [42 U.S.C. § 11433], [definition of homelessness](#). Students from Pre-kindergarten through 13<sup>th</sup> grade make up the *enrolled* category\*. Homeless students included in served counts may or may not be enrolled in school, but receive assistance from the schools as a result of McKinney-Vento [42 U.S.C. § 11433] funding.

*From NCHÉ's Guide to Federal Reporting, 2015:*

"The McKinney-Vento Act defines enrolled as "attending classes and participating fully in school activities" [42 U.S.C. § 11434(a) (1)]. For data collection purposes, enrolled includes any child for whom a current record exists. Age 3 through 5 (not Kindergarten) includes any preschool-aged (3 through 5) homeless child who is enrolled in public preschool program (See the definition of public preschool for more information). Children to be included may be attending at a specific location or participating in a home-based program." [p. 22]

"The definition of served includes homeless children who have been served in any way through McKinney-Vento funds regardless of their enrollment in school or preschool. Services would include both direct services, as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act [42 U.S.C. § 11433], and indirect services, such as those provided by a staff member whose position is supported through McKinney-Vento funds and who is involved in the administration of the McKinney-Vento program but does not necessarily provide direct services. An example of an indirect service includes outreach activities for which a staff member's time is paid and results in an increase in the identification of homeless students. This definition includes children aged Birth through 5 years old who are served by the subgrant program." [p. 25]

Caution should be used in comparing counts of students, especially across state lines. Changes from year to year could be a result from numerous factors, including improved outreach and identification as well as an increase in the homeless population. Data may also be impacted by changes to state academic standards or assessments; while all states use the same definitions found in the McKinney-Vento Act, each state designs the academic standards and assessments used to measure the academic progress of students. Additional challenges exist when comparing counts of students who were served by school districts, as even within the same state, variations in the application of the term served may cause one district to include students in the count while another district providing similar services does not.

\*The PDE report does not include 13<sup>th</sup> grade students in their enrolled statistic

## Number of Homeless Students Enrolled, United States:

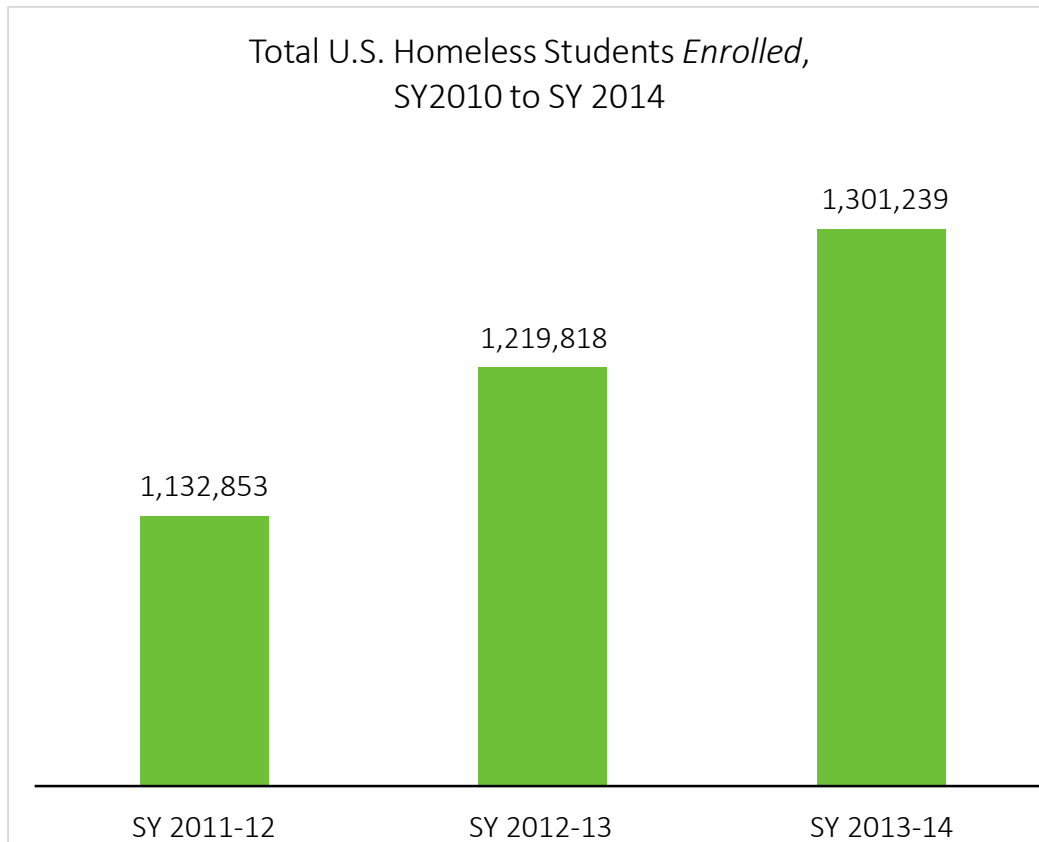


Figure 1. SY 2013-14 data from NCHE 2015a; SY 2011-13 data from previous PEC summaries

- 1,301,239 homeless children were enrolled in the 2013-14 School Year (SY), a 6.7 percent increase from the previous year total of 1,219,818 and a 14.9 percent increase from the 2011-12 total of 1,132,853 [NCHE 2015a].
- There were 37 states (71 percent) that reported an increase in the total number of homeless children and youth enrolled in school. This includes Washington D.C [NCHE 2015].
- There were 15 states (29 percent) that reported a decrease in the number of homeless children and youth. This includes Puerto Rico [NCHE 2015a].

