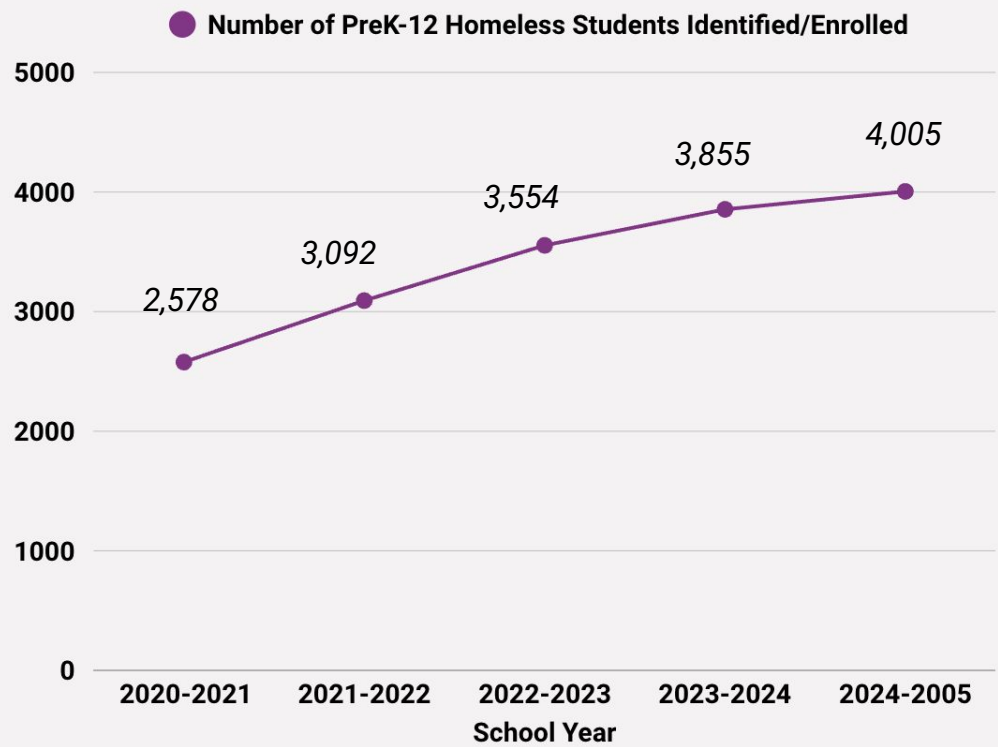**SchoolHouse Connection**

Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Experiencing Homelessness

January 23, 2026

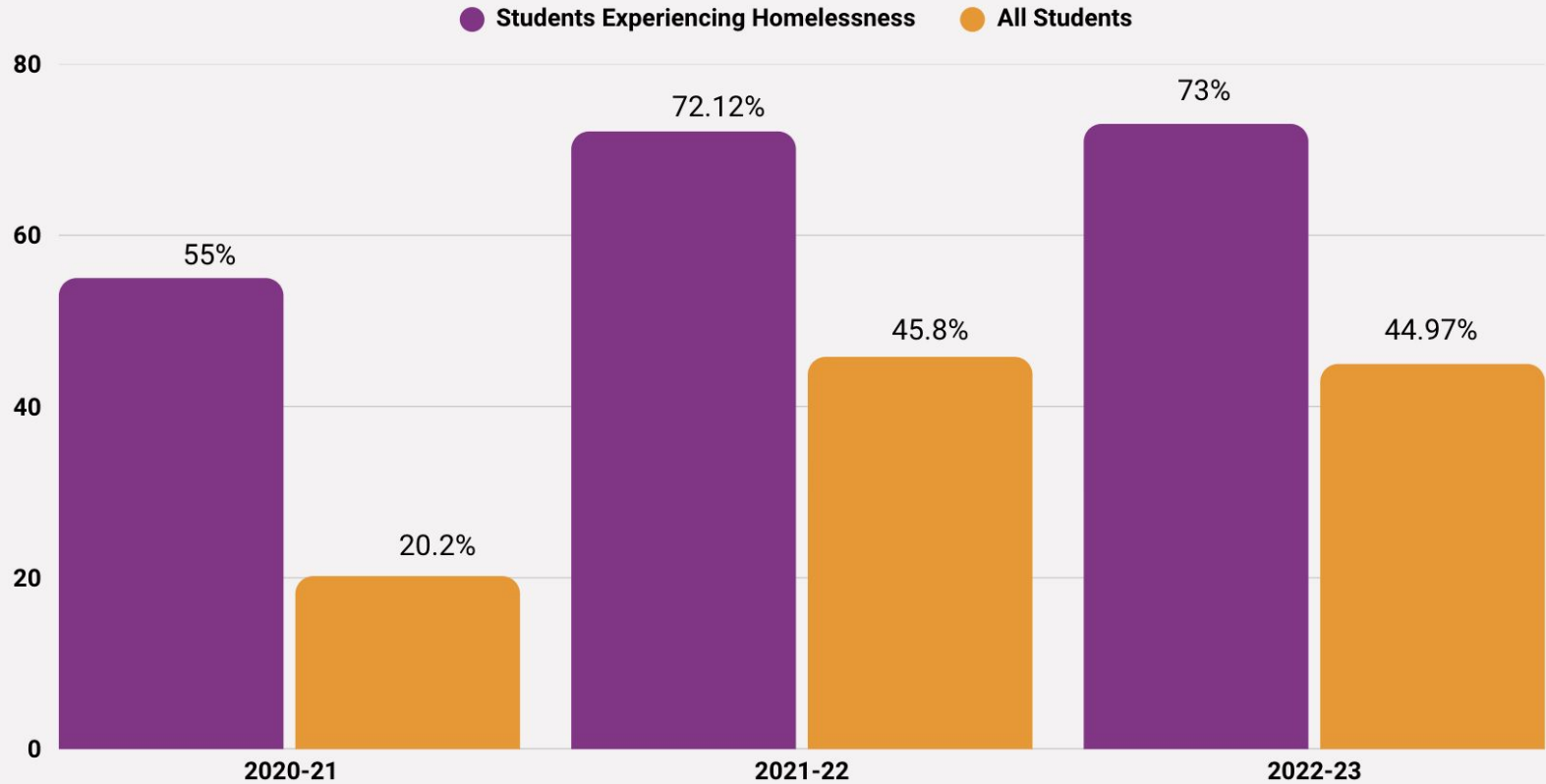# Student homelessness in Alaska has increased in recent years.

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Student Homelessness Now Affects Over 3% of Alaska's PreK–12 Students

● Number of PreK-12 Homeless Students Identified/Enrolled

School Year	% of Total PreK-12 Enrollment
2020-21	2.0%
2021-22	2.4%
2022-23	2.7%
2023-24	2.9%
2024-25	3.1%

