

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

The Honorable David Banks
Chancellor, New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Urgent Need for Support for Students Experiencing Homelessness

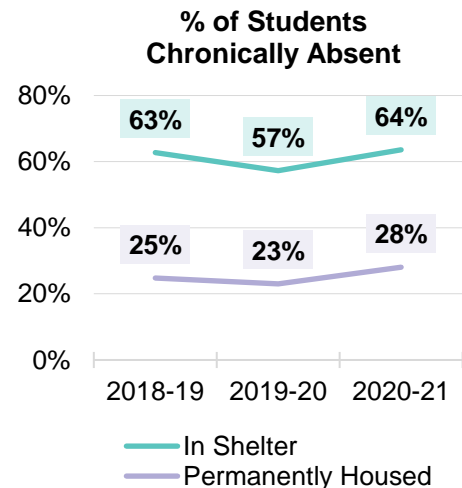
Dear Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks,

Over the past several months, you have talked about how the City must do more for the 100,000 students who are homeless in New York City—and how chronic absenteeism is a clear sign that students need more help. With the NYC Department of Education getting \$33 million in COVID-19 federal relief funding specifically to support students experiencing homelessness, you have the opportunity to tackle chronic absenteeism for students living in shelter and create lasting change. We write to strongly urge you to hire **150 shelter-based Students in Temporary Housing (STH) Community Coordinators** to help students get to school every day and get the needed supports and services to be successful in school. Also, we strongly urge you to **lift the hiring freeze so that the DOE can hire Students in Temporary Housing Regional Managers**, a critical role in directing and overseeing the supports offered to students in shelter and ensuring that all students in temporary housing get needed supports in schools. The DOE should not have positions dedicated to students who are homeless sitting empty while students are facing obstacles to attending school.

1. NYC DOE should use the federal funding available now to launch a team of 150 shelter-based Community Coordinators for the next two years

The DOE is receiving \$33 million in American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds specifically to support students in temporary housing. The DOE has already committed to hiring 50 shelter-based STH Community Coordinators using part of the first phase of this funding, and the DOE must submit its plan for using the remaining \$24 million in ARP-HCY by the end of May. **We urge you to use this funding to hire an additional 100 shelter-based STH Community Coordinators for a total of 150.**

The educational outcomes for students in temporary housing are dismal: well over half of students living in shelter are chronically absent, missing at least one out of



every 10 school days; students in shelter transfer schools mid-year at 4.4 times the rate of their permanently housed peers; and only 60% graduate high school in four years, 22 percentage points lower than the graduation rate for permanently housed students.

Far too many students in shelter are simply not making it to school regularly to benefit from the services available there. That is why it is imperative that the DOE use available funding to invest in shelter-based supports to help parents and students where they are.

With 60% of students living in shelter chronically absent from school, it is important to have someone on the ground in the shelter who can partner directly with families, determine why a particular child is missing school, and resolve the problem. If the bus isn't coming, the staff could work with the DOE's Office of Pupil Transportation to resolve the problem; if the child doesn't have clean clothing to wear to school, the staff could connect the family to laundry services; if the parent is unable to get a child to the bus because of competing job and childcare responsibilities, the staff could help figure out a plan.

DOE shelter-based staff are needed to:

- Build trusting relationships with parents and students, shelter staff, and school staff to proactively address educational concerns;
- Use data from DOE and DHS to identify students struggling with attendance and identify trends;
- Convene regular meetings with shelter-based staff to develop action plans to improve student attendance, bringing in staff from different schools as needed;
- Follow up with the family/student and shelter- and school-based staff to ensure action plans move forward;
- Regularly monitor data for improved attendance and work with shelter- and school-based staff to provide encouragement to students and parents, including celebrating parents and students who have improved attendance;
- Work with STH Regional Managers and schools to develop programming and services for students in shelter using McKinney-Vento grant funds and Title I STH funding;
- Design, coordinate, and implement targeted outreach efforts to ensure that students in shelter are connected with available supports and services, including Summer Rising, afterschool programs, programming funded using McKinney-Vento and Title I STH fundings, 3-K and pre-K, and SYEP. Robocalls, emails, or one or two personalized calls are not enough (many parents in shelter have limited cell phone plans and limited access to technology)—and students living in shelter disproportionately miss out on these programs. In-person engagement on multiple occasions is necessary to support students and families in registering for these programs and ultimately participating.