## Number of Children and Youth Who are Homeless, Pennsylvania:

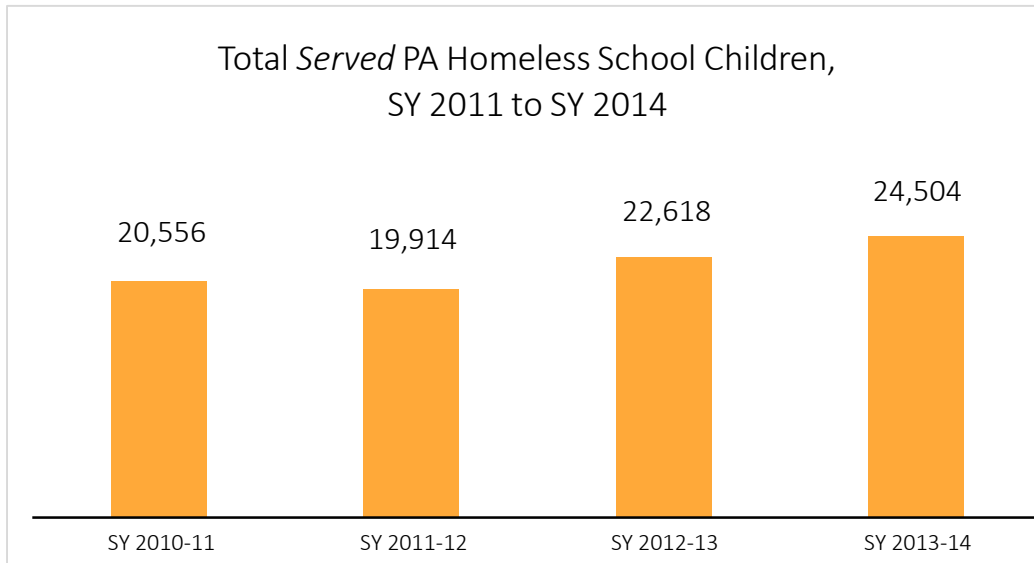


Figure 2. SY 2013-14 data from PDE 2015; SY 2010-13 data from previous PEC summaries

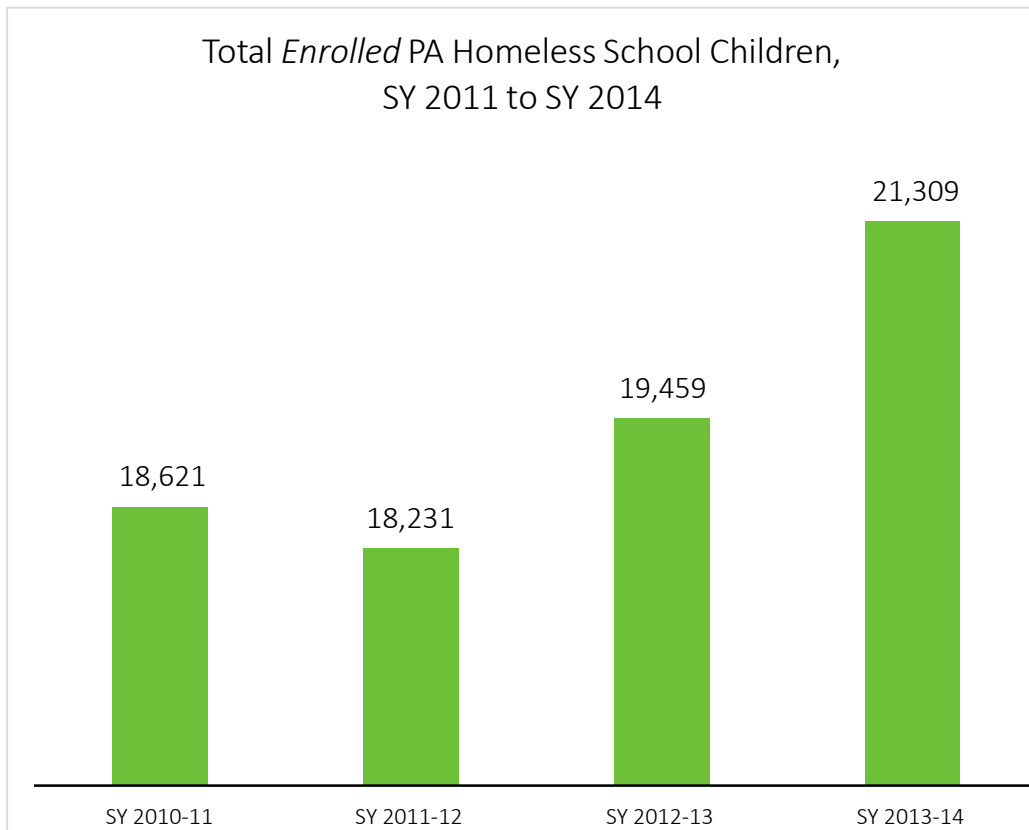


Figure 3. SY 2013-14 data from PDE 2015; SY 2010-13 data from previous PEC summaries

- The Pennsylvania state evaluation report identified 24,504 total homeless children and youth experiencing homelessness as *served* in SY 2014. [PDE 2015]

