

**Educating Homeless
Children in Chicago:
A Case Study of Children
in the Family Regeneration
Program**

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social systems

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Introduction

A sharp rise in the incidence of homelessness among families with children during the 1980s led to growing concerns about the education of homeless children. Children often changed schools when their families became homeless, either because they lacked transportation to the school in which they had been enrolled (their “home” school) or because they were no longer living in that school’s catchment area. It was also difficult for homeless children to enroll in a new school because their parents lacked proof of residency or other documentation (e.g., birth certificates, proof of guardianship, immunization or other health records, and school records).

In response, Congress created the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program as part of the 1987 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (henceforth referred to as McKinney-Vento). This program was designed to reduce instability and remove barriers to enrollment. Under McKinney-Vento, homeless children must have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education as their peers who are not homeless. They must also be allowed to stay in their “home” school to complete the school year and be provided with the transportation necessary to do so by Local Educational Agencies (LEA).¹

Much progress has been made since 1987 when McKinney-Vento became law. For example, access to education has significantly improved. Recent estimates suggest that 87 percent of homeless children are now enrolled in school compared with only 57 percent before the law’s enactment (U.S. Department of Education, 2000, 2004). Nevertheless, barriers to the education of homeless children still exist.

Homeless children are not always immediately enrolled in school, particularly if they lack the required documentation (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Nor are they always provided with transportation to and from their “home” school (Anderson, Janger, & Pandon, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This might help explain why only 77 percent of enrolled homeless children attend school regularly (U.S. Department of Education, 2000), and why one study found that, in one year, 37 percent of New York City’s homeless children missed more than two weeks of school, including 12 percent who missed more than one month (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2001).

Homeless children also continue to experience high rates of school mobility. According to recent estimates, 28 percent of homeless children go to three or more schools over the course of a single year (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Similarly, one study found that, within a single year, 42 percent of New York City’s homeless children changed schools at least once, including 24 percent who transferred two or more times (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003). Contributing to school mobility are time-limited homeless shelters in which families can only stay 30, 90, or 120 days. If

¹ Originally, states were only required to allow children to stay in the same school district. However, since a 1994 amendment, states have been required to allow children to stay in their school of origin (Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 P.L. 103-382).

transportation to a child's home school is not provided or if parents are encouraged to enroll their children in the nearest school, a child may change schools each time the family moves to a different shelter.

School mobility is likely to have negative effects on homeless children's achievement. Children who change schools make less academic progress than their peers, and each time they change schools, they fall farther and farther behind (Kerbow, 1996). This is true even after family socioeconomic status and other demographic factors associated with both academic achievement and school mobility are taken into account (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994; Ingersoll, Scamman, & Eckerling, 1989; Kerbow, 1996).

Homeless children may also have trouble succeeding in school because they are living in situations that are not conducive to learning. They may not be able to find a quiet place where they can study or do homework, particularly if they are staying in a crowded shelter, and they may have limited access to books or other educational materials that promote literacy and the development of skills important to school success.

Thus, it is not surprising that homeless children tend to experience a variety of academic problems. For example, they are more likely to score below grade level on standardized tests (Nunez, 1994; Rubin et al., 1996), twice as likely to be retained, and 1.3 times as likely to be categorized as having special education needs (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003) than their peers who are stably housed.² Some of their academic problems can be explained by the fact that homeless children tend to be poor and, like many poor children, attend underachieving schools. However, researchers still find differences between homeless children and their peers after controlling for socioeconomic status and other demographic factors (Rubin et al., 1996).

Addressing the educational needs of homeless children is more important than ever. Recent estimates suggest that approximately 600,000 families with 1.35 million children experience homelessness each year (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007), and these numbers will increase because families with children comprise the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population in the United States. However, far too little is known about these children or their educational experiences to develop effective policies and programs.

Thus, the present study was undertaken in order to begin to close this knowledge gap. We used administrative data from both the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and a program that serves many of Chicago's most vulnerable homeless families to examine children's educational experiences; we used qualitative data from interviews with key informants to help place the findings from our quantitative analyses in context. The results have implications for how public schools and homeless shelters can work together to improve homeless children's educational outcomes.

² It is unclear whether some homeless children are categorized as having special education needs because they are in environments where it is difficult to learn rather than because they have learning disabilities.

Before turning to the details of our research, we provide some important background information about Chicago's shelter system, the umbrella agency that operates the program for Chicago's homeless families, and homeless children in the city's public schools.

Chicago's Shelter System

A majority of homeless shelters in Chicago are funded by the Chicago Department of Human Services. Different types of shelters serve different populations, have different length-of-stay restrictions, and provide different types of services. Table 1, which is based on information provided by the Chicago Department of Human Services, illustrates this diversity.

To enter the shelter system, homeless families must first call Chicago's nonemergency help line (i.e., 311), which refers them to one of six field offices throughout the city. The primary field office is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and most homeless families are directed there. A team is available to provide transportation. The field office has an intake process that includes an initial assessment.

There is no standard progression through the system, and referrals are generally dictated by bed availability. This means that families are typically referred without regard to where the children are enrolled in school. This is contrary to the Illinois Homeless Education Act, which states that proximity to school of origin should be considered when placing families.

Shelters tend to fill up around the holidays because of cold weather and increased stress among families living doubled up. The opposite happens as the weather becomes warmer and families feel stifled by shelter rules.

Homeless shelters that serve families are quite diverse. Some require families to share a single room. Others assign each family to what is essentially its own apartment. Although the former may be fine for families with young children, the latter may be more appropriate for families with older children who need more privacy.

Helping parents achieve self-sufficiency is a major focus of shelter staff. Some shelters require parents to be working or enrolled in a job training program. Other shelters have no such requirement. However, parents may still be required to work or participate in job training as a condition of TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) receipt. Coordinating parents' work or training with children's school schedules can be difficult, particularly if children are being bused to and from their school of origin. Indeed, TANF work and training requirements often seem to conflict with requirements of McKinney-Vento and related court orders.

Table 1. Types of Homeless Shelters in Chicago

Type	Population served	Length-of-stay restrictions	Services Provided
Overnight shelters	Single adults	12 hours	Agreements with support service providers
Emergency response shelters for single adults	Single adults	No time limit	Agreements with support service providers
Emergency response shelters for families	Families ^a	No time limit	Services provided by shelter staff or through agreements with other agencies
Interim housing	Families ^a	120 days, but some families stay longer	Services focused on achieving permanent housing (i.e., housing first approach) Case management and crisis intervention Referrals to community resources
Safe haven shelters	Persons with severe mental illness, including individuals with dual diagnoses	No time limit	Programs work to engage homeless adults in services
Permanent housing with short-term supports	Single individuals and families needing short-term assistance to regain self-sufficiency	2 years	Rent subsidies and case management are gradually phased out and lease is assumed
Permanent supportive housing	Persons with serious or persistent disabilities including mental illness, substance disorders, and HIV/AIDS	Long-term	Supportive services
Transitional shelters ^b	Families and single adults ^a	120 days	Case management and supportive services
Second stage ^c	Single adults or families ^a	1 year or 2 years with waiver	Case management and supportive services
Domestic violence shelters	Women and children	Not available	Case management and supportive services
Shelters for unaccompanied youth	Youth and young adults	Not available	Case management and supportive services

^aFamily refers to mother and/or father and children, although some “family” shelters will not accept boys older than 12 years.

^bBeing phased out as part of HUD’s move toward permanent housing and the city’s 10-year plan to end homelessness by 2012.

^cIncludes transitional supportive housing.

As part of the Chicago Housing Authority's 10-year Plan to End Homelessness by 2010, there has been a system-wide effort to adopt a "housing first" approach. This approach aims to help individuals and families end an episode of homelessness as quickly as possible by placing them in permanent housing and linking them to the services they need to achieve self-sufficiency. One consequence has been the adoption of an interim housing model that emphasizes needs assessment, resource acquisition (i.e., public benefits, employment), and permanent housing placement. Service plans focus on addressing parents' physical, mental, and behavioral health needs as well as increasing their job readiness. Some interim housing shelters provide these services on site, whereas others primarily make referrals to community agencies.

Inner Voice

One of the largest providers of services for the homeless in Chicago is Inner Voice, a nonprofit agency with programs in 28 locations throughout the city. Inner Voice provides emergency shelter, employment assistance, supportive services, and permanent housing to more than 18,000 homeless persons every year. It also supervises operations at all of the 19 neighborhood-based centers that comprise Chicago's Emergency Shelter Response Network (7 for families, 8 for adult men, and 4 for adult women). These centers, operated by churches, nonprofit organizations, and social service agencies, have a total of 320 beds for homeless families with children and 575 beds for single men and women.³

Of particular relevance to the present study is the assistance Inner Voice provides to homeless families. Its Family Regeneration Supportive Services Project (henceforth referred to as the Family Regeneration program) helps chronically and episodically homeless families become stably housed. The families served by the program are typically staying in one of the many interim housing shelters—although not necessarily a shelter operated by Inner Voice. After a clinical assessment, each family receives an individualized service plan, including intensive case management, supportive services, and referrals to transitional, second-stage, or permanent housing.

Homeless Children in the Chicago Public Schools

With an enrollment of more than 400,000 students in 655 schools, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the third largest public school system in the United States (Chicago Public Schools, 2008). More than 10,000 students are identified as homeless by CPS each year (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 2006).⁴ This includes students staying in homeless shelters as well as students whose families are living with other families. In

³ Additional beds for single men and women are added to accommodate increased demand during the winter season.

⁴ The unduplicated count for the 2005-2006 school year was 10,515. The Homeless Education Office was not confident in its numbers for the 2006-2007 school year, because some schools were still using the old Legacy student information system (SI) while others had already switched to the new system (IMPACT).

fact, homeless students are far more likely to be living doubled up with another family than staying in a shelter.⁵

Changes in the database and data collection methods CPS has used to track homeless students make it difficult to look at trends over time. Moreover, although the number of students identified as homeless has increased significantly since 2000, when approximately 3,500 homeless students were identified, it is unclear whether the increase reflects real growth in the number of homeless students or improvements in efforts by CPS to identify them.

