



# A CRITICAL MOMENT: CHILD & YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS

The economic downturn has forced more families and youth to lose their footing, falling downward into the spiral of homelessness and jeopardizing children and youth's educational success. At the same time, a one-time increase in federal funding for school-based efforts to identify and support homeless children and youth has enabled more school districts to provide more assistance. The ability of schools to continue to provide this assistance, however, hinges on current budget decisions. This brief summarizes recent federal data, as well as findings from a national survey of school districts and state departments of education.

## Unprecedented Increases in Child and Youth Homelessness

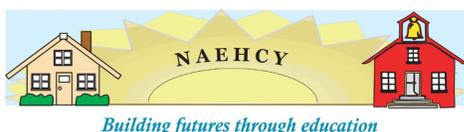
- Analysis of recently released federal data shows that the number of homeless children and youth identified in public schools has increased for the second year in a row, and by 41% over the past two school years. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of homeless children and youth (preK-12) increased from 679,724 students in the 2006-2007 school year, to 956,914 students in the 2008-2009 school year. (See map on page 4 and state-by-state breakdown on page 5.) The growth in numbers of homeless students reported between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009 occurred prior to the infusion of homeless education dollars from the ARRA stimulus fund. Therefore, the increase is not attributable to more federal dollars available to identify and enroll more homeless children.
- Consistent with this data, according to a national survey of school districts conducted by NAEHCY and First Focus, 70% of district respondents reported enrolling an increasing number of students experiencing homelessness since 2007-08. Furthermore, 39% reported enrolling more homeless students in the first six months of the 2009-2010 school year than the entire previous year.
- The economic downturn was cited most frequently as the reason for increases in child and youth homelessness, followed by greater school and community awareness of homelessness, and the foreclosure crisis.

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### ABOUT THE NAEHCY/ FIRST FOCUS SURVEY

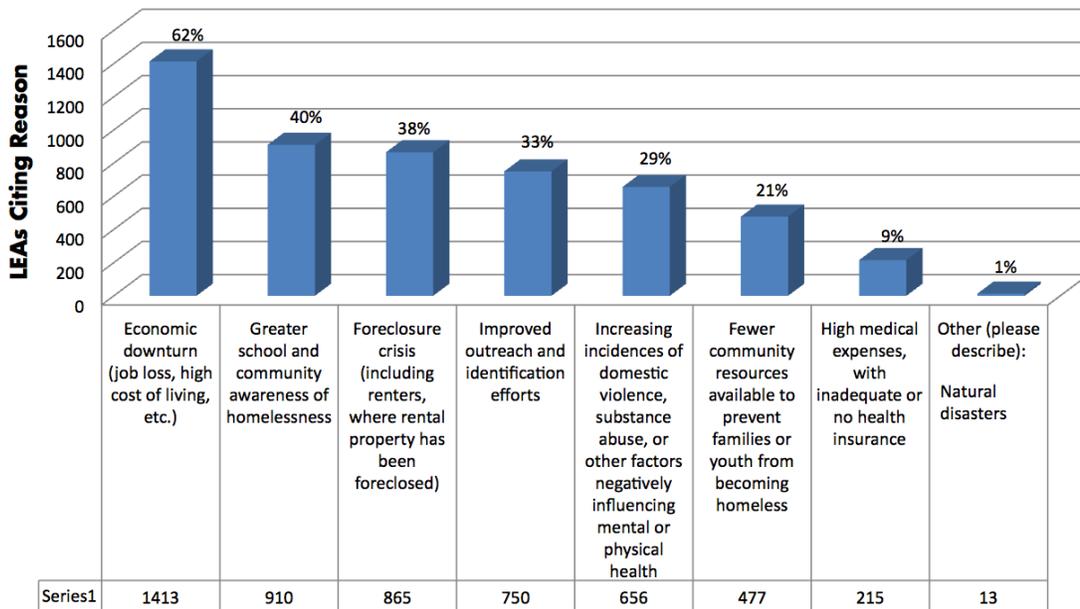
In order to assess the early impact of ARRA homeless education funding and take stock of the current crisis, NAEHCY and First Focus conducted a voluntary survey of school districts and state departments of education in early 2010. More than 2,200 school districts from 47 states and 45 state coordinators for EHCY responded – approximately 14% of all school districts nationwide and 90% of EHCY state coordinators. In addition to empirical data, the survey yielded profoundly informative narratives about needs, accomplishments, and challenges, as well as innovative uses of ARRA stimulus funding. NAEHCY/First Focus intend to publish additional briefs based on the survey data received.