Sources: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

Chronic Absence Rates in Alaska

- **Students Experiencing Homelessness**
- **All Students**

2020-21
- 55%
- 20.2%
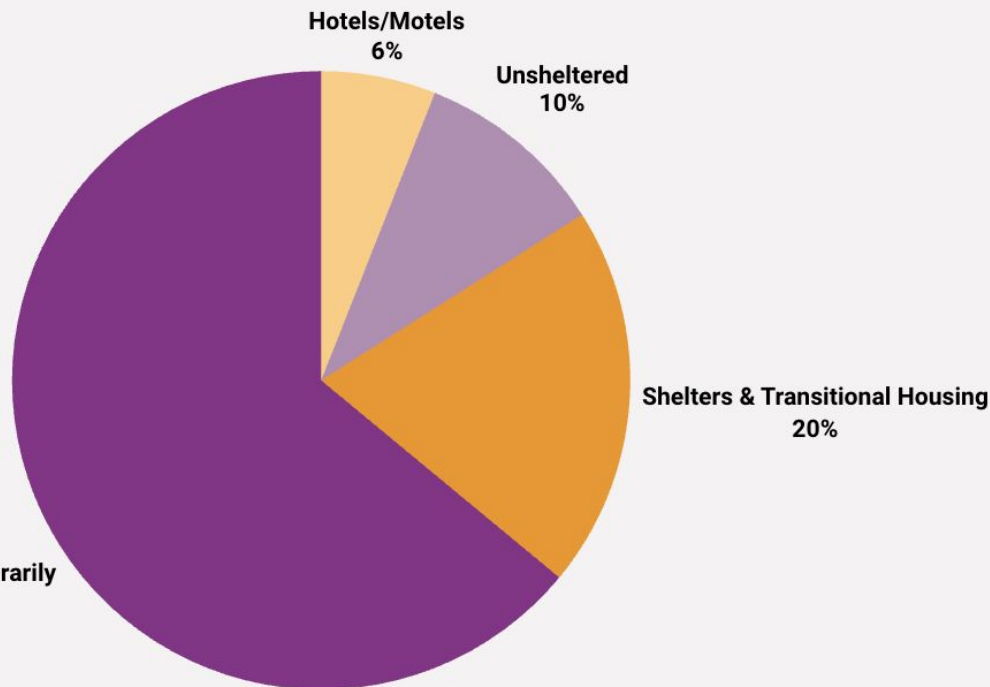
2021-22
- 72.12%
- 45.8%

2022-23
- 73%
- 44.97%

Sources: Attendance Works; National Center for Homeless Education

Student Homelessness in Alaska is Hidden

- Lack of shelter in most communities; fear of shelter.
- Lack of motels/hotels in most communities; inability to pay.
- The "unsheltered" category includes both outdoor locations as well as substandard housing.
- Children and youth "staying with others temporarily" are extremely vulnerable to predation/harm but much more difficult to identify.
- Students move fluidly between these living situations.

School Year 2024-2025

Hotels/Motels 6%

Unsheltered 10%

Shelters & Transitional Housing 20%

Staying With Others Temporarily 64%

How Homelessness Contributes to Chronic Absence

➔ Constantly moving between temporary living situations

➔ Lack of transportation

➔ Basic Needs
   ◆ Sleep, food, hygiene, clothing, supplies

➔ Caregiving and employment responsibilities

➔ Lack of engagement
   ◆ Barriers to extra-curricular activities, isolation

➔ Stress and Safety

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"My dad would experience periods of depression and he would lay in bed all day everyday for as long as a week straight. This made it difficult to get to school because he was the only one I had to help me safely arrive at school for a period of time. He wouldn't take me to school and would get angry at me for expressing my desire to go to school.

Another barrier I had when I was taking the school bus, my school bus driver put me in uncomfortable situations. When she would come to get me, she would park far down the road and would force me to walk to the bus even if it wasn't at the correct location. It was especially hard because she would park next to an area where a bunch of men would sit and sometimes they wouldn't be wearing clothes or would try talking to me. If I didn't walk over there, she would just drive away. It just made me dread getting to school. When I would take the school bus home, I would have to ride the bus with the high schoolers, the middle schoolers, and the grade schoolers, and then I would finally be dropped off. This made me also not look forward to going to school."

– SchoolHouse Connection Scholar

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"I think the biggest barriers to attending school were always transportation, energy, and embarrassment. I lived around 45 minutes away from my school at the time and I would need to bike there: some days, I just could not get myself to do it. Both because of how physically and mentally taxing homelessness is, but also because I would need to wake up at five am to get there. Also, by the time I was at school, I would usually be drenched in sweat.

Once I got out of homelessness, the trauma got in the way–some days I would be too anxious/depressed to leave."