Since 1999, the district's Homeless Education Program has been responsible for ensuring that homeless children in the Chicago Public Schools have access to the same educational opportunities as students who are not homeless, as required under both McKinney-Vento and the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act.⁶

The treatment of homeless children in the Chicago Public Schools first received significant attention in the late 1980s when concerns were raised about what were, in essence, two segregated schools. One was a self-contained classroom inside a large high school on the city's north side to which all students identified as homeless were sent. The other was an on-site classroom in one of the city's largest family shelters in which all of the shelter's school-age children were required to enroll—and then required to leave when families had exhausted their 30-day stays.⁷ All of the children were taught by a single teacher from one of the neighborhood schools, and no special education or other support services were provided.

A class action lawsuit, *Salazar v. Edwards*, was eventually filed in June 1992 by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless Law Project (CCHLP) on behalf of homeless children in the Chicago Public Schools. It alleged that the district had consistently failed to comply with McKinney-Vento requirements. According to CCHLP, school-age children could be found in homeless shelters during the school day because CPS had refused to enroll them in violation of federal law.

Although CPS never admitted to violating the law, a settlement was reached in November 1996. As part of that settlement, CPS agreed to remove perceived barriers to education of homeless children and to close the segregated schools. The CCHLP took CPS back to court in 1999 after three years of alleged noncompliance with the *Salazar* settlement. The court entered an order demanding full compliance and requiring the district to take a number of specific measures, including (1) a massive information campaign about the rights of the homeless; (2) training for school personnel about the

⁵ Eighty-two percent of the nearly 9,000 students who were homeless at the end of the 2005-2006 school year were living doubled up ($n = 7,365$) compared with only 12 percent who were staying in shelters ($n = 1,573$).

⁶ The state legislature passed the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act in 1994 after a suburban district attempted to exclude homeless students.

⁷ The three public schools in the community where the shelter was located routinely turned away homeless families and directed them to the "shelter school."

requirements of and compliance with state and federal law; (3) the designation of school liaisons who would identify, assist, and enroll homeless children; (4) the provision of bus passes so homeless children could attend their schools of origin; and (5) informing parents about the dispute resolution process. A subsequent settlement, reached in 2000, required CPS to designate a Homeless Liaison in each public school and contained a number of specific provisions regarding transportation and schools of origin.

The CCHLP filed another court motion in 2004 alleging that CPS was once again violating *Salazar*. At issue was the district's Renaissance 2010 plan, which called for the closure of between 60 and 90 Chicago public schools. Although these schools would eventually be replaced with 100 new schools, the school closings threatened to displace thousands of homeless students from their schools of origin. However, rather than trying to prevent the closures, the CCHLP sought transition services and opportunities for the displaced homeless children to enroll in better-performing schools. In the end, CPS provided both and indicated that these same opportunities and transition services would be offered to any homeless children displaced by future school closures. Moreover, because it appeared that the closure decisions had been made without considering their impact on the homeless students in those schools, the CCHLP also wanted more coordination between CPS administration and the Homeless Education Program when school closing decisions are made.

Methodology

The research on which this report is based involved a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Both of these components are described below.

Qualitative Interviews with Advocates and Service Providers

The qualitative component of this project involved in-person interviews with key informants who were familiar with the problems facing homeless children and their families in the city of Chicago. An introductory e-mail about the study was sent to nine potential interviewees. This e-mail was followed by a telephone call approximately three days later. If the individual was willing to participate in the study, an interview was scheduled. In some cases, we were referred to another person at the same agency.

Altogether, a total of six interviews were completed: three with staff from homeless shelters that serve families with children, and one each with representatives from the Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and the Chicago Department of Human Services.

Interview guides were developed for each interview to reflect each key informant's area (or areas) of expertise. Although the specific questions asked varied across interviews, the underlying focus was always on the education of homeless children in the Chicago Public Schools. The interviews, which lasted approximately one hour each, were conducted at the key informant's place of work.

Quantitative Analysis of Administrative Data

The quantitative component of this project involved analyzing administrative data from two sources: Inner Voice and the Chicago Public Schools. Inner Voice created two data files. The first contained identifying information (i.e., name, gender, and birthdate) for all of the children whose families entered its Family Regeneration Program between November 2002 and August 2006. The second data file contained identifying information (i.e., name, gender, birthdate, and race/ethnicity) for the parent or parents of those children, as well as program entry and exit dates.

Probabilistic record matching was used to identify educational records for the Inner Voice children in Chapin Hall's Chicago Public Schools Student database.⁸ This database contains information about individual students, including dates of enrollment, schools enrolled in, grade in school, special education classifications, standardized test scores (for children in grades 3 through 8), course grades (for high school students), and attendance (for high school students).

Results of Qualitative Interviews

The primary purpose of the qualitative interviews was to provide a context for understanding the quantitative results. Below is a summary of what we learned about the various topics addressed.

School Enrollment

Although McKinney-Vento gives homeless children the right to remain in their school of origin, shelters have not always encouraged parents to keep their children in that school. On the contrary, parents were sometimes urged to enroll their children in the neighborhood school with which the shelter had a relationship. Enrolling children in the school closest to the shelter obviated the need for transportation and minimized problems with residency requirements (because the shelter would provide proof of address). More recently, shelters have been encouraging parents to keep children in their school of origin, and most parents choose to do just that.⁹ Parents often feel that their children have already experienced enough disruption and hope to eventually move back to the neighborhood in which they last lived.

There was some variation in the role that the shelter played in school enrollment among the three shelters whose staff we interviewed. Staff at one shelter indicated that they usually inform the principal and the homeless liaison at the school of origin that the

⁸ Probabilistic record matching is a technique for calculating the likelihood that records from two different databases belong to the same person by matching as many pieces of identifying information from each database as possible (Newcombe, 1993; Roos & Wadja, 1991; Roos et al., 1992). Usually, one can be more confident that two records belong to the same individual if there are more rather than fewer matching pieces of identifying information. To link across the Inner Voice and CPS data, we used first and last name, date of birth, sex, and race.

⁹ Based on requests for transportation, CPS estimates that about two-thirds of homeless elementary students attend their school of origin

children are staying in their shelter so that transportation can be arranged by the school. By contrast, staff at another shelter reported that they tend not to get involved in school enrollment unless there is a problem: for example, if children are trying to return to their school of origin after a long absence. In that case, they will call the Homeless Education Hotline (in the Homeless Education Office). Hotline workers can often resolve the problem by conferring with school staff.

A minority of parents do enroll their children in the neighborhood school during their shelter stay. This can increase children's access to community resources and prevent the additional stress that is created when children need to be bused or take public transportation. Shelter staff may contact the Homeless Education Office if parents are asked for proof of residency or other documentation (e.g., birth certificates, immunization records) that McKinney-Vento prohibits schools from requiring. Alternatively, they may provide a letter as proof of residency to expedite enrollment. When the neighborhood school is already at capacity, children are referred to another that is supposed to accept any overflow.¹⁰

Transportation to School of Origin

Most children (and their parents) are given CTA fare cards by their school of origin, and parents are required to accompany their children on public transportation until they are 13 years old. This can be particularly difficult for parents who are working.¹¹ If parents are unable to accompany their children on public transportation—for example, if parents are working, if their children are enrolled in different schools, or if they have a disability—their children can be bused. In that case, parents are required to wait with their children at a designated location, often the neighborhood school, for the bus to pick them up.¹² However, parents do not have to be present when their children are dropped off at the end of the day, which means that children as young as 5 years old may be walking back to the shelter without adult supervision. Although this so-called “hardship” transportation can help reduce absenteeism and tardiness, it is costly. Shelter staff will call the Homeless Education Office if families experience transportation problems, for example, if schools run out of fare cards or front-office staff refuse to provide them.

Information about the Educational Rights of Homeless Children

The informants we interviewed generally agreed that school staff today are much more knowledgeable about the educational rights of homeless children than they were in the past. Principals, school clerks, and Homeless Liaisons receive mandatory training and are supposed to train teachers and other staff. Nevertheless, informants noted that some school staff are still not familiar with homeless children's educational rights and do not know who their Homeless Liaison is.

¹⁰ Some CPS literature contains enrollment information (i.e., that proof of immunizations is always required) that can be misleading regarding homeless children.

¹¹ CTA fare cards are available to students and to the parents of students in grades K through 6.

¹² Door-to-door service is sometimes provided to special education students.

Schools are required to provide parents with information about the educational rights of homeless children, including their right to free legal counsel in the event of a dispute. This information is supposed to be included in the emergency handbook, and schools are supposed to display posters about homelessness. However, our informants expressed concern that some parents are not aware of their children's educational rights or do not know how to advocate for their children so that their needs are addressed.

Sometimes parents learn about their children's rights from Homeless Education Office field liaisons who do outreach at homeless shelters. Although these liaisons also conduct school audits to ensure compliance with both the law and the *Salazar* decree, there are only 3 liaisons and each is responsible for approximately 200 schools.

Identifying Homeless Students

Sometimes parents inform school staff that they are homeless, in which case they are supposed to be taken to a private place where their children's educational rights can be discussed confidentially. However, we were told that this need for confidentiality is not always respected. Homeless children are also identified based on the living situation that parents list on the Emergency Contact form.

Although there is some variation across schools, CPS is generally perceived as doing a fairly good job at identifying homeless children.¹³ The Homeless Education Office estimates that it is probably aware of more than half the children who qualify as homeless under McKinney-Vento, with children living doubled up being the most likely to be overlooked.

School Climate

Schools in neighborhoods where shelters for homeless families are located respond to homeless children in different ways. Some have a good relationship with the shelter and try to make homeless students feel welcome. Others are less welcoming.