*So many of our families are just not “making it” financially and are desperate for help. At the beginning of the school year, I had dozens of requests from homeless families for clothes and school supplies. Most of them, literally, had no shoes, clothes or school supplies for their kids, and had no money to buy them.*

*-AZ, Humboldt Unified School District*

**Reasons for Increased Enrollment of Students Experiencing Homelessness Since 2007-08**



**Stimulus Funding Helps Schools Reach More Homeless Children and Youth**

School is a refuge for homeless children and youth, providing safety, structure, and services; education is also their surest path to economic security and stable housing in adulthood.

Congress recognized the impact of the economic crisis on child and youth homelessness, and the role of public schools in responding to it, by providing \$70 million through ARRA for the McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. This funding more than doubled the EHCY program’s appropriation, allowing more school districts to receive funding to assist homeless children and youth, and increasing funding in those school districts struggling to meet demand with meager resources.

- According to the NAEHCY/First Focus survey, ARRA homeless education funds more than doubled the number of school districts receiving assistance through the EHCY program. The 43 responding states provided 1,576 school districts with ARRA homeless education funds, compared to only 821 school districts with annual McKinney-Vento funds. Still, despite this increase, less than one in five school districts nationally received any support through either the ARRA homeless education funds or the annual McKinney-Vento funding.

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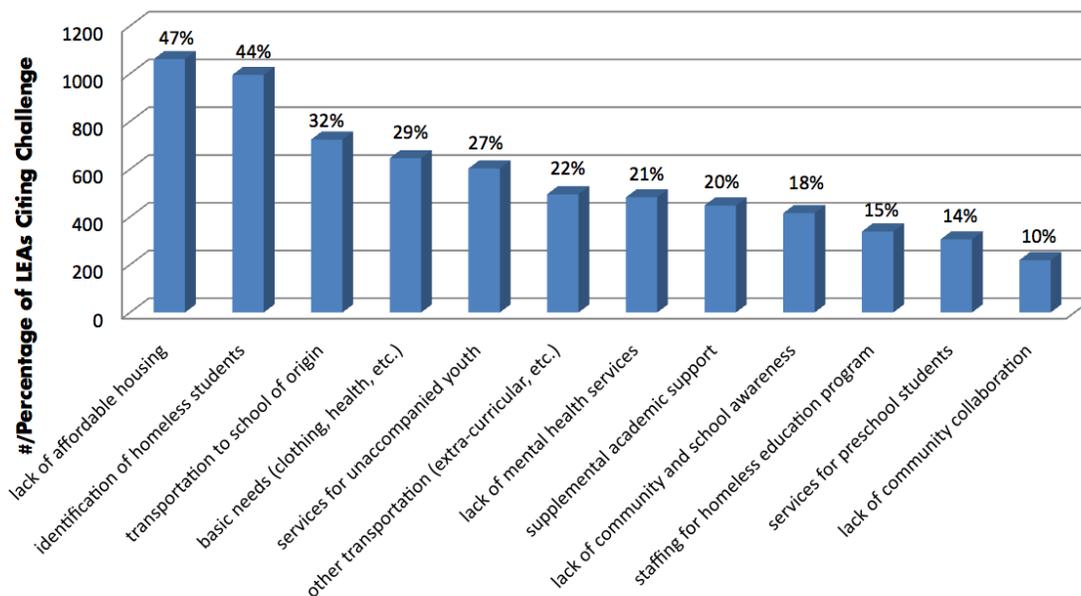
- School districts are using ARRA homeless education funds in a variety of ways suited to local needs, including increasing academic support, providing transportation assistance, expanding outreach and identification efforts, strengthening support for specific subpopulations of homeless children and youth (e.g., unaccompanied homeless youth and preschool students), and enhancing collaborative relationships with community partners.