- Pennsylvania’s 24,504 students who experienced homelessness are in 96 percent of school districts, 72 percent of charter schools, and 100 percent of full-time comprehensive career and technical education centers [PDE 2015].
- In the 2013-14 school year, the National Center for Homeless Education reported 21,309 children and youth in Pennsylvania experiencing homelessness in SY 2014 as *enrolled* in school, a 9.5 percent increase from the previous year’s total of 18,231. However, the Pennsylvania Department of Education reported 20,785 as enrolled in SY 2014. No explanation for the discrepancy is provided by the sources [PDE 2015; NHCE 2015].
- History of Homelessness: Approximately 22 percent of children and youth could be identified as experiencing homelessness in the prior year, an increase from approximately 20 percent in SY 2012-13. The PA Department of Education notes that *“It is important to note that with the exception of the migrant population, there is no consistent coding of children and youth not enrolled in school across program years. As such, history of homelessness could not be determined for approximately 11 percent of the 24,504 children/youth.”* [PDE 2015, pg. 33].

## Academic Achievement of Homeless Students

In the United States, standardized tests are designed and administered by state education agencies to measure their students’ academic achievement. On these tests, students can score *below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced*. Those scoring *proficient* or *advanced* meet or exceed state proficiency standards. In Pennsylvania, academic achievement is measured using the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

### READING:

- Nationally, academic achievement of homeless high school students in reading decreased between SY 2013 and SY 2014, after making gains from SY 2010. The percentage of homeless students in grades three to eight meeting or exceeding state proficiency in reading decreased steadily since SY 10 [NCHE 2015a].

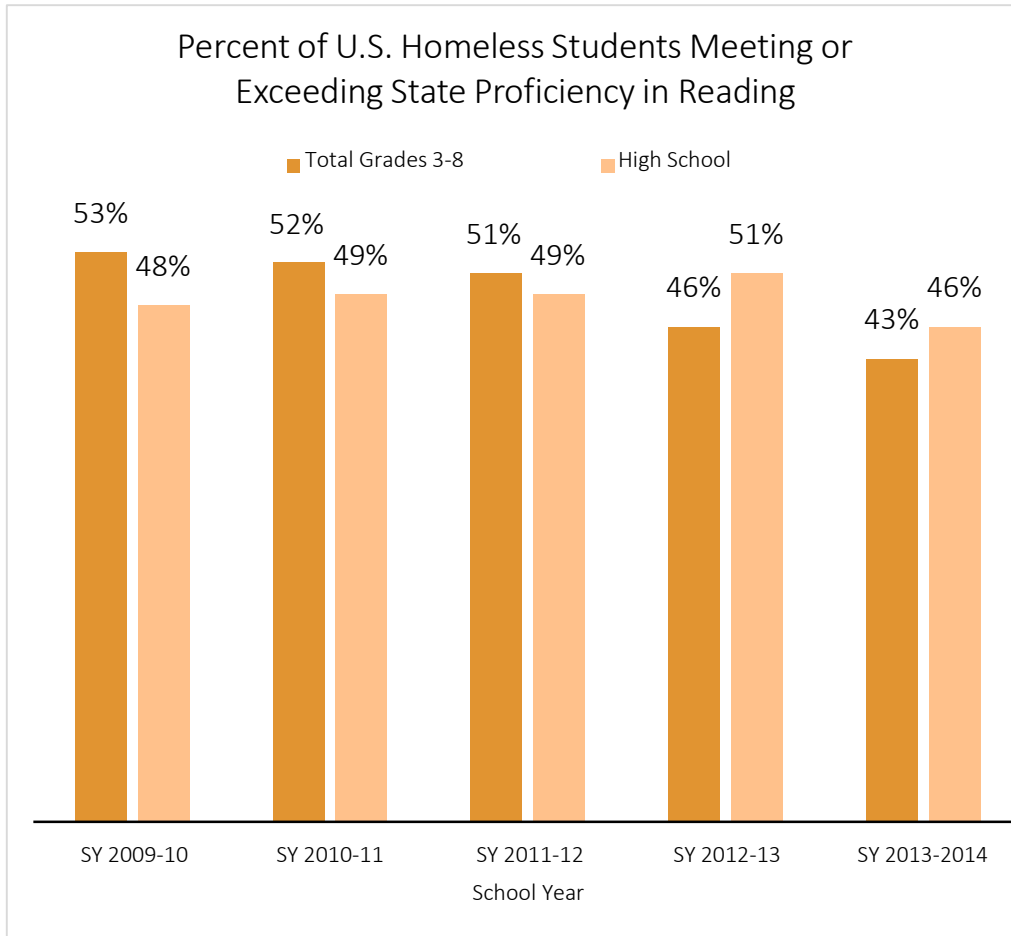


Figure 4. SY 2013-14 data from NCHS 2015a; SY 2009-13 data from previous PEC summaries

- In Pennsylvania, the percent of students in grades three to eight meeting or exceeding state proficiency in reading declined between SY 2010-11 and SY 2013-14. For high school students, reading scores increased between SY 2010-11 and SY 2013-14, although it decreased since SY 2012-13 [PDE 2015].