Homeless children, especially those who attend neighborhood schools, may face taunting when other children find out they are homeless. Children who attend their school of origin may be identified as homeless because they ride the "homeless" bus. Homeless children may also feel different from their peers because of the things they do not have (e.g., gym shoes, uniforms, school supplies).¹⁴

The Illinois School Code requires districts to waive all standard fees for children whose parents cannot afford to pay, including homeless children. These can include annual fees for textbooks or instructional materials as well as fees for field trips, extracurricular activities, and other events (e.g., graduation). However, those fees are not always waived in practice. Although standard school supplies (e.g., notebooks and

¹³ Identifying homeless children may be more of an issue in suburban districts where there is less familiarity with the law.

¹⁴ Schools are supposed to provide homeless children with uniforms, but parents must make a request.

pencils) do not qualify for the fee waiver, some schools have resources to assist families with the cost of these items.

Relationship between Shelters and Schools

The Chicago Department of Human Services hosts annual “back to school” workshops at the shelters. These workshops are an opportunity for CPS to educate shelter staff about the rights of homeless children under McKinney-Vento and to inform them about the services for homeless children that CPS provides. Bus passes and school supplies are also distributed.

Despite the fact that these workshops take place every year, one of the shelter staff with whom we spoke could not recall receiving any information from CPS other than a pamphlet from the Homeless Education Office. In fact, there was a sense among the shelter staff that CPS needed to “reach out” more. They also expressed frustration that communication between shelters and schools tended to be one-way. For example, schools will sometimes contact shelter staff to find out why children have been absent for several days, but shelter staff are typically not informed about, and thus cannot do anything to help address, behavior problems. At the same time, shelter staff acknowledged that schools may be more responsive to them than to the homeless children’s parents.

Other informants noted that shelters had generally not shown much initiative in terms of working with CPS. However, according to shelter staff, their efforts to help parents resolve school-related problems are frequently rebuffed. For example, parents often refuse offers by shelter staff to be present when they meet with school administrators.

Most shelters do not formally monitor grades or attendance, although some do recognize children who are doing well in school with prizes and praise. Staff may also make sure older children whose parents have gone to work are out of bed and ready for school.

After-School Programs

The Homeless Education Office has set up tutoring programs run by VISTA volunteers that offer homework help as well as recreational activities. However, these programs have only been set up in a handful of shelters, perhaps because shelters do not have staff they can commit.

In fact, despite what seemed to be a consensus about the need for organized activities, most shelters do not have programs for children after school. One exception was a shelter whose staff we interviewed that employs a youth coordinator to run an afterschool program for children ages 7 to 14. The children do their homework, visit the library, and attend cultural events. Some of their parents volunteer.

Homeless children may participate in tutoring programs recommended by the school or in programs run by the local Boys and Girls Club. However, shelter staff do not necessarily encourage parents to enroll their children in organized activities, so many homeless children spend their afterschool hours at the library, in their rooms, or hanging out in front of the TV.

Homeless Teens in Family Shelters¹⁵

Some shelters require teens to attend high school or be enrolled in a GED program. Most teens continue to attend their school of origin because their friends are there and they know the neighborhood. Older children who attend the neighborhood high school often try to hide the fact that they are living in a homeless shelter. This can be particularly tricky if the shelter provides opportunities for local high school students to do their community service.

Teens may be referred to After School Matters, but they are not given priority and cannot participate if the program is already full. Teens are not allowed to hang out in front of the shelter. Some spend their afterschool hours in their rooms; others do not return until evening.

Early Education for Young Children in Homeless Shelters

Addressing the early education needs of young children seems to be a priority for homeless advocates. Enrolling homeless children in Head Start can be challenging. Programs are sometimes full, and there are paperwork requirements. However, the Families and Children in Shelters Initiative is a new program operated by the Salvation Army and Family Rescue that connects shelters with Early Head Start and Head Start programs.

Although homeless children can be immediately enrolled in CPS preschool programs, their parents may be unintentionally discouraged from doing so by literature about pre-school enrollment that emphasizes the need for documentation and posters that state an enrollment deadline.

Enrolling young children in early education programs is even more of a challenge for homeless parents who are working, searching for work, or in job training, because many programs are only half-day.

Mental Health Service Needs of Homeless Children

Although some homeless children are quite resilient, others become angry, aggressive, ashamed, or depressed living in a shelter. Older children and boys seem to be especially vulnerable. Homeless children can also be affected by the traumas or other problems that

¹⁵ Our focus was on shelters that serve homeless families, rather than unaccompanied homeless youth, whose situation is quite different.

contributed to their homelessness. This may be manifested in school-related problems including skipping class, absenteeism, and low achievement.

Homeless children may be identified as needing mental health services, particularly if they are acting out. The mental health service needs of children who exhibit internalizing behaviors are often overlooked unless specifically mentioned by a parent. Counselors from Beacon Therapeutic come to many of the shelters, but older children, in particular, can be difficult to engage in services.

Results of Quantitative Analysis of Administrative Data

Characteristics of Homeless Families and Children

Altogether, 444 families with a total of 1,325 children entered the Family Regeneration program during the period from November 2002 through August 2006. Table 1 shows the number of families and children entering each year as well as the ages of the children at program entry. Nearly three-quarters of these children were under age 12. It is possible that the older children in some of these families were living somewhere else, perhaps as unaccompanied homeless youth.¹⁶

	Year of first entry					Total	
	2002 ^a	2003	2004	2005 ^b	2006 ^c	No.	%
No. of families	60	148	142	14	80	444	
No. of children	203	458	422	39	203	1,325	
Age of children at entry						No.	%
0 to 2 ^c	13.8	18.9	15.0	13.9	20.9	224	17.2
3 to 5	21.7	19.1	19.1	2.8	21.4	255	19.4
6 to 8	21.7	18.2	18.6	16.7	18.9	249	18.7
9 to 11	17.7	18.9	21.0	19.4	12.9	243	18.4
12 to 14	14.3	15.8	14.3	33.3	15.9	205	15.6
15 to 17	10.8	9.2	12.1	13.9	10.0	140	10.6
Missing ^e	0	2	2	3	2	9	9

^a Thirteen families entered the Family Regeneration program more than once during the observation period. Only their first entry is represented here.
^b The first families for which we have data entered in November 2002.
^c Inner Voice lost funding for the Family Regeneration program in 2005. A small number of families were served using other agency funds. However, the number of families entering the program was only a fraction of what it had been the year before.
^d The last families for which we have data entered in August 2006.
^e These data do not include eleven children who were born after their families had entered the Family Regeneration program but before they had exited.
^f Birthdates were missing for six of the children.

The overwhelming majority of these families were headed by a parent who was both female and African American. Approximately half of these families had one or two children at program entry and another third had three or four. Forty-two percent had at least one child younger than age 3, and 61 percent had a child younger than age 6.

¹⁶ As noted above, some homeless shelters do not accept males older than age 12.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Inner Voice Families (N = 444)		
	No.	%
Race/ethnicity of parent		
African American	388	87.4
White	17	3.8
Hispanic	21	4.7
Biracial/multiracial	8	1.8
Other	10	2.3
Parent gender		
Male	19	4.3
Female	425	95.7
Number of children at entry^a		
One	103	23.2
Two	114	25.7
Three	88	19.9
Four	62	14.0
Five	32	7.2
Six or more	45	10.0
Age of youngest child at entry^a		
0 to 2	183	41.9
3 to 5	89	20.4
6 to 8	64	14.7
9 to 11	51	11.7
12 to 14	33	7.6
15 to 17	17	3.9
Missing	7	
^a This does not include the eleven children born after families had entered the Family Regeneration program.		

Although the data file that contained identifying information for each child did not include race/ethnicity, most of the children were probably African American, given their parent's race/ethnicity, and more than half were male.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Homeless Education Program has also found that the vast majority of homeless students in the Chicago Public Schools are African American. It is possible that Hispanic families are less willing to identify themselves as homeless.

	No.	%
Race/ethnicity of child's parent		
African American	1,177	88.8
White	40	3.0
Hispanic	58	4.4
Biracial/multiracial	23	1.7
Other	27	2.0
Child's gender		
Male	693	52.3
Female	632	47.7

Because this program targets chronically or episodically homeless families, we cannot assume that the date on which a particular family entered the program is the date on which the family's homeless spell began. On the contrary, it is quite possible that these families had been homeless for some time before entering the program, particularly if the more inclusive McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness is used.¹⁸

With this understanding, we calculated their length of stay in the program. Table 5 shows the number of weeks these children and their families were in the program as of August 31, 2006, the last date for which data were available.¹⁹ Approximately one-third were in the program for less than 20 weeks, but the largest group was in the program for 50 weeks or more.

Number of weeks	Families (N = 444)		Children (N = 1,325)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 10	77	17.4	216	16.3
10 to 19	73	16.5	196	14.8
20 to 29	37	8.4	117	8.9
30 to 39	45	10.2	121	9.2
40 to 49	32	7.2	109	8.3
50 or more	178	40.3	563	42.6
Missing	2		3	
Mean number of weeks	62.4		65.8	
Median number of weeks	34.6		40.3	

¹⁸ As already noted, the McKinney-Vento definition includes living doubled up.

¹⁹ Families and children still in the program as of August 31, 2006, were treated as censored cases as of that date. Children born after families entered the program are not included in these data.

A very different picture emerges when the 681 children whose families had exited the program by August 31, 2006 (i.e., the “leavers”), are compared with the 644 children whose families had not (i.e., the “stayers”). Nearly half of leavers had been in the program for less than 20 weeks, whereas the vast majority of stayers had been in the program for at least one year.

	Leavers (N = 681)				Stayers (N = 644)			
	Families		Children		Families		Children	
Number of weeks	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 10	44	20.2	130	19.3	32	14.4	85	13.1
10 to 19	58	26.6	165	24.5	15	6.7	31	4.8
20 to 29	30	13.8	101	15.0	7	3.1	16	2.5
30 to 39	32	14.7	90	13.4	13	5.8	31	4.8
40 to 49	32	14.7	109	16.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
50 or more	22	10.1	78	11.6	156	70.0	485	74.9
Missing	2		3		0		0	
Mean number of weeks	28.9		29.7		97.4		104.1	
Median number of weeks	21.0		23.3		104.1		109.4	

Chicago Public Schools Enrollment

Probabilistic matching yielded CPS records for 1,022 (77 percent) of the 1,325 children whose families were in the program. These children represented 90 percent of the 444 program families. However, of the 1,022 children for whom we found records, 70, or just over 5 percent, had only been enrolled in Head Start or state pre-K. Excluding these 70 children, 86 percent of the families had at least one child who was ever enrolled in CPS.

