



## BrainGain@PEC

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BrainGain@PEC provides brief summaries of research or publications on family homelessness and related issues. Previous issues of BrainGain@PEC can be found at <http://www.pec-cares.org/publications.html>. Much of the following text was taken verbatim from the source document.

### ***New GAO study reviews homeless education issues***

**Source: Education of Homeless Students: Improved Program Oversight Needed**, viewable at <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/GAOreport.pdf>

**Why is this important?** More than 20,000 students in Pennsylvania, including 5,000 in Philadelphia, were homeless last year [PA Dept of Education, 2014]. Research informs us that while many homeless students do well academically, not all do. Homeless students have higher rates of dropping out, lower standardized testing, and lower rates of high school graduation [School District of Philadelphia, 2012]. This summary is part of an on-going series of reports on homeless education issues intended to inform the homeless system and other advocates on key issues. PEC has a strong interest to improving how homeless students are supported in ways that relate to improving high school graduation rates, lowering dropout rates, and improving academic achievement.

**Who should read this report?** Policy makers and advocates of children and youth who experience homelessness.

The [United States Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO), an independent, nonpartisan agency that works for Congress, reviewed the *Education for Homeless Children and Youth* (EHCY) program for implementation and oversight. It evaluated implementation at 20 school districts in three states. Its report, [The Education of Homeless Students: Improved Program Oversight Needed Study](#), aimed to study 1) how districts identify and serve homeless students and challenges they face; 2) how the [United States Department of Education \(DOE\)](#) [<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html>] and states collaborate with other service providers to address student needs and any barriers; and 3) the extent to which DOE monitors program compliance.

## **Key Findings:**

- Officials in 8 of the 20 districts noted that the under-identification of homeless students was a problem
- Among the challenges that officials in the 20 districts cited were limited staff and resources to provide services, the cost of transportation, student stigma associated with homelessness, and responding to students made homeless by natural disaster
- Federal and state officials frequently cited limited resources and differing federal definitions of homelessness as constraints to greater collaboration
- Education has protocols for monitoring state EHCY programs, but not to ensure adequate oversight of all states
- 13 out of the 20 school districts studied identified students through housing surveys at enrollment
- All 20 school districts studied relied on referrals from schools or service providers to identify homeless students
- GAO found gaps in state monitoring of districts that could weaken program performance, reinforcing the importance of effective federal monitoring of states

## **Key Conclusions**

- There needs to be further collaboration among state and federal officials to address the challenges faced by states in providing education and services to homeless students
- Education should develop a plan to ensure adequate oversight of the EHCY program

## **Background**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act established a grant program to help the nation's homeless students have access to public education. In the school year 2011-12, more than one million students were identified as homeless. Under the Education for Homeless Children and Youth grant program, states and their school districts are required to identify homeless children and provide services and support. In the fiscal year 2014, Education received about \$65 million

to carry out this program. Education provided formula grants to states, which competitively awarded funds to school districts to help meet program requirements. GAO was asked to review program implementation and oversight.

**Related Note:** The Pennsylvania General Assembly and the Corbett Administration created the Pennsylvania Task Force on Homeless Children’s Education to “examine the education needs of Pennsylvania’s homeless children and youth.” The task force submitted its findings and recommendations in 2014. This work is expected to improve Pennsylvania’s ability to improve how it serves students who are homeless. Read the report at [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/homeless\\_education/7491](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/homeless_education/7491).

**About PEC:** PEC’s mission is to nurture families, strengthen neighborhoods, and drive change. PEC seeks to change the life trajectory for the women and children who seek its services and inspire them to aspire to new heights.

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