– SchoolHouse Connection Scholar

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The McKinney-Vento Act: A Blueprint for Improving Attendance

- Enrollment is defined as **attending classes and participating fully in school activities.**

- Broad mandate to review and revise policies to remove barriers to identification, enrollment, and retention (**including barriers tied to absences**, fees, or fines).

- **Immediate enrollment:** enroll even when records or typical documentation are missing.

- **School stability:** students may remain in the same school, if in their best interest.

- **Transportation** for school stability

- **Local liaisons in every LEA:** identifying students, coordinating services, and connecting families and youth to supports.

Systemic Barriers at the Intersection of Homelessness and Chronic Absence

SchoolHouse Connection and Attendance Works have spent two years working together to better understand system barriers and conditions for success at the intersection of attendance and homelessness. Key insights to date include:

➔ McKinney-Vento staff and attendance teams often operate separately, with different data, workflows, priorities, and pressures.

➔ District/state attendance initiatives rarely explicitly consider homelessness; as a result, the strategies miss the highest-barrier students (for example, automatic drop policies).

➔ Homelessness status may not be visible in internal or external attendance dashboards or report cards; real-time platforms may not support a clear flag, reporting, or intervention for homelessness.

➔ Without targeted funding and adequate staffing, liaisons and schools can't sustain the intensive supports needed to identify and address root causes (transportation, outreach, coordination).

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Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

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Policy

"Schools are required to contact their Homeless Liaison when a homeless student is absent for 3 or more consecutive days without prearranged notice or when the total number of absences in a quarter goes beyond 7 days." - KPBSD AR 5112.6

- School Admin will work with the Liaison to determine if the absences are due to homelessness
- No students with an absence due to homelessness will be denied the opportunity to make up work/take a test given during the absence, have grades tied directly to in-school/class attendance, or be denied an award or eligibility to compete for an award
- Attendance issues will not act as a barrier to the student's education

Policy is shared and explained during in-person site level trainings to all school staff present (Admin, classroom teachers, special education aids, etc.)

Policy is shared at targeted staff trainings (school nurses and school counselors)

Policy is shared to all school Administrators throughout the year in "Admin Updates"

Transportation Assistance

to and from "school of origin"

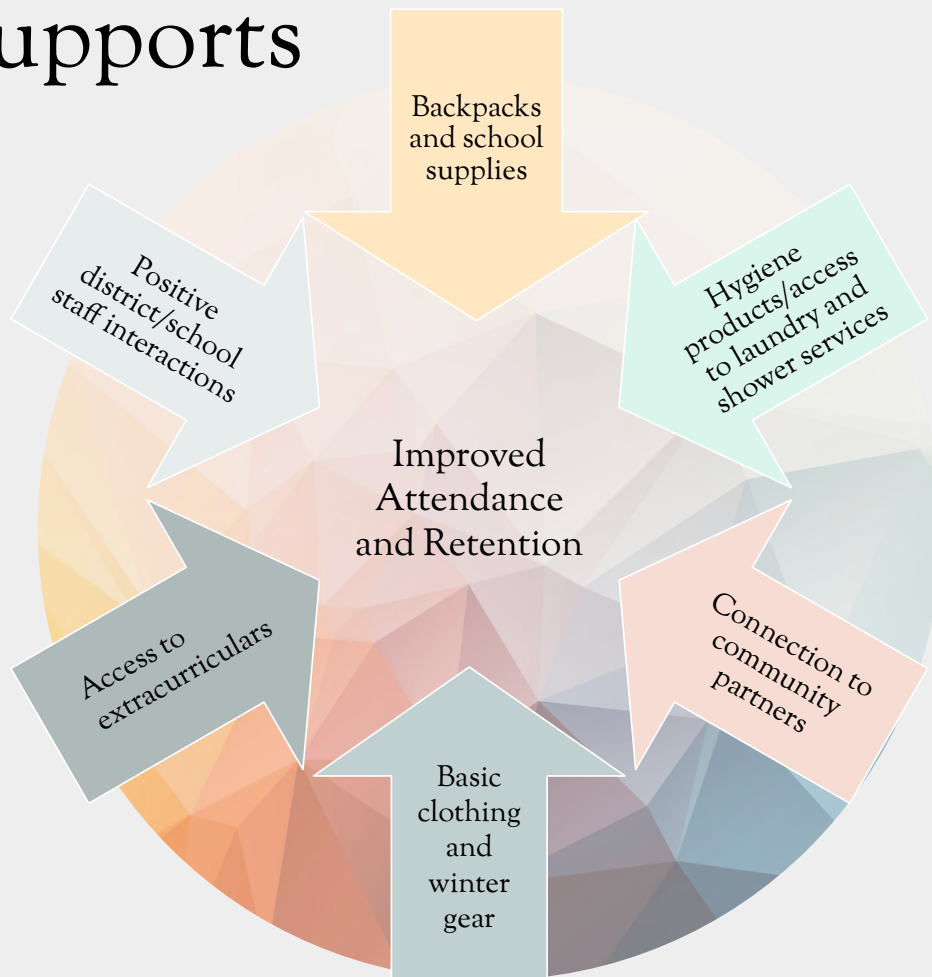Assign, create, or amend existing KPBSD bus routes