	Children		Families	
	No.	%	No.	%
Any CPS record	1,022	77.1	398	89.6
At least one record for kindergarten through grade 12	952	71.8	382	86.0.

Of the 952 children for whom we had at least one grade K through 12 record, almost 70 percent were continuously enrolled in CPS before and after program entry. Another 13 percent were first enrolled in CPS while their families were in the program.

	No.	%
Continuously enrolled before and after program entry ^a	659	69.2
Enrolled before and after program entry but with gaps in enrollment	23	2.4
First enrolled while in the program	123	12.9
First enrolled after exiting the program	82	8.6
Last enrolled before program entry	65	6.8

^a Includes children enrolled during the spring before and the fall after entering.

Just over 85 percent of the 659 continuously enrolled children were in grades K through 8 at program entry compared with only 16 percent who were in grades 9 through 12.²⁰

Grade	No.	%
Kindergarten	47	7.1
1 – 4	276	41.9
5 – 8	232	35.2
9 – 12	104	15.8

^a Grade in September after program entry for children whose families entered during the summer.

Nearly half of the 65 children who were no longer enrolled at program entry had transferred to a public school in another district or to a nonpublic school. An additional 40 percent had either officially dropped out (≥ 16 years old) or simply disappeared (< 16 years old).²¹

	No.	%
Graduated	1	1.6
Dropped out ^a	9	14.3
Transferred	31	49.2
Unable to locate student ^b	16	25.4
Institutionalized	1	1.6
Other	5	7.9
Missing	2	3.2

^a Must be at least 16 years old
^b Not yet 16 years old

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of children whose enrollment did not begin until after program entry were in kindergarten when they first enrolled. Most of the others were in grades 1 through 4.

²⁰ As noted above, some homeless shelters do not accept males older than age 12.

²¹ Some of those under age 16 who could not be located may also have dropped out.

Grade	First enrolled while in program		First enrolled after exiting	
	No.	%	No.	%
Kindergarten	95	77.2	66	80.5
1 – 4	18	14.6	14	17.1
5 – 8	7	5.7	1	1.2
9 – 12	3	2.4	1	1.2
Total	123	100.0	82	100.0

School Mobility

Because previous studies have found that children often change schools when their families become homeless, and that some homeless children experience multiple school changes during the same year (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2000), we looked at school mobility among the homeless children in our study. We began by counting the number of times these children changed schools between their first enrollment and June 2007. We excluded transitions from elementary or middle school to high school and limited our analysis to children who were continuously enrolled in CPS before and after program entry.

Overall, these children had experienced a mean of 3.2 school changes. Only 11 percent had never changed schools compared with more than 25 percent who had changed schools a minimum of five times. Of course, some of these children had been enrolled in CPS for a much longer time than others and thus were at risk of changing schools for a longer period. Indeed, children who had been enrolled since the 1990's had experienced an average of 3.7 to 5.3 school changes compared with an average of 0.6 to 2.8 school changes among children whose enrollment began after 1999.

Table 12. Cumulative Number of School Changes as of June 2007 by Year of First CPS Enrollment								
Year first enrolled	0	1	2	3	4	5+	Mean	<i>N</i>
1991	18.2	0.0	18.2	9.1	18.2	36.4	3.91	11
1992	4.0	16.0	0.0	12.0	8.0	60.0	5.32	25
1993	0.0	21.7	8.7	13.0	13.0	43.5	4.17	23
1994	9.5	7.1	11.9	28.6	16.7	26.2	3.71	42
1995	2.8	5.6	8.3	13.9	27.8	41.7	4.53	36
1996	6.4	6.4	17.0	14.9	10.6	44.7	4.13	47
1997	4.5	10.5	11.9	17.9	14.9	40.3	4.18	67
1998	8.8	10.5	14.0	19.3	5.3	42.1	3.93	57
1999	1.5	13.4	14.9	20.9	10.5	38.8	3.81	67
2000	11.1	16.7	16.7	25.0	13.9	16.7	2.83	72
2001	13.4	29.9	16.4	19.4	6.0	14.9	2.21	67
2002	10.3	22.4	25.9	27.6	10.3	3.5	2.16	58
2003	18.4	38.8	22.5	12.2	6.1	2.0	1.55	49
2004	44.4	27.8	22.2	5.6	0.0	0.0	0.89	18
2005	50.0	45.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.55	20
Total	70	117	100	122	72	178	3.22	659
Total %	10.6	17.8	15.2	18.5	10.9	27.0		100.0

Of more concern than the total number of school changes these children had experienced was the frequency with which those changes occurred during the school year, when they are likely to be especially disruptive. Overall, 60 percent of these children had changed schools at least once mid-year, and these changes accounted for more than one-third of all the changes that occurred.

Year first enrolled	Any	% of total changes	Mean	<i>N</i>
1991	72.7	34.9	1.60	11
1992	64.0	30.1	1.36	25
1993	69.6	37.5	1.57	23
1994	59.5	32.1	1.19	42
1995	77.8	34.4	1.56	36
1996	72.3	37.6	1.55	47
1997	65.7	37.5	1.57	67
1998	68.4	37.5	1.47	57
1999	61.2	32.5	1.24	67
2000	58.3	37.7	1.07	72
2001	49.3	32.4	0.72	67
2002	63.8	36.8	0.79	58
2003	51.0	34.2	0.53	49
2004	27.8	37.5	0.33	18
2005	10.0	18.2	0.10	20
Total	59.9	35.2	1.13	659

A closer look at the timing of these changes relative to program entry revealed that three-quarters of the children had changed schools at least once before entering, including one-third who had done so three times or more. In fact, by the time they entered the program, the number of school changes these children had experienced was, on average, 2.2. Not surprisingly, the number of school changes children had experienced was positively correlated with their grade at program entry. Children who were in kindergarten had experienced a mean of only 0.3 school changes, whereas children who were in grade 12 had experienced a mean of 5.8. However, there were some exceptions to this trend. Most notably, the mean was lower among children who were in grade 11 when their shelter stay began than among children who were in grade 10.

Table 14. Cumulative Number of School Changes prior to Entering Program by Grade at Program Entry									
	Number of school changes as of June 2007								
Grade at entry	0	1	2	3	4	5+	Mean	<i>N</i>	
Kindergarten	74.5	25.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.26	47	
1	61.4	35.1	1.8	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.44	57	
2	32.0	41.3	17.3	4.0	2.7	2.7	1.12	75	
3	16.3	23.8	25.0	17.5	10.0	7.5	2.06	80	
4	15.6	37.5	26.6	6.3	7.8	6.3	1.77	64	
5	18.2	18.2	22.7	9.1	9.1	22.7	2.53	66	
6	10.8	16.9	24.6	12.3	10.8	24.6	2.86	65	
7	12.1	12.1	15.5	17.2	20.7	22.4	3.10	58	
8	18.6	11.6	20.9	20.9	4.7	23.3	2.88	43	
9	3.7	7.4	16.7	25.9	14.8	31.5	3.89	54	
10	15.6	9.4	9.4	12.5	12.5	40.6	4.09	32	
11	21.4	28.6	14.3	7.1	0.0	28.6	2.43	14	
12	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	5.75	4	
Total	161	152	114	74	56	102	2.21	659	
Total %	24.4	23.1	17.3	11.2	8.5	15.5		100.0	

Focusing specifically on those changes that had occurred during a school year, we found that, before entering the program, almost half of these children had experienced at least one school change. In fact, these changes accounted for more than one-third of all the changes that had already occurred.

Table 15. Cumulative Number of Within-Year School Changes prior to Entering Program by Grade at Program Entry				
Grade at entry	Any	% of changes	Mean	<i>N</i>
Kindergarten	25.5	100.0	0.26	47
1	19.3	48.0	0.21	57
2	32.0	41.7	0.47	75
3	60.0	43.0	0.89	80
4	34.4	31.9	0.56	64
5	50.0	36.5	0.92	66
6	55.4	38.2	1.09	65
7	60.3	33.3	1.03	58
8	58.1	34.7	1.00	43
9	63.0	34.3	1.33	54
10	59.4	34.4	1.41	32
11	42.9	32.4	0.79	14
12	75.0	30.4	1.75	4
Total	46.7	36.9	0.81	658

These children continued to change schools frequently after entering the program. Nearly 60 percent experienced at least one school change post-entry, including 28 percent who changed schools two times or more. Also, children who were in grades K through 4 at program entry were far more likely to change schools after entering the program than children who were in grades 9 through 12. This probably reflects the fact that many high school students do not attend their neighborhood school and thus may be less likely to change schools because they are living in a different place.

Grade at entry	Number of school changes as of June 2007					Mean	N
	0	1	2	3 or more			
Kindergarten	27.7	44.7	17.0	10.6		1.15	47
1	33.3	28.1	17.5	21.1		1.26	57
2	22.7	34.7	22.7	20.0		1.47	75
3	23.8	31.3	22.5	22.5		1.55	80
4	26.6	40.6	17.2	15.6		1.27	64
5	50.0	24.2	10.6	15.2		0.94	66
6	43.1	27.7	21.5	7.7		0.94	65
7	46.6	27.6	19.0	6.9		0.90	58
8	58.1	32.6	4.7	4.7		0.56	43
9	68.5	29.6	1.9	0.0		0.33	54
10	78.1	18.8	3.1	0.0		0.25	32
11	85.7	7.1	7.1	0.0		0.21	14
12	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0		0.25	4
Total	275	202	101	81		1.02	659
Total %	41.7	30.7	15.3	12.3			100.0

Nearly one-third of the school changes these children experienced after entering the program occurred during a school year.