It is extremely challenging for schools to lead the work described above because students are placed in shelters all across the City, and their school is often located far away from their shelter. Per their right under federal law, the majority of students in shelter continue to attend the school they attended prior to entering shelter, which offers tremendous stability for students when so much is unstable outside of school. For example, the roughly 310 children at Junius Family

Residence who are enrolled in school attend over 160 different schools, and the 65 children at Crotona Family Shelter who are enrolled in school attend over 50 different schools.

Unfortunately, the current shelter-based DOE staff are not in a position to lead this work either. Currently there are approximately 115 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. And shelter provider staff are focused on connecting families with social services and permanent housing; they do not have sufficient capacity to address the educational needs of students.

To ensure students in shelter can access a high-quality education that can, over time, reduce family homelessness, the DOE must build a team of shelter-based staff with the skills, and commensurate compensation, to effectively resolve educational barriers and connect students with school and other educational supports. [Over 40 organizations called on the new Administration to do just that, starting by hiring 150 shelter-based DOE Community Coordinators](#). We appreciate that the DOE listened to stakeholders and included the hiring of 50 shelter-based Community Coordinators in its plan for using phase 1 of the ARP-HCY funds. But 50 Coordinators are not nearly enough, and we urge the City to fund 100 additional Community Coordinators using a portion of the phase 2 ARP-HCY funds. We understand that the federal funding would allow the DOE to hire Community Coordinators for two years. We strongly believe that in those two years, the Coordinators could have a far-reaching impact in addressing chronic absenteeism during the Mayor's first term. Launching a two-year program would present an opportunity to learn more about systemic barriers to regular attendance for students living in shelters and effective approaches to addressing chronic absenteeism, allowing the City to assess what should be continued or changed once the federal funding expires.

2. The City should lift the hiring freeze to allow the DOE to hire Students in Temporary Housing Regional Managers

There are 14 Regional Managers responsible for:

- supporting the 28,000 students in shelter PLUS the more than 65,000 students in temporary doubled up arrangements who are protected as homeless under the federal McKinney-Vento Act;
- supervising the STH Family Assistants in over 200 shelters;
- developing, coordinating, and recruiting for out-of-school time programming like Brooklyn North's [SIMBA and ASET](#) programs; and
- providing support to 1,600 schools on matters related to students in temporary housing (effectively using Title I STH funds, busing, address verification, immunization requirements, consent for services for unaccompanied youth, protecting students impacted by domestic violence, etc.).

There are simply not enough hours in the day for 14 Managers to adequately do this work.

Just last year, the DOE approved hiring 4 additional Regional Managers, which would have brought the total to 18. Unfortunately, the hiring freeze put a halt to those plans. Particularly at a time when the DOE is receiving \$33 million in federal ARP-HCY funding and has billions of additional dollars in COVID-19 relief funding to support students, the needs of students in temporary housing cannot and should not be part of any cost-cutting strategy. The DOE should move forward with filling all vacant positions in the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing Office immediately.

The [pandemic has exacerbated inequities](#) and increased the need for educational support for students in shelter. **Now is the time for the City to use available resources to overhaul the educational support system in shelters and prioritize support for students in temporary housing.**

Sincerely,
Advocates for Children of New York
Alliance for Quality Education
Barrier Free Living
BronxWorks
CAMBA Inc.
Children's Aid
Children's Defense Fund-New York
Citizens' Committee for Children
Coalition for the Homeless
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
Educators for Excellence (New York)
Family Homelessness Coalition
FPWA
Gateway Housing
Good Shepherd Services
Homeless Services United
Homes for the Homeless
NAACP New York State Conference of Branches
New Alternatives for Children
NY Lawyers For the Public Interest Inc. (NYLPI)
NYU Education Advocacy Clinic
Providence House, Inc.
Safe Horizon
The Education Trust–New York
The Floating Hospital
The Legal Aid Society
The Opportunity Network
United Neighborhood Houses of New York
Volunteers of America-Greater New York
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Zone 126