- New funding for the EHCY program spurred innovative and effective strategies for addressing the needs of homeless children. For example:
  - Fairfax, VA hired a dedicated staff person to arrange transportation for hundreds of children and youth in northern Virginia, giving the transportation department the ability to seek out safe, creative ways to provide transportation. The district is thus able to keep children and youth stable in their original schools while reducing their homeless transportation costs.
  - The Orange County Department of Education in CA provided mini-grants to school districts that had very high poverty rates, but low numbers of identified homeless students. For example, Anaheim Union High School District hired six staff to visit motels, collaborate with the elementary districts that feed into the high schools, and put systems in place to identify and meet homeless students' needs. In just one year of implementation, the school district's identified number of homeless students increased from 191 students to 2,197 students.

**Many Barriers Remain, as Funding Remains Inadequate to Meet the Growing Needs**  
**Additional data from the survey:**

- School districts report many remaining barriers to the education of homeless children and youth. The most frequently cited barriers included lack of affordable housing, difficulty identifying homeless students, transportation to the school of origin, and meeting basic needs.
- Many school districts expressed concern about loss of funding, especially the impact on services when ARRA homeless education dollars run out. Prior to the receipt of ARRA funds, many school districts had never received funding to support homeless children and youth. For the first time, these districts have been able to dedicate resources to procedures and programming to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified, enrolled, and attending school. Respondents frequently commented that loss of funding would result in loss of educational access, stability, and success.

**School Districts Greatest Remaining Challenges**



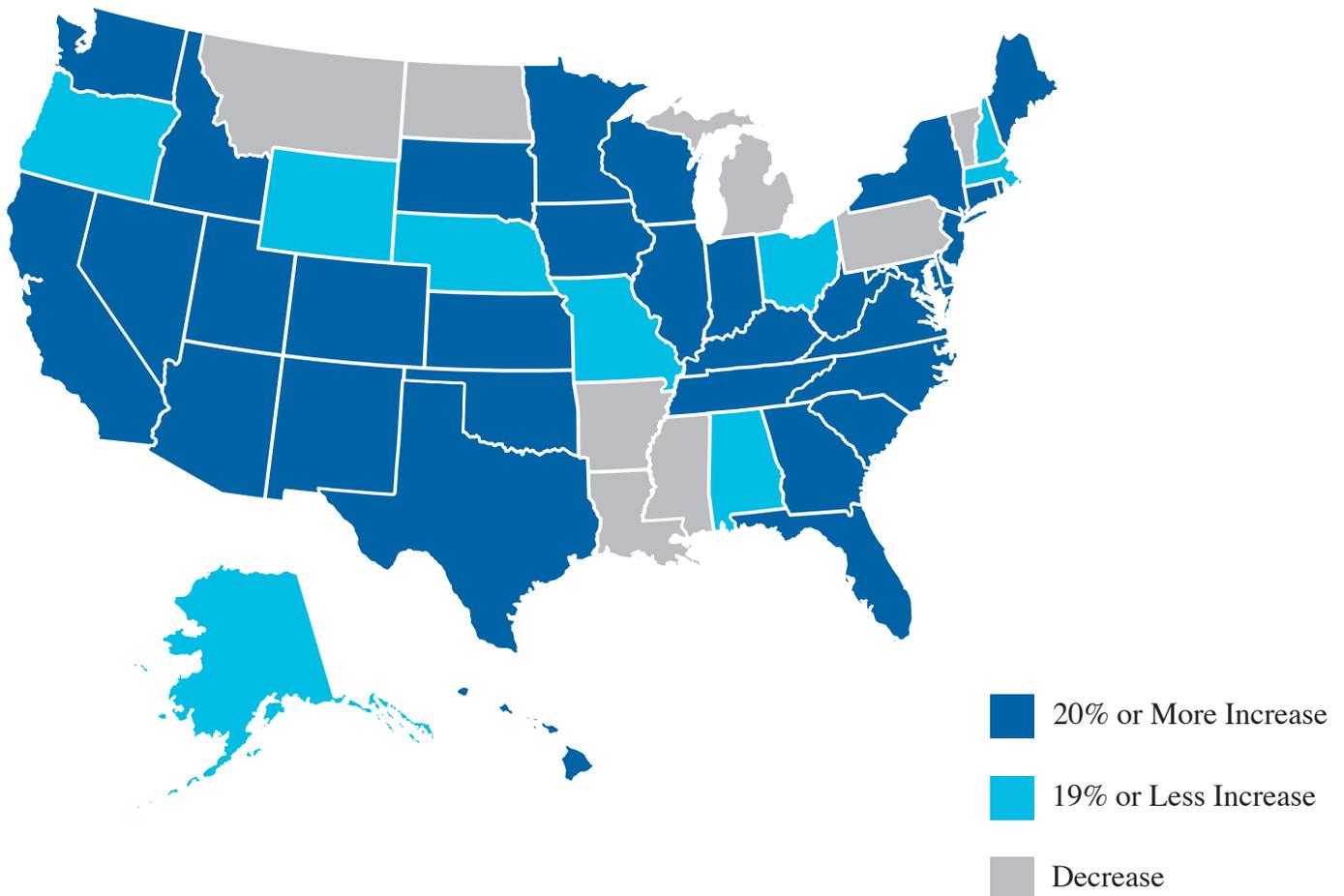
*“Without these funds, it would be impossible to serve the identified homeless students, since we are also facing severe budget cuts and shortages in our district. These funds have helped us keep our focus on continually trying to identify the students who would often rather remain hidden. We have had several students graduate from high school and go on to higher education, and that would not have happened if we did not have McKinney funds to help them stay in school and get the extra support they need to be successful. We are building productive citizens with our McKinney funds, rather than shoving problems under the rug.”*