Table 17. Number of Within-Year School Changes after Entry into Program by Grade at Entry				
Grade at entry	Any	% of changes	Mean	<i>N</i>
Kindergarten	34.0	29.6	0.34	47
1	38.6	36.1	0.46	57
2	34.7	30.9	0.45	75
3	35.0	31.5	0.49	80
4	35.9	32.1	0.41	64
5	22.7	29.0	0.27	66
6	21.5	29.5	0.28	65
7	24.1	30.8	0.28	58
8	14.0	33.3	0.19	43
9	5.6	16.7	0.06	54
10	18.8	75.0	0.19	32
11	7.1	33.3	0.07	14
12	0.0	0.0	0.00	4
Total	26.4	31.5	0.32	659

We concluded our examination of school mobility by looking at enrollment in what would have been the neighborhood (i.e., attendance area) school for the children in our study during their shelter stay. This required a manual review of individual case files to identify the shelter in which each family was staying when they entered the program. In most cases, this information was listed on the cover page.²² We then used the Chicago Public Schools' Locator website to identify the attendance area schools associated with each shelter's street address.²³

Our strategy has two potential problems. First, recent school closures in some neighborhoods, including neighborhoods where homeless shelters are located, have led to changes in their attendance area schools. However, the Locator website only shows the attendance area schools currently associated with a particular address; it provides no information about the attendance area schools that might have been associated with that address in the past. Second, we did not know where families had been living prior to their stay. Thus, we could not rule out the possibility that their homeless shelter was located in the same attendance area in which they were previously living. Because we do not know how much either of these problems might have biased our results, or even the direction of that bias, the figures we present in Table 15 should be interpreted with caution.

We found that almost one-quarter of these children were ever enrolled in the shelter's attendance area school, including 20 percent whose enrollment overlapped with their shelter stay. However, more than three-quarters of the children for whom there was

²² We were unable to determine the particular shelter in which 32 families and 68 children stayed, because the case files for those families could not be located by Inner Voice staff.

²³ The CPS Locator website can be found at <http://schoollocator.cps.k12.il.us/>

an overlap had been enrolled in that school prior to entering the program. In other words, staying in the shelter does not appear to have triggered their enrollment in that school.

Because CPS students frequently choose a high school outside their neighborhood, we repeated our analysis, focusing exclusively on children who were in grades K through 8 when they entered the program. The results were essentially the same. Eighty-one percent of the children who had been enrolled in the shelter’s attendance area school had been enrolled in that school before program entry.

Table 18. Enrollment in Shelter Attendance Area Schools

	All schools			Elementary schools only		
	<i>N</i>	No.	%	<i>N</i>	No.	%
Ever enrolled in shelter’s attendance area school	596	137	23.0	487	119	23.9
Ever enrolled in attendance area school prior to entry (<i>N</i> = 137)	137	108	78.8	119	96	80.7
Ever enrolled in attendance area school after entry (<i>N</i> = 137)	137	83	60.6	119	68	57.1
Ever enrolled in attendance area school during shelter stay ^a	596	120	20.1	487	106	21.8

^aFifteen children had summer-only shelter stays.

Academic Performance of Elementary-School-Age Children

We looked at several measures of academic performance among the children in our study, beginning with grade retention. Overall, one-third of these children had been held back at least once before entering the program. However, that figure ranged from less than 5 percent of 5- to 7-year-olds to approximately half of 12- to 16-year-olds. The somewhat lower percentage of 17-year-olds who had ever been retained could reflect the fact that we did not include children who had already dropped out prior to entry. Also, more than one-quarter of the ever-retained children had been held back more than once, although this, too, varied considerably by age.

Table 19. Grade Retention Prior to Entering the Program by Age at Program Entry					
Age at entry in years	<i>N</i>	Ever retained		Retained more than once (if ever retained)	
		No.	%	No.	%
5	22	0	0.0	—	—
6	57	2	3.5	0	0.0
7	64	3	4.7	0	0.0
8	67	16	23.9	0	0.0
9	50	12	24.0	1	8.3
10	79	32	40.5	4	12.5
11	65	22	33.9	4	18.2
12	59	29	49.2	10	34.5
13	59	28	47.5	8	28.6
14	43	20	46.5	8	40.0
15	46	25	54.4	11	44.0
16	26	14	53.9	9	64.3
17	21	9	42.9	2	22.2
Total	658	212	32.2	57	26.9

Unfortunately, retention rates continued to be quite stable after children had entered the program. Overall, nearly one-quarter were retained between program entry and June 2007.

Table 20. Grade Retention After Entering the Program by Age at Program Entry			
Age at entry in years	<i>N</i>	No.	%
5	20	4	20.0
6	52	14	26.9
7	61	18	29.5
8	64	20	31.3
9	46	11	23.9
10	75	8	10.7
11	58	9	15.5
12	54	12	22.2
13	54	14	25.9
14	41	8	19.5
15	44	19	43.2
16	20	6	30.0
17	18	7	38.9
Total	614	150	24.7

We also used standardized test scores as a measure of school performance. Figure 1 shows the mean percentile scores of the Inner Voice children on the Iowa Test

of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading and math during the 1999-2000 to 2003-2004 school years. The percentile score refers to the percentage of students nationwide who a particular student scored as high as or higher than. Percentiles can range from 1 to 99, and national average is 50. CPS used the ITBS to measure achievement at the individual level among students in grades 3 through 8. The mean percentile score for reading ranged from 20 percent to 26 percent. Similarly, the mean percentile score for math ranged from 21 percent to 25 percent. In other words, only a minority of these children scored at or above the national average in reading or math.

Figure 1. Mean Percentile Scores in Reading and Math on the ITBS in Grades 3 through 8 by Year

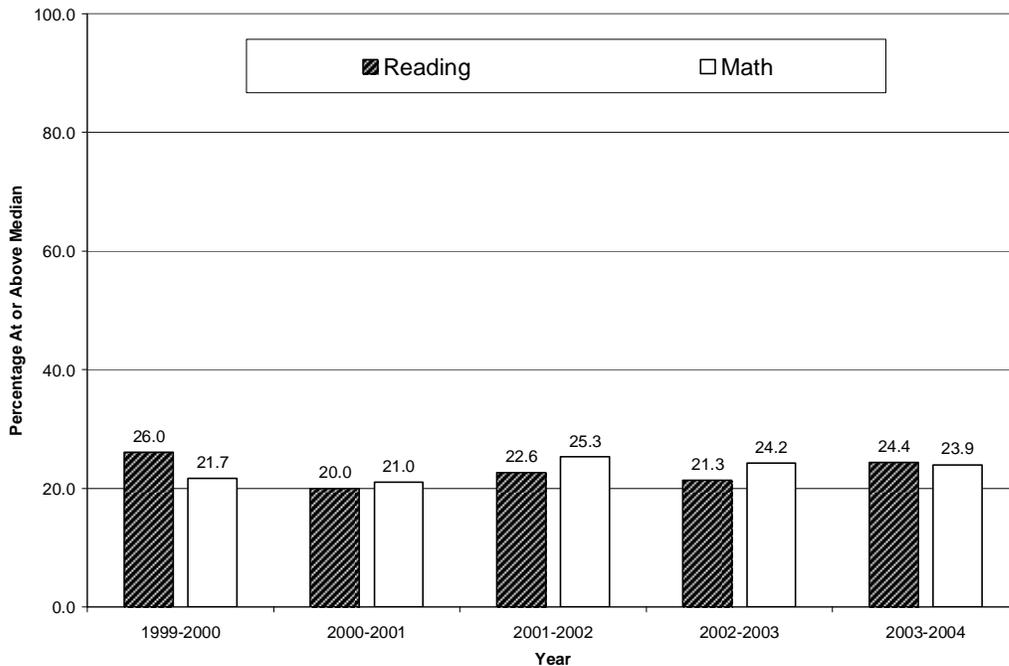
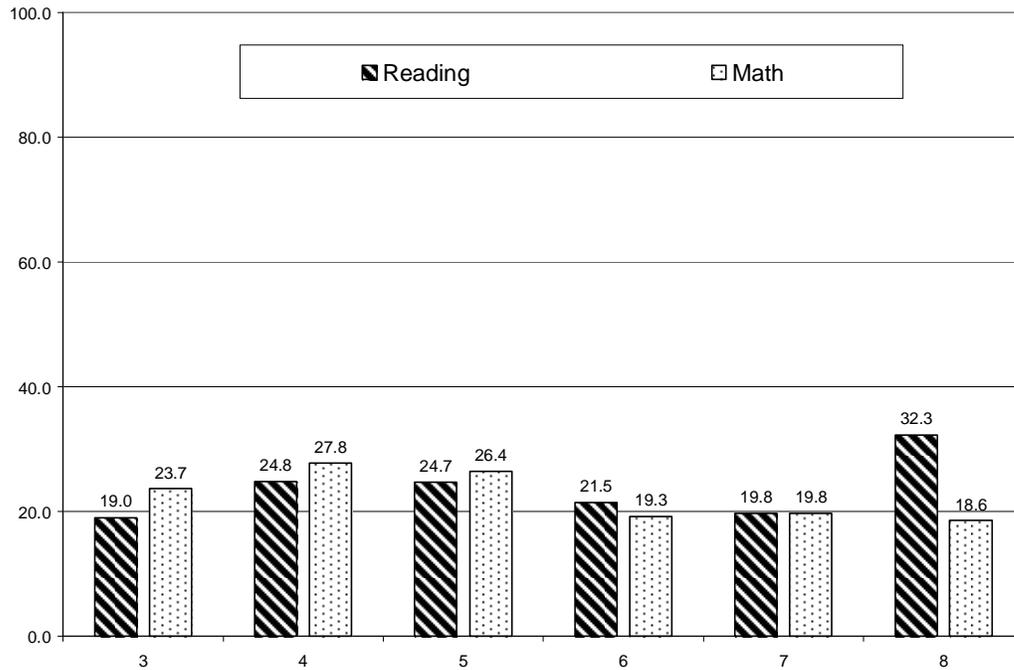


Figure 2 presents the same ITBS data broken down by grade rather than by year. The mean percentile score for reading ranged from 19 percent among third-graders to 32 percent among eighth-graders. Similarly, the mean percentile score for math ranged from 19 percent among eighth-graders to 28 percent among fourth-graders. In fact, despite some variation by grade, the mean percentile score was well below the national average (i.e., 50) for every grade.

