

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of students experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin's schools has risen dramatically over the past 14 years, increasing by 260 percent over this time period to 19,264 homeless students identified by DPI in 2017. Research indicates that experiencing homelessness introduces many challenges for these students, resulting in negative school outcomes including low attendance rates, poor academic achievement, high rates of grade retention and social stigmatization. While no race-delineated data are available to quantify the racially disparate impact of experiencing homelessness for a student in Wisconsin, people of color are disproportionately represented among sheltered families with children indicating a similarly disparate impact for students experiencing homelessness.

Research reviewed suggests that homeless students are among the most vulnerable populations represented in Wisconsin's school system, resulting from continual risk factors introduced by the housing instability and economic hardship of their families. While education outcomes are similarly poor for other low-income students, homeless students lie on one extreme end of a "Continuum of Risk". While students experiencing homelessness may face similar risk factors as their continuously housed low-income peers, the cumulative amount of risk factors that accrue over a period of homelessness places homeless students at a higher risk of poor education outcomes. Research also indicates that the impact of experiencing homelessness may be heterogeneous in nature, where the size and type of impact is contingent on the student's nighttime residence.

Evaluations of intervention programs in the Madison and Beloit school districts revealed promising results for closing education outcome disparities for students experiencing homelessness. The graduation coaching model in the Beloit School District achieved a 100 percent graduation rate among the unaccompanied homeless youth in the program, with over half of the cohort planning on entering college following graduation. A forthcoming report on how well the Madison Metropolitan School District 4K program served families and children experiencing homelessness revealed issues in 4K access for families experiencing homelessness and the challenges presented as a result of the current half-day design of the program. The study also provides evidence of persisting academic achievement gaps across socioeconomic status groupings, indicating that, as currently designed, 4K does not effectively close achievement gaps for low-income students in Madison. Supporting academic literature on similar types of programs suggest that further research is necessary to make conclusive claims about the effectiveness of these programs specific to Wisconsin.

Policy recommendations for DPI include, increased visibility and performance tracking of successful EHCY funded interventions, replication of successful EHCY

programs in other school districts, increased communication across Homeless Liaisons in order to facilitate the exchange of programmatic details from successful interventions, publicly available race delineated data of the population of students experiencing homelessness in order to quantify racial disparities among this demographic, and increased funding for research evaluating long-term impacts of interventions targeted towards students experiencing homelessness.