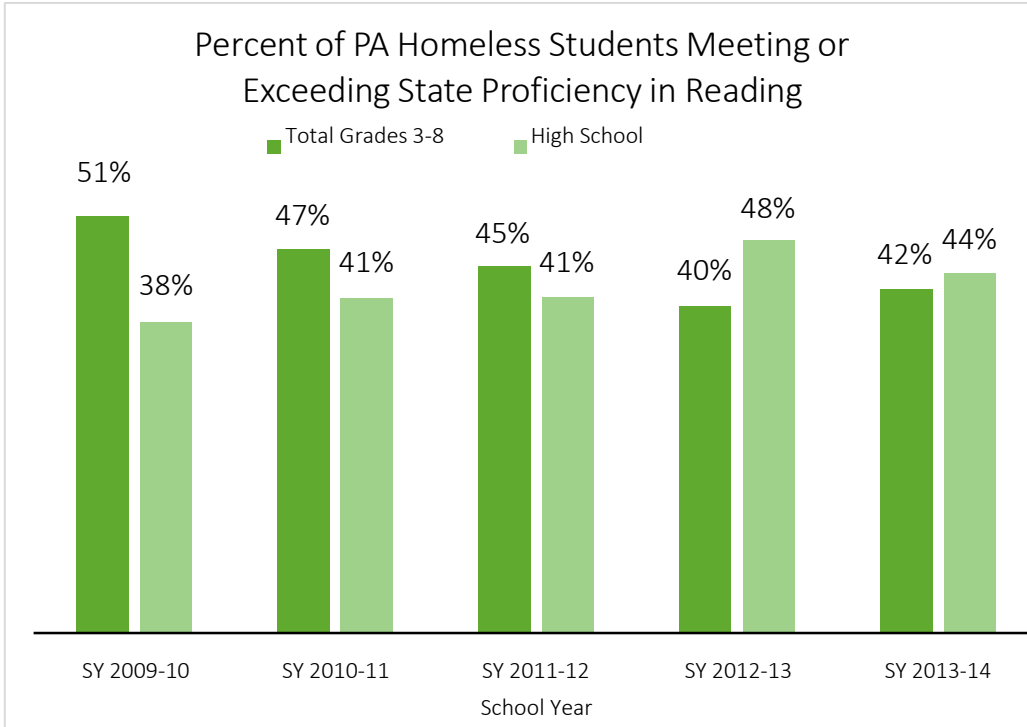


Figure 5. SY 2013-14 data from PDE 2015; SY 2009-13 data from previous PEC summaries

- Students who experience homelessness in Pennsylvania do not do as well as their peers across the country in reading. [PDE 2015; NCHE 2015a]

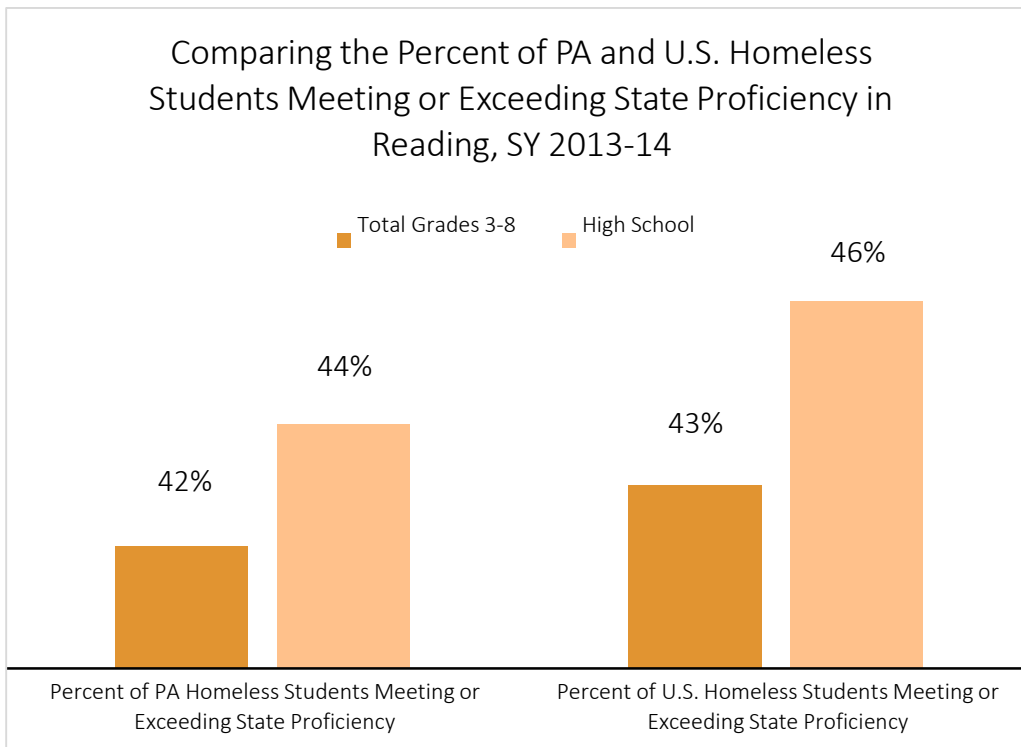


Figure 6. Data from PDE 2015; NCHEa 2015



## MATH:

- Nationally, fewer homeless students in grades three to eight met or exceeded state proficiency in math since SY 201-11 in comparison to previous years' totals. The number of homeless high school students who met or exceeded proficiency decreased since SY 2010-11, even after making gains in SY 2012-13. [NCHE 2015a]