Figure 2: Mean Percentile Scores in Reading and Math on the ITBS by Grade for 1999-2000 through 2003-2004



One factor Figure 2 fails to take into account is the timing of the ITBS relative to children's entry into the program. Some tests were administered before children entered, whereas others were not administered until after entry. Therefore, we re-analyzed the ITBS data to account for these differences in the relative timing of the test.²⁴ Figure 3 shows mean ITBS reading percentile scores for the 1999-2000 to 2003-2004 school years. Each line represents an entry grade cohort, i.e., children who were in the same grade when they entered the program. The horizontal axis shows the number of school years between test administration and program entry, where zero represents the year of entry.

Figure 3 shows both upward and downward movement over time for most of the cohorts but no consistent trends. Although children's mean scores generally ranged between the 25th and 40th percentile regardless of when they were tested, the 6th-grade entry cohort seemed to perform the best over time.²⁵

²⁴ Assessing the effects of homelessness on the test scores of these children would require analyses that go beyond the scope of this report.

²⁵ The number of data points varies depending on the grade at entry, because the ITBS was usually administered in grades 3 through 8.

Figure 3: Mean ITBS Percentile Reading Scores by Timing and Grade at Entry

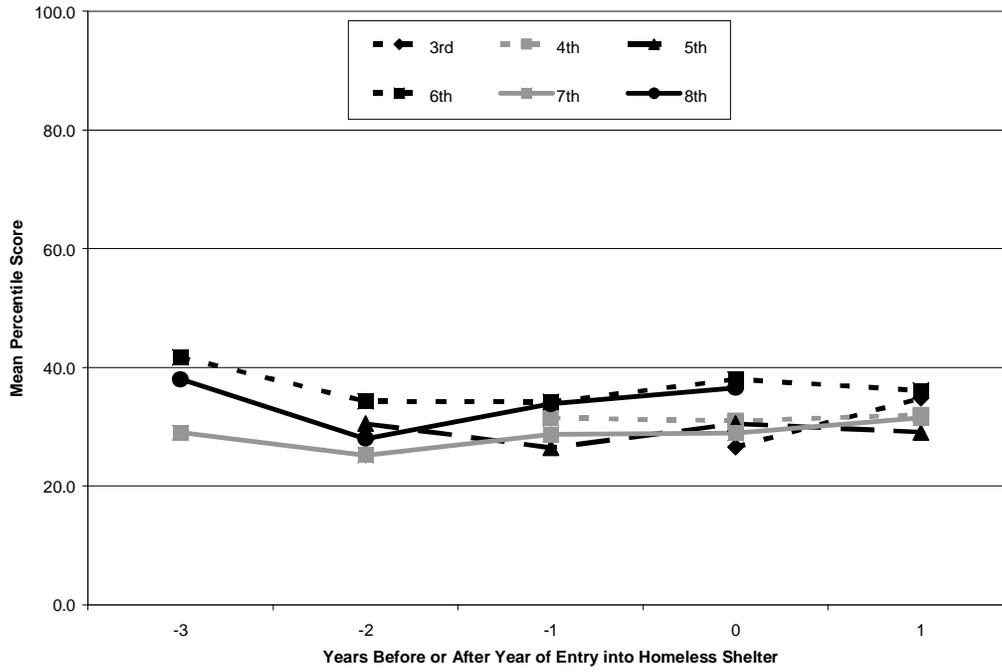
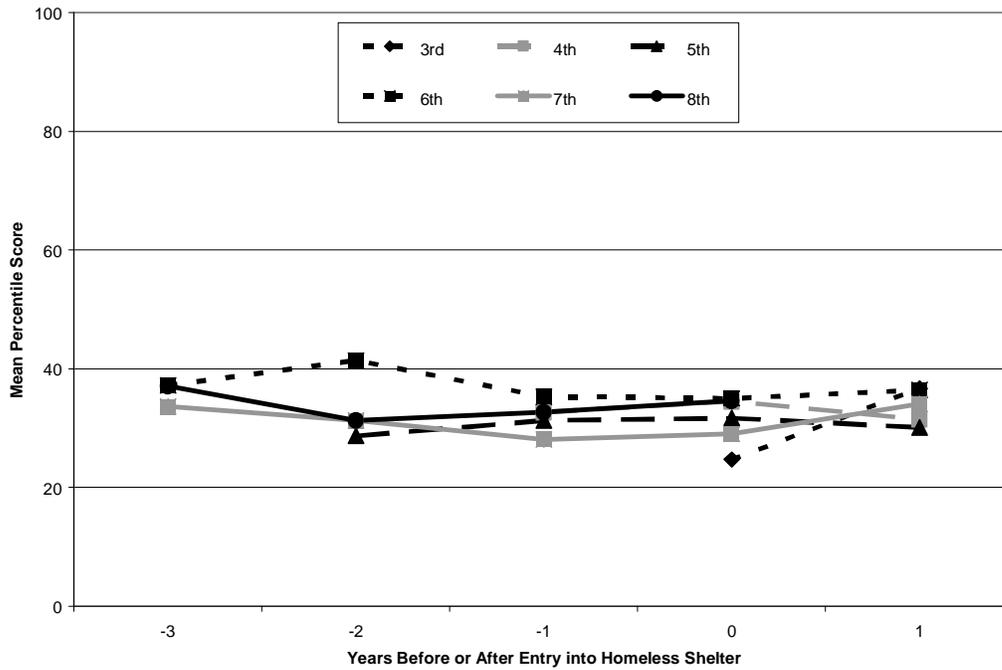


Figure 4 shows a similar pattern for mean ITBS math percentile scores.

Figure 4: Mean ITBS Percentile Math Scores by Timing and Grade at Entry

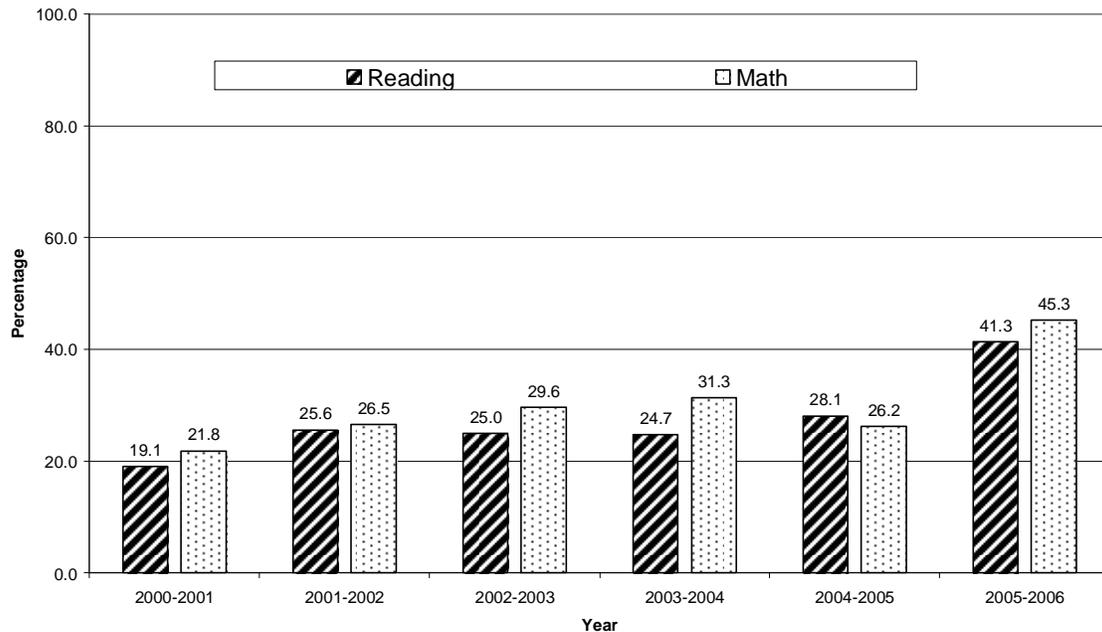


The ITBS was discontinued as of the 2005-2006 school year because it was not consistent with state learning standards, and the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) became the primary standardized measure of student achievement at the individual level. Until the 2005-2006 school year, when the tests were also administered to students in grades 4, 6, and 7, the reading and math ISAT's were administered to students in grades 3, 5, and 8.

We began our analysis of the ISAT data by looking at the percentage of children meeting or exceeding standards in reading and math during the 2000-2001 through 2005-2006 school years. The percentage meeting or exceeding reading standards rose a net 9 percentage points over the first five years and then another 13 percentage points in 2005-2006, for a net gain of 22 percentage points. The percentage meeting or exceeding math standards rose a net 9.5 percentage points between 2000-2001 and 2003-2004 and then, after dipping 5 percentage points in 2004, rebounded in 2005-2006 for a net 13.5-percentage-point increase.

At least some of the gains observed between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 may be attributable to a number of changes in the test and how it was scored. First, the state dramatically lowered the passing bar on the eighth-grade math test. Second, although the number of test questions was approximately the same, significantly fewer contributed to student scores. And third, students were given more time to complete the test than they were given in the past.

Figure 5: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Reading and Math ISAT Standards by Year



Figures 6A-6C provide more detailed information about children’s performance on the reading ISAT. They show the percentage of children who met or exceeded state reading standards when they were in grades 3, 5, and 8, respectively. They also compare the performance of these homeless children on the reading ISAT to the performance of all CPS students.

Two patterns can be observed in each of the three figures. First, there was a net increase in the percentage of homeless children who met or exceeded standards over these six years despite some years in which the percentage decreased. Second, although the size of the gap varied both across grades and over time, the percentage of homeless children meeting or exceeding standards was consistently lower than the percentage of their peers. Also, the marked increase observed in Figure 5 between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 reflected a more general trend.