*- SC, Sumter School District 17*

### **Congress Should Maintain ARRA-level Funding for the EHCY Program**

In light of the continued economic crisis and unrelenting growth in family and youth homelessness, Congress must maintain ARRA-level funding for the EHCY program in fiscal year 2011. Congress should appropriate at least \$140 million – the combined amount for ARRA and EHCY appropriations – for FY2011. This funding will allow school districts to continue a minimal level of support to ensure that children and youth who lose their housing do not also lose access to school.

### **Increase/Decrease in Homeless Students Enrolled School Year 2006/07 & 2008/09**



**STATE BREAKDOWN:  
Increase/Decrease in Homeless Students Enrolled  
School Year 2006/07 & 2008/09**

|                      |      |
|----------------------|------|
| Alabama              | 18%  |
| Alaska               | 6%   |
| Arizona              | 29%  |
| Arkansas             | -10% |
| California           | 62%  |
| Colorado             | 32%  |
| Connecticut          | 21%  |
| Delaware             | 41%  |
| District of Columbia | 15%  |
| Florida              | 34%  |
| Georgia              | 72%  |
| Hawaii               | 54%  |
| Idaho                | 45%  |
| Illinois             | 35%  |
| Indiana              | 26%  |
| Iowa                 | 136% |
| Kansas               | 88%  |
| Kentucky             | 23%  |
| Louisiana            | -26% |
| Maine                | 23%  |
| Maryland             | 26%  |
| Massachusetts        | 3%   |
| Michigan             | -22% |
| Minnesota            | 26%  |
| Mississippi          | -34% |
| Missouri             | 5%   |

|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Montana        | -41% |
| Nebraska       | 7%   |
| Nevada         | 61%  |
| New Hampshire  | 7%   |
| New Jersey     | 84%  |
| New Mexico     | 91%  |
| New York       | 73%  |
| North Carolina | 48%  |
| North Dakota   | -5%  |
| Ohio           | 18%  |
| Oklahoma       | 47%  |
| Oregon         | 16%  |
| Pennsylvania   | -4%  |
| Rhode Island   | 65   |
| South Carolina | 45   |
| South Dakota   | 73   |
| Tennessee      | 50   |
| Texas          | 139  |
| Utah           | 40   |
| Vermont        | -13  |
| Virginia       | 29   |
| Washington     | 23   |
| West Virginia  | 43   |
| Wisconsin      | 35   |
| Wyoming        | 7    |

**First Focus** is a bipartisan children’s advocacy organization committed to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Learn more by visiting: [www.firstfocus.net](http://www.firstfocus.net).

The **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth** (NAEHCY) is the voice and social conscience for the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. NAEHCY accomplishes this through advocacy, partnerships, and education. Learn more by visiting: [www.naehcy.org](http://www.naehcy.org).