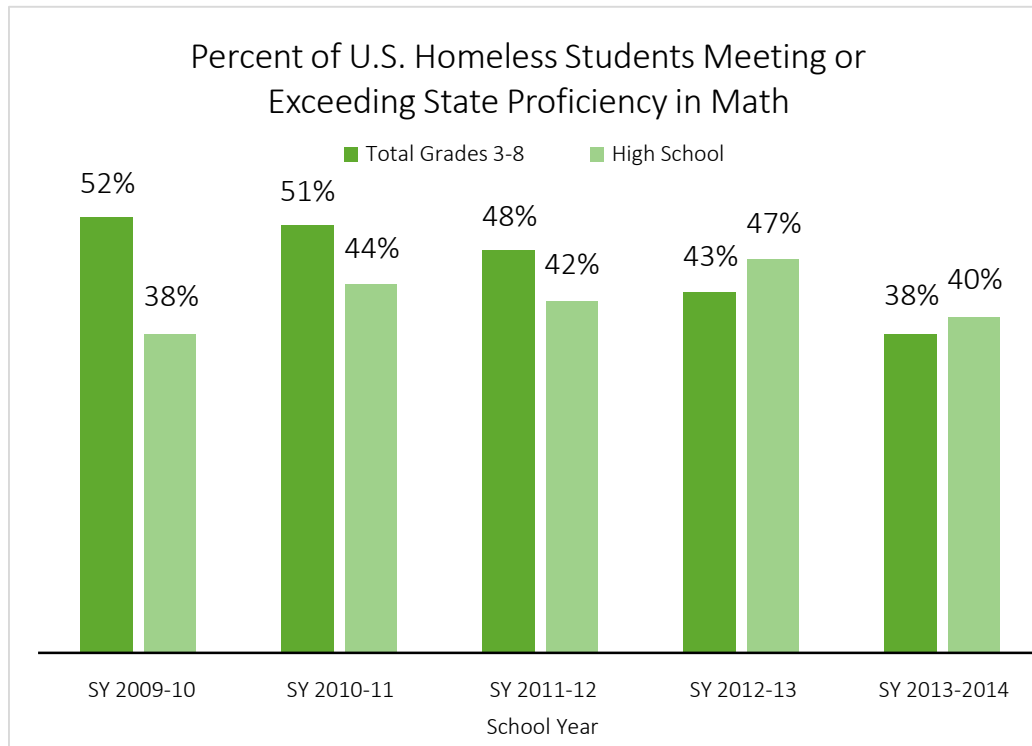


Figure 7. SY 2013-14 data from NCHE 2015a; SY 2009-13 data from previous PEC summaries

- In Pennsylvania, homeless students in grades three to eight also exhibited a decrease in the percentage of those having met or exceeded state proficiency since SY 2010-11. Since SY 2010-11, there has been an increase in high school students who have met or exceeded state proficiency scores in math [PDE 2015].
- For SY 2013-14 a higher percentage of Pennsylvania's homeless students in grades three to eight met or exceeded state proficiency in math than their national counterparts. However, a higher percentage of homeless students in high school across the country fared better than Pennsylvania's high school students [PDE 2015; NCHE 2015a].

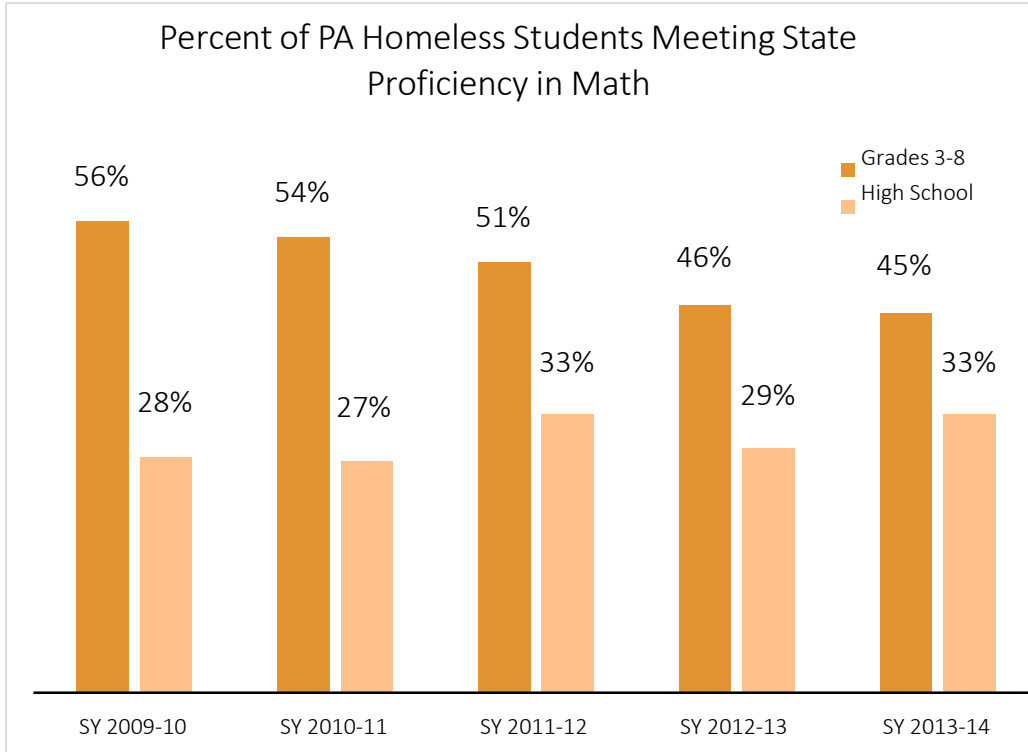


Figure 8. SY 2013-14 data from PDE 2015; SY 2009-13 data from previous PEC summaries