Provide fuel assistance for guardian/youth providing transportation

Utilize public transportation option (CARTS) *w/restrictions*

Offer tokens/vouchers to local cab companies *w/restrictions*

MVP Supports

Backpacks and school supplies

Hygiene products/access to laundry and shower services

Positive district/school staff interactions

Improved Attendance and Retention

Connection to community partners

Access to extracurriculars

Basic clothing and winter gear

Dedicated Youth Support Specialist

Positive relationships with school staff

Wraparound support, opt-in service

Setting student-specific goals, including attendance

Frequent communication, ongoing needs assessments

Enrichment opportunities

Considerations

Decisions about specific facets of the public education system, whether transportation, CTE programming, or policy, ripple across the entire system. Students experiencing homelessness, and the programs in place to support them, often feel the outcomes of those decisions in a real way.

Anchorage School District

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Child in Transition

- **Enrollment assistance**
- **School of Origin transportation**
- **Academic support**
- **Family assistance**
- **Connection to community resources**

Anchorage School District

- **2024/25 SY - 1,880 students identified**

- **4.3% of overall student population**

- **60% living 'doubled-up'**

- **Highly mobile**

- **25% report 3 or more different addresses**

- **14% report 4 or more different addresses**

- **Overall CIT attendance rate of 82%**

Staff Response

- **Regular attendance reports**
- **Family communication**
- **Relationship building**
- **School collaboration**
- **Adjusting transportation**
- **Problem solving**
- **Creative solutions**

Student Support Specialists

- **Check attendance**
- **Meet with students**
- **Develop relationships**
- **Frequent check-ins**
- **Follow up on issues**
- **Connect with school resources**
- **Academic support**

Success

- 'Thomas'
- 17 different addresses
  - Friends
  - Family
  - Hotels
  - Shelter
- Frequent communication
- 95% attendance rate

State Policy Considerations

State Policy Considerations

- **Do no harm:** Carefully examine both existing and proposed policies to ensure that they do not inadvertently penalize students for absences beyond their control – or create disincentives for schools to identify and enroll homeless students.

- **Explicitly integrate homelessness into district and statewide attendance initiatives:** Ensure that homeless students can participate in and benefit from broader initiatives.

- **Increase awareness and inform action through data:** Support public dashboards and reporting that make homelessness visible in attendance metrics, while protecting privacy; support real-time use of data to identify and support homeless students..

- **Target resources:** Consider homelessness in funding formulas, oversight of Title I homeless set-asides, pilot initiatives

- **Cross-agency alignment:** Consider how the policies and practices of other sectors – housing, homeless response, and child welfare – may contribute to chronic absence.

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