

June 25, 2021

The Honorable Bill de Blasio  
Mayor of the City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Hire 150 Shelter-Based Students in Temporary Housing Community Coordinators**

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Porter:

With the NYC Department of Education (DOE) poised to receive tens of millions of dollars in COVID-19 federal relief funding specifically allocated to support students experiencing homelessness, we write to strongly urge you to **hire 150 shelter-based Students in Temporary Housing Community Coordinators to help students reconnect with school and participate in supplemental programming** offered by the DOE over the coming year.

Despite the hard work of many educators and DOE staff members, including the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing (STH) team, the pandemic has worsened the inequities that have long existed for students in shelter. Over the course of the pandemic, we have heard from families in shelter about students having to wait months to receive an iPad; students whose iPads did not work properly due to lack of Wi-Fi and adequate cellular reception in shelter units; students who had difficulty focusing on schoolwork while trying to complete assignments in small rooms that they shared with their parents and multiple siblings of varying ages, grade levels, and needs; and students whose instruction or special education services were not effective over a screen.

In January 2021, the only month for which the DOE has released disaggregated attendance data this school year, [students living in shelter had by far the lowest attendance rate of any student group](#): 75.7%, 15.1 percentage points lower than the rate for their permanently housed peers, with even lower attendance rates at the high school level. Tenth graders in shelter had an attendance rate of just 64%, meaning they missed one out of every three school days. And even with the easing of graduation requirements, only 64% of students in temporary housing graduated in 2020, 16% percentage points lower than the graduation rate for permanently

housed students, and 14% of students in temporary housing dropped out, 2.7 times that of permanently housed students, 5% of whom dropped out.<sup>1</sup>

The current supports are simply not enough. Addressing the barriers to school attendance and helping students reconnect with school will require a targeted strengths-based outreach approach with qualified, trained DOE professionals on the ground at the City's shelters who can listen to concerns of families, help them navigate DOE's complex school system, and support them on issues ranging from transportation to enrollment and technology to special education. Every shelter should have DOE staff qualified and equipped to address barriers to school attendance, support students' education needs, and connect them with available services.

Over the past decade, student homelessness has skyrocketed, but both the number of DOE Family Assistants working in shelters and services they offer have not expanded, leaving families without the support they need to overcome educational barriers. Currently there are 117 Family Assistants assigned to help families in shelter, a number that has not grown over the past decade even though [the number of school-age children in shelter has increased by 40%](#). Furthermore, the Family Assistant title is a very low-paying position ([\\$28,000 for 10 months](#)), making it hard to recruit and retain staff who have the skills needed to help families navigate NYC's complex school system. To ensure students in shelter can access a high-quality education that can, over time, reduce family homelessness, the DOE must hire additional staff and better compensate them to help build a corps of DOE shelter-based staff with the skills to effectively connect students with school and other educational supports at this critical time.

Fortunately, the DOE is poised to get tens of millions of dollars as part of the American Rescue Plan specifically to support students experiencing homelessness<sup>2</sup> and could use a portion of this funding to hire 150 shelter-based STH community coordinators, adding a corps of professionals to focus on helping students in shelter connect with school and access any supplemental programming, services, and supports the DOE will be offering.

The pandemic has exacerbated inequities and increased the need for educational support for students in shelter. ***Now is the time for the DOE to make a bold investment in supports for students in shelter.*** We strongly urge the DOE to use its American Rescue Plan homeless funding to hire 150 shelter-based STH Community Coordinators to ensure that students in

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<sup>1</sup> The [data about graduation and drop-out rates](#) are for all students in temporary housing, which includes those in shelter and those in temporary shared housing arrangements. Based on [data from prior years](#), the graduation and drop-out rates are likely significantly worse for students in shelter.

<sup>2</sup> New York State has been awarded [\\$58.8 million](#) as a part of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act to support students experiencing homelessness. Although the New York State Education Department (NYSED) hasn't announced how it will make this funding available to school districts, in [his letter to Chief State School Officers](#), U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona wrote that states are strongly encouraged to award the first portion of the funding, ARP Homeless I, to existing McKinney-Vento grantees. Currently, the [DOE receives 44% of all McKinney-Vento grant funds awarded by NYSED](#), and the [U.S. Department of Education is expected](#) to require states to distribute the second portion of the funding, ARP Homeless II, to school districts by a formula that considers both the district's Title I, Part A allocation and the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness identified by the school district in the 2018-19 school year. In 2018-19, students experiencing homelessness enrolled in DOE schools represented [69% of the total number of students identified as homeless in the state](#). With that in mind, the DOE should receive a significant portion of the \$58.8 million in ARP Homeless funds.

shelter can reconnect with school and get the support they need following this year of educational disruption.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children of New York  
Alliance for Quality Education  
BronxWorks  
CAMBA  
Center for Urban Community Services  
Citizens' Committee for Children of NY  
Coalition for the Homeless  
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)  
Educators for Excellence - New York  
Emergency Shelter Network  
Gateway Housing  
Goddard Riverside  
Good Shepherd Services  
Homeless Services United  
New Destiny Housing  
NY Lawyers for the Public Interest, Inc.  
Providence House, Inc.  
RiseBoro  
Safe Horizon  
The Legal Aid Society  
The Opportunity Network  
The Partnership for the Homeless  
Volunteers of America - Greater New York  
Women In Need (Win)  
Zone 126