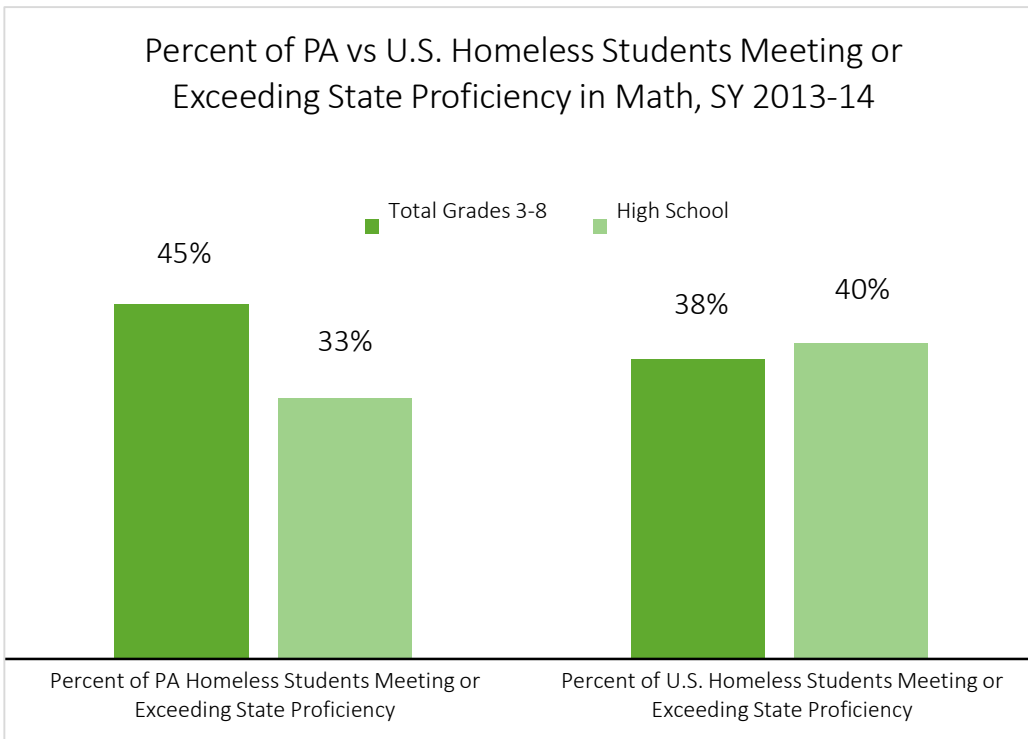


Figure 9. From PDE 2015; NCHE 2015a

**Nighttime Residence:** Knowing where homeless students reside helps provide information to school personnel for their outreach strategies. Primary nighttime residence is defined as “the type of residence [e.g. shelter, hotel, doubled up in a homes of a friend or relative] where a homeless child or unaccompanied youth was staying at the time of enrollment or the type of residence where a currently enrolled child or youth was staying when he or she was identified as homeless”<sup>i</sup>. In addition to informing school personnel, this data also aids housing and youth service providers who work with homeless youth.

- Nationally, the number of homeless students living doubled up continues to increase. The number of homeless students living in shelters decreased between SY 2012-13 and SY 2013-14 [NCHE 2015a].

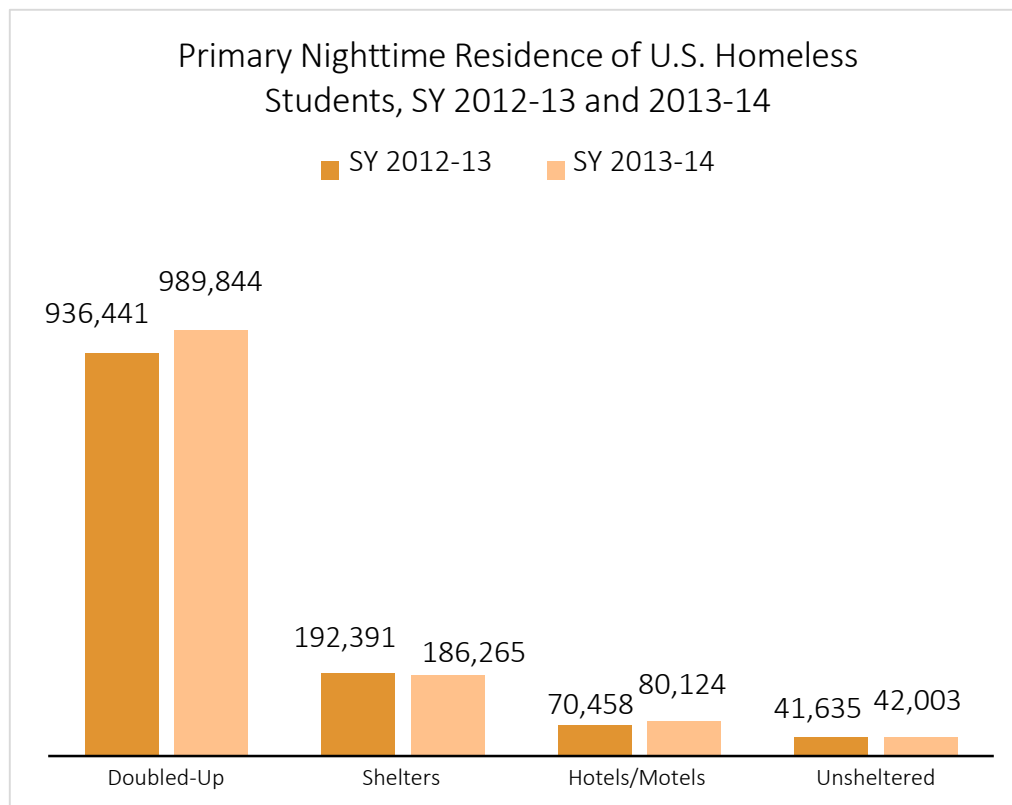


Figure 10. SY 2013-14 data from NCHE 2015a; SY 2012-13 data from previous PEC summaries