Figure 6A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 3rd Grade Reading ISAT by Year: Inner Voice Compared with All CPS

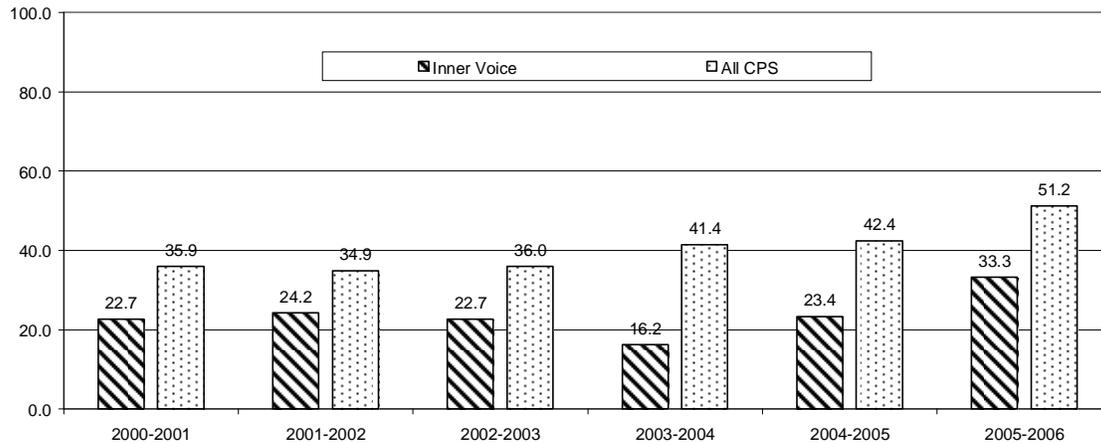


Figure 6B: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 5th Grade Reading ISAT by Year: Inner Voice Compared with All CPS

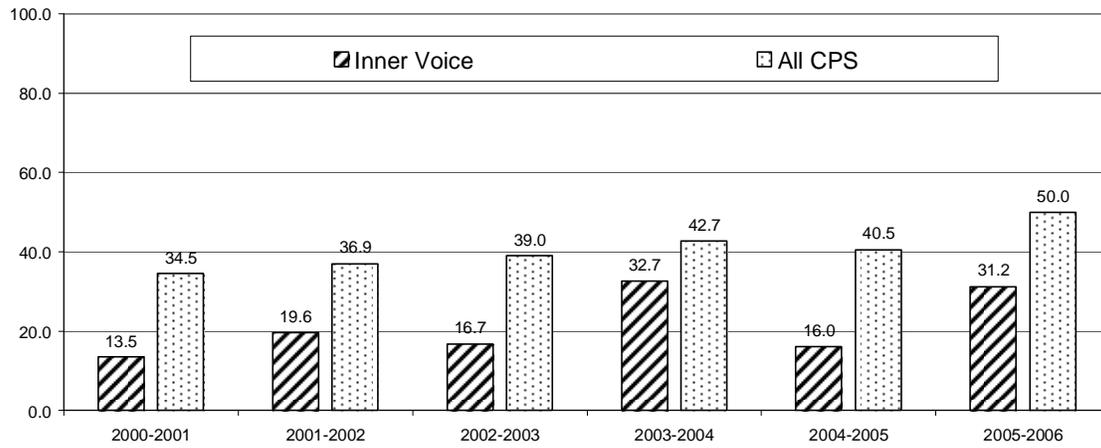
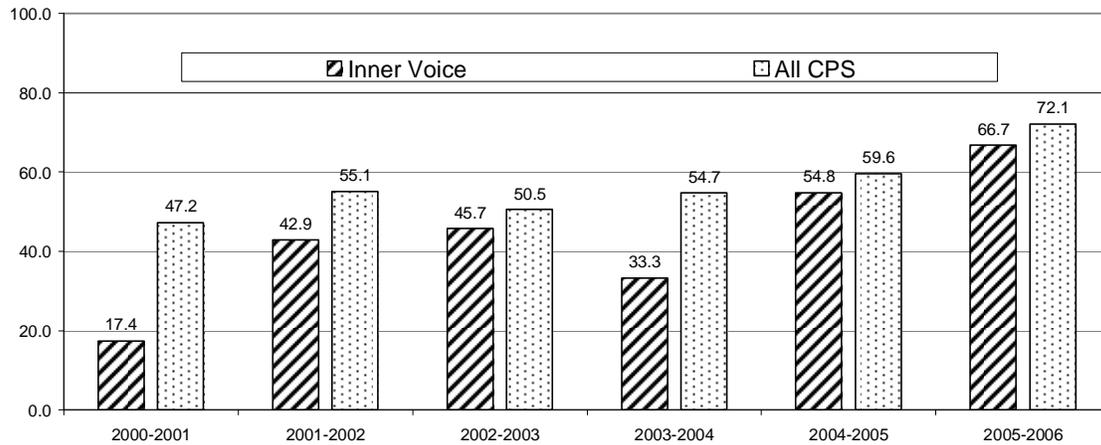


Figure 6C: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 8th Grade Reading ISAT by Year: Inner Voice Compared with All CPS



Figures 7A-7C reveal similar trends in the percentage of children meeting or exceeding state standards on the math ISAT in grades 3, 5 and 8, respectively. Despite a net increase in their performance over time, the children in our study were consistently out-performed by their CPS peers. And, once again, the marked increase observed in Figure 5 between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 seems to have been part of a larger trend.

Figure 7A: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 3rd Grade Math ISAT by Year: Inner Voice Compared with All CPS

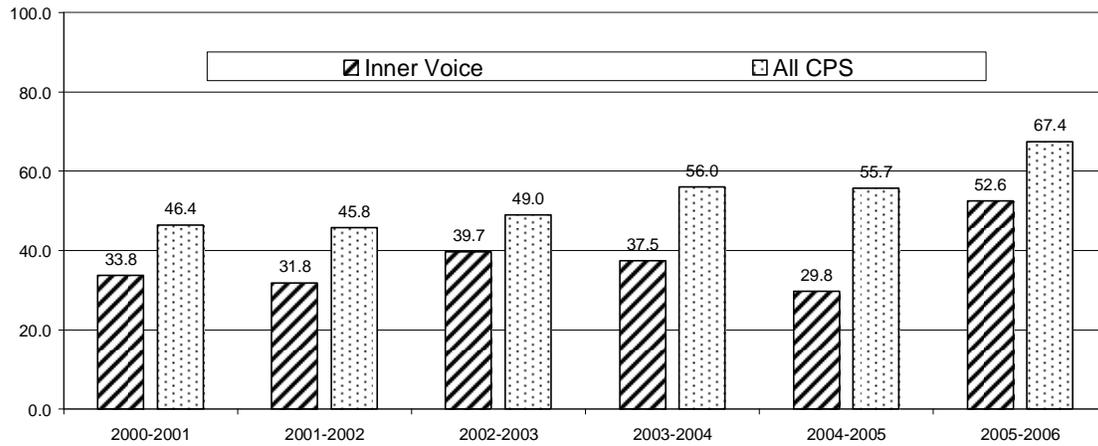


Figure 7B: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 5th Grade Math ISAT by Year: Inner Voice Compared with All CPS

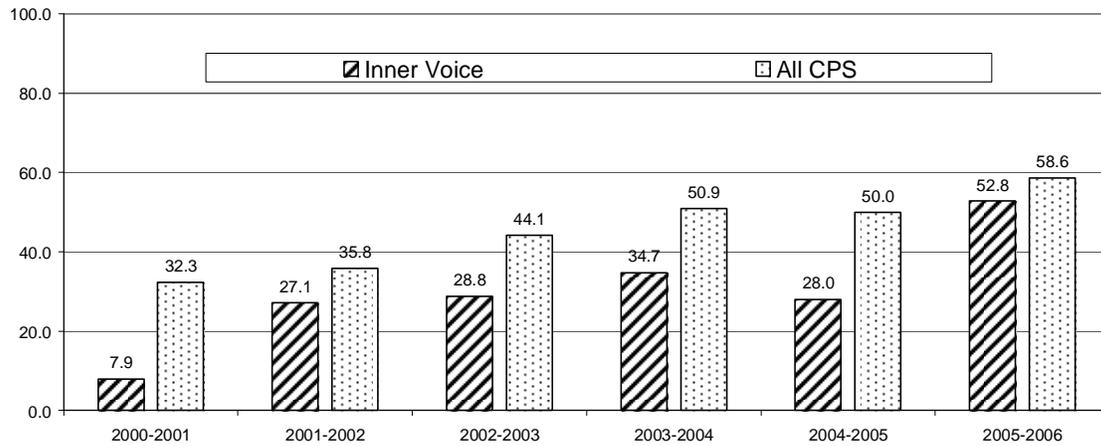
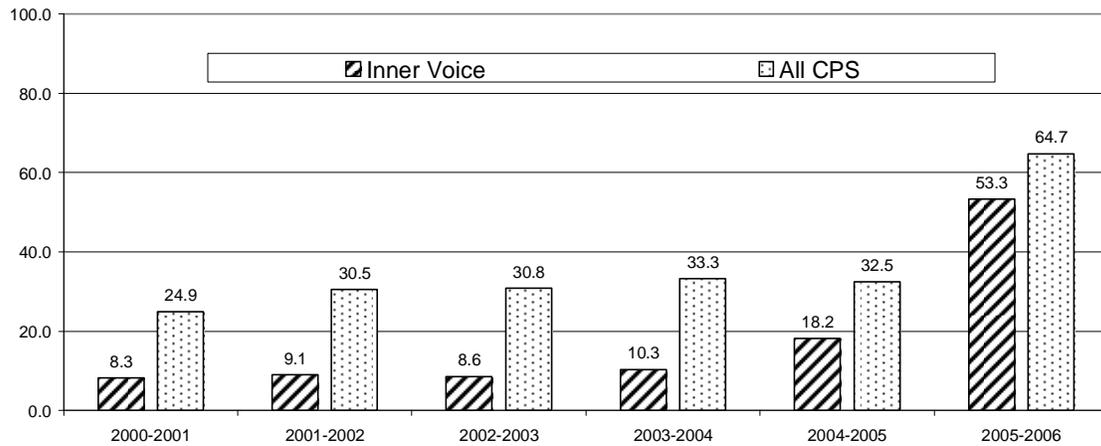


