

Background: Higher education and obtaining a college degree or certification can play a critical role in preventing homelessness and supporting youth and young adults (YYA) in exiting homelessness by providing opportunities to secure long-term careers. However, higher education is much harder to attain and complete for YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability. These individuals often lack familial support, are unfamiliar with the financial resources available to them, and may have weak academic foundations.¹ As a result, students experiencing homelessness while in college are found to have lower GPAs and are less likely to complete their degree program than their stably housed peers.²

The McKinney-Vento Act, a federal law to support students experiencing homelessness in K-12 education, requires that students are provided some specific assistance. However, many barriers to successful college completion persist for students experiencing homelessness. These challenges include confusing financial aid requirements, food insecurity, lack of access to healthcare, and loss of housing during school closures.

Former foster youth, as well as foster youth in extended care, face many of the same barriers to higher education as youth experiencing homelessness. However, while college campuses across Texas have Foster Care Liaisons to provide foster youth support, there is no equivalent assistance for homeless youth navigating housing, financial aid, food assistance, healthcare, and other supports needed to be successful in college. Colleges are also required to keep dormitories open between breaks for foster youth in on-campus housing. Youth experiencing homelessness should be provided similar support to navigate complicated systems and ensure their success in higher education and ultimately the workforce.

**Snapshot: College Students
Experiencing Homelessness**

- Young adults experiencing homelessness are about 1/3 as likely to be enrolled in higher education as their non-homeless peers.³
- 16% of college students experience homelessness while in school.⁴
- 1,408 young adults (ages 18-24) experience homelessness on any given day in Texas.⁵



What Youth and Young Adults Say: In 2022, TNOYS hosted listening sessions with youth and young adults across Texas who are or have been in foster care, juvenile justice, experiencing homelessness, or at risk of these experiences. TNOYS learned many of these youth would like to attain higher education, but don't always see it as an option. Others struggled to see college as a good investment of their time. Here are some of the most common concerns they shared:

- *They are often too embarrassed to share with their friends that they are experiencing homelessness and in need of a place to sleep.*
- *They don't know who to turn to get help applying to college or applying for financial aid.*
- *Former foster youth shared that foster care liaisons on their college campuses have been helpful in navigating financial aid, student support services, and other resources available.*

"Being homeless makes it hard to focus on education when working would be more beneficial to get back on my feet."

TNOYS Recommends requiring colleges and universities to prioritize on-campus housing for students experiencing homelessness and have a homeless liaison to help youth and young adults navigate needed supports.

1. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-16-343> 2. https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/BasicNeedsStudy_phasell_withAccessibilityComments.pdf 3. https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/ChapinHall_VoYC_Education-Brief.pdf 4. Belfield, C. R., et al. (2011). The benefits of attending community college: A review of the evidence. *Community College Review*, 39(1), 46–68. 5. Texas Homelessness Statistics. Homeless in Texas Statistics 2019. Homeless Estimation by State | US Interagency Council on Homelessness. <https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/tx/>