- Pennsylvania has followed the national trend with increases in the number of doubled up residences and a decrease in sheltered children and youth [PDE 2015].
- When compared to SY 2012-13, there was an increase in the number of Pennsylvania homeless students living doubled-up doubled up and a slight decrease in the number living in shelters in SY 2013-14. [PDE 2015]

- In Pennsylvania, 63 percent of homeless children and youth are living doubled up, compared to 76 percent nationally.
- In SY 13-14, 29 percent of enrolled PA homeless students were living in shelters, compared to 31 percent in SY 12-13. However, not all nighttime residence data was collected for all students in Pennsylvania.
- In Pennsylvania, 29 percent of homeless enrolled students are living in shelters compared to just 15 percent of all the homeless students in the United States.

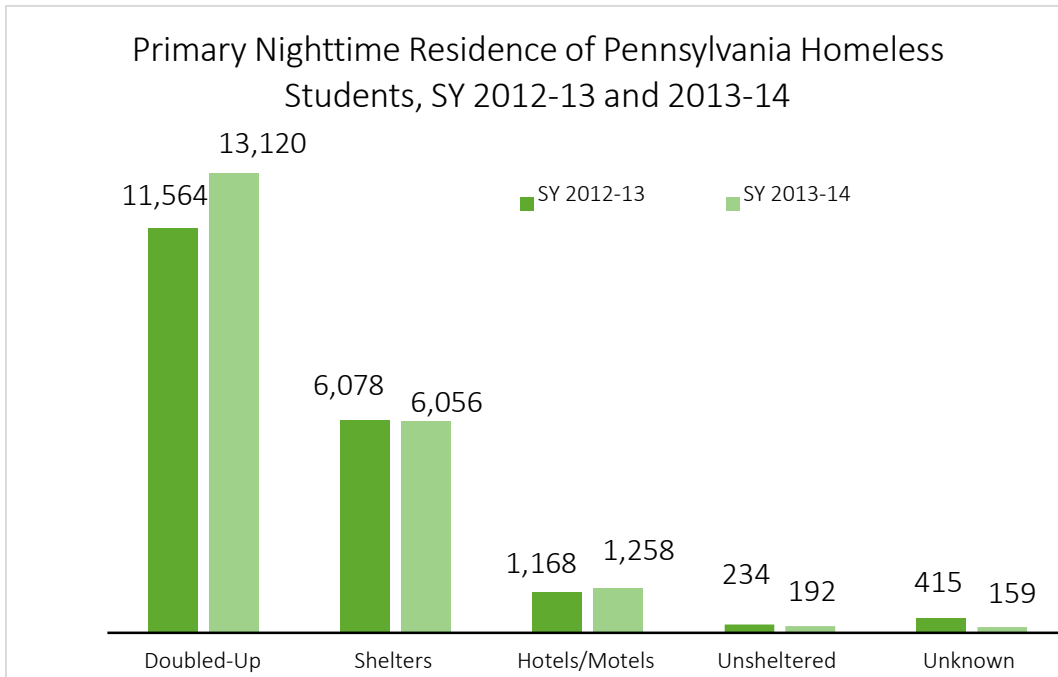
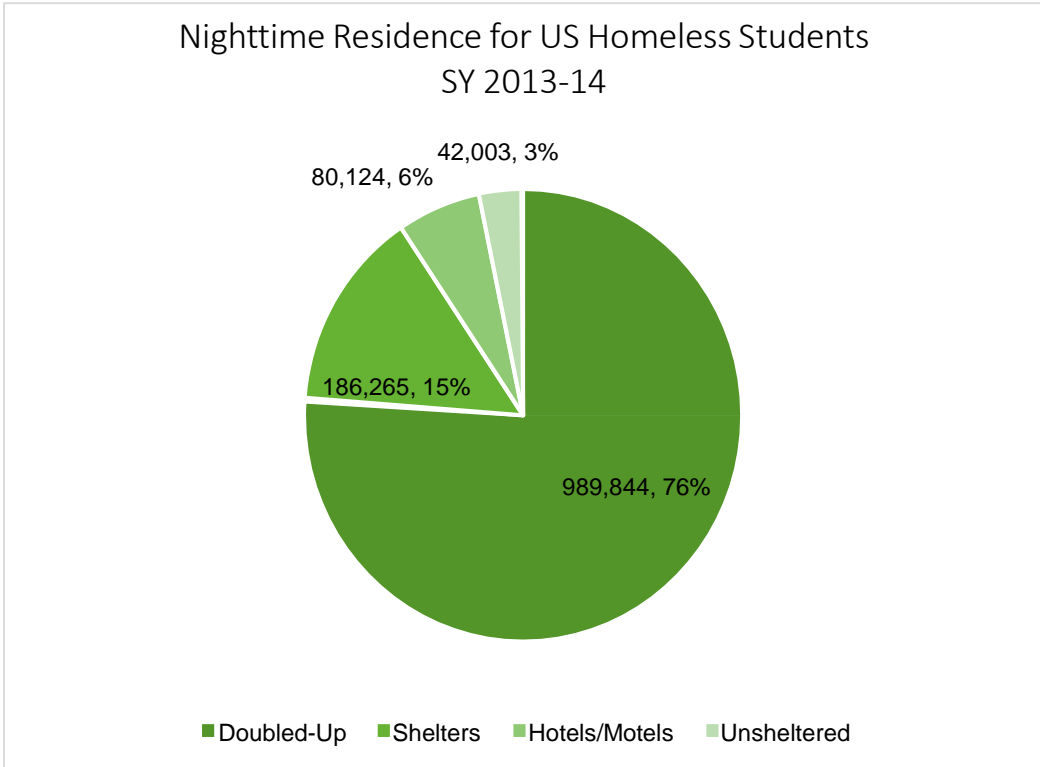
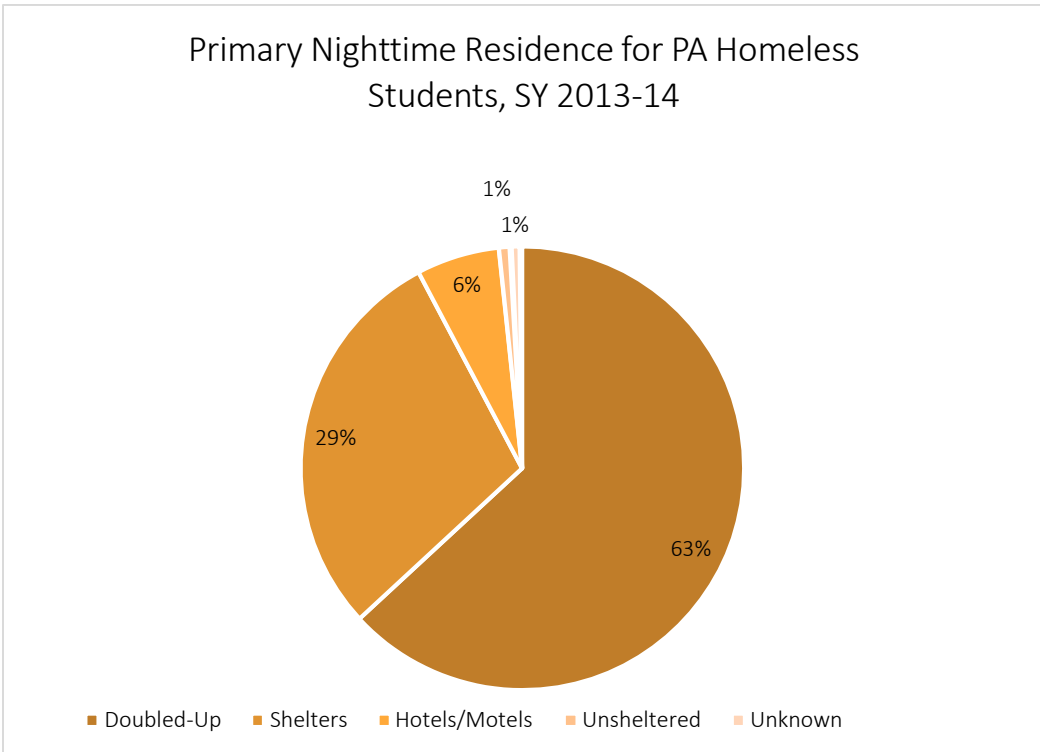


Figure 11 SY 2013-14 data from PDE 2015; SY 2012-13 data from previous PEC summaries



*Figure 12. from NCHC 2015a*



*Figure 13. from PDE 2015*

PEC Commentary:

1. Youth homelessness is increasing and vastly under-reported. The national report only shared those children and youth who were *enrolled* in school, which is only a subset of the unknown total number. While the nation is focused on ending homelessness for its veterans and chronic street populations, the need to increase attention on children and youth grows. The United States Congress recently approved \$33 million to address youth homeless, but this will only support ten regions for which Pennsylvania would have to compete for these resources. Assuming Pennsylvania does not get these resources, state and regional leadership will need to figure out a plan without new resources.
2. The dramatic percentage point declines in reading and math by Pennsylvania's homeless students can only signal a troublesome future for these children.
3. Critics of the Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 576/S. 256) have fought against unifying the definition of homelessness in part because of the lack of resources. However, one result is that as the numbers of homeless children and youth increased, policy makers lacked the urgency to address the growing needs and now have a larger problem to manage than before.
4. The number of total homeless students and the percentage that live doubled up should urge policy makers to analyze the numbers rather than relying sole on a "street count." The majority of homeless youth are living doubled up and not on the street. Policy makers should exercise realistic judgement when implementing decisions that involve already scarce resources- especially when targeting the homeless youth population.

The People's Emergency Center's mission is to nurture families, strengthen neighborhoods and drive change in West Philadelphia. Through a community of more than 240 housing units and five educational centers offering job training, parenting and early childhood education, financial education and planning, life skills, and technology coursework, PEC seeks to change the life trajectory for the women and children who seek its services and inspire them to aspire to new heights. This report was written by Rashni Stanford, Joe Willard, and Jake Golden. Special thanks to the National Center for Homeless Education. All inquiries can be sent to [policy@pec-cares.org](mailto:policy@pec-cares.org).