Figure 7C: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding Standards on 8th Grade Math ISAT by Year: Inner Voice Compared with All CPS

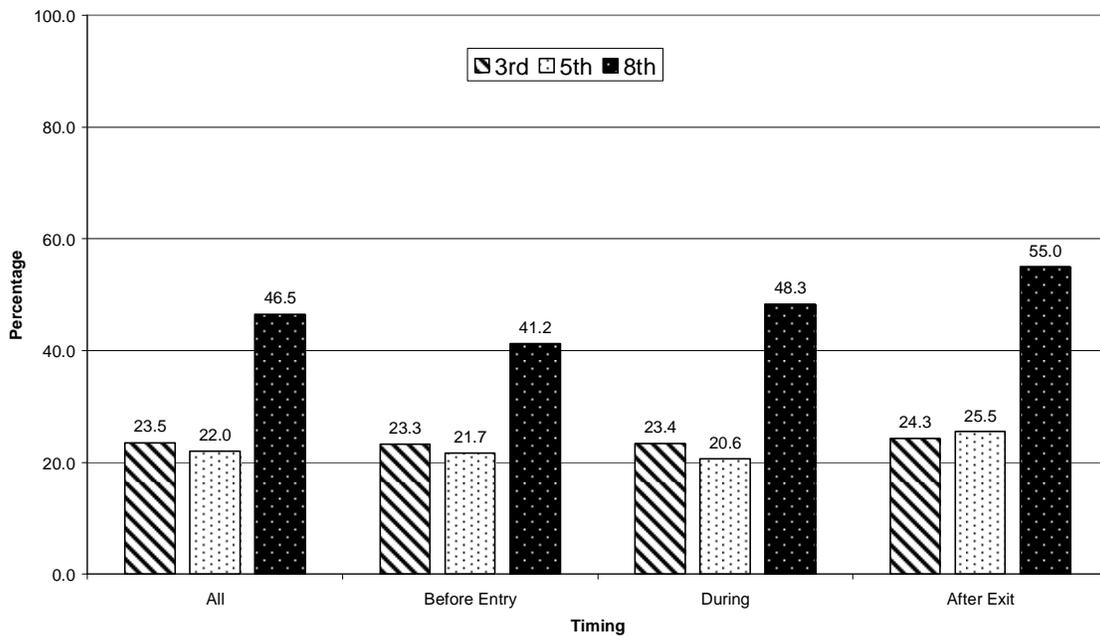


We concluded our analysis by comparing the scores of children who took the ISAT before the school year in which they entered the program with the scores of

children who took the ISAT during a school year in which they were in the program, and with the scores of children who took the ISAT after the school year in which they exited.²⁶ Figures 8 and 9 show the percentage of children in each of these three groups who met or exceeded standards on the 3rd-, 5th-, and 8th- grade ISAT's for reading and math, respectively.

Although we found relatively little difference in performance on the third-grade reading ISAT across the three groups, children who were tested after the school year in which they exited the program were more likely to have scored at or above standards on the fifth-grade reading ISAT than children in either of the other two groups. However, it was on the eighth-grade reading ISAT where the most noticeable differences were observed. Children were most likely to have met or exceeded standards when they were tested after the school year in which they exited the program and least likely to have met or exceeded standards when they were tested before the school year in which they entered.

Figure 8: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Reading Standards by Grade and Year of Test Relative to Program Participation

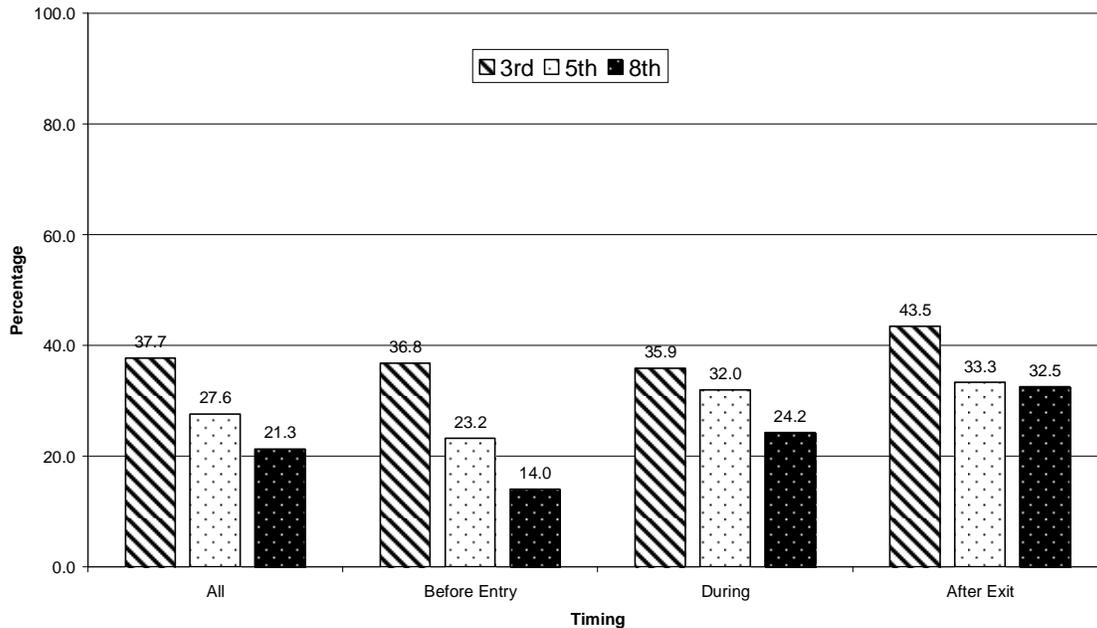


Differences in performance on the math ISAT were also observed. Children who were tested after the school year in which they exited the program were the most likely to have met or exceeded standards on the third-grade math ISAT, whereas children who were tested before the school year in which they entered the program were the least likely to have met or exceeded standards on the fifth-grade math ISAT. Finally, and consistent with the eighth-grade ISAT reading results, children who were tested before the school

²⁶ Because exact test dates were not available, we included children in the middle group as long as they had stayed in the shelter sometime during the school year even if they were not staying in the shelter when the test was administered.

year in which they entered the program were the least likely to have met or exceeded standards, and children who were tested after the school year in which they exited the program were the most likely to have met or exceeded standards on the ISAT for eighth-grade math.

Figure 9: Percentage Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Math Standards by Grade and Year of Test Relative to Program Participation



Need for Special Education Services

One factor that may have contributed to the academic difficulties experienced by many of the children in our study was their need for special education services. Overall, 22 percent were identified as having special education needs, but this ranged from 11 percent among children who were in kindergarten at program entry to 36 percent among children who were in ninth grade. This variation probably reflects the time it can take for special education needs to be recognized. Moreover, with the exception of children who were in grades K through 3, most of these children had already been identified as having special education needs when their shelter stay began, before entering the program.

Importantly, the homeless children in our study were more likely to have been identified as needing special education services than CPS students generally. For example, an earlier study by researchers at Chapin Hall found that the percentage of CPS students receiving special education services in 2003 ranged from 7 percent of first-graders to 16 percent of eighth--graders (Smithgall et al., 2004).²⁷

²⁷ These percentages do not include children who were or had been in out-of-home care or children who had been identified as neglected or abused by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

	Ever identified		Identified before program entry	
	No.	%	No.	%
Kindergarten	5	10.6	0	0.0
1	8	14.0	0	0.0
2	14	18.7	4	28.6
3	20	25.0	8	40.0
4	13	20.3	10	76.9
5	13	19.7	11	84.6
6	15	23.1	13	86.7
7	16	27.6	12	75.0
8	13	30.2	11	84.6
9	20	37.0	20	100.0
10	7	21.9	7	100.0
11	2	14.3	2	100.0
12	0	0.0	0	—
Total	146	22.2	98	67.1

Nearly 60 percent of the children identified as needing special education services were diagnosed with a learning disability or with an emotional/behavioral disorder.

Table 22. Special Education Diagnoses (N = 146)

Disability	No.	%
Other ^a	16	11.0
Educable mentally handicapped	23	15.8
Emotional/behavioral disorder	30	20.6
Speech/language disorder	21	14.1
Learning disabled	56	38.4

^aOther includes autistic, developmentally delayed, physically handicapped, and traumatic brain injury.

Early Childhood Education

Although we had initially planned to limit our analysis to grades K through 12, a number of informants spoke about homeless children's access to early education during the qualitative interviews. Thus, we used the CPS data to examine Head Start and/or state pre-kindergarten enrollment among the children who entered the Family Regeneration program before their sixth birthday. However, only one-third of the city's Head Start programs are administered by the Chicago Public Schools; the other two-thirds are administered by the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services (CDCYS). Because enrollment in the CDCYS programs is not captured in the CPS data, Head Start enrollment among the children in our study is almost certainly higher than our figures suggest, and thus our figures might best be viewed as a lower bound.

Thirty-seven percent of the 467 children who entered the program before their sixth birthday were ever enrolled in a CPS administered pre-K or Head Start program. However, enrollment ranged from a 13 percent among children who were less than 1 year old at program entry to a high of 60 percent among children who were 5 years old.

Table 23. Pre-K or Head Start Enrollment by June 2007 among Children Younger than 6 Years Old at Program Entry by Entry Age (*N* = 467)

Age at entry in years	<i>N</i>	# Ever enrolled in CPS Head Start or state pre-K	% Ever enrolled in CPS Head Start or state pre-K
Less than 1 year old	61	8	13.1
1 year old	76	24	31.6
2 years old	83	23	27.7
3 years old	88	30	34.1
4 years old	85	42	49.4
5 years old	74	44	59.5
Total	467	171	36.6

We also looked at the timing of children’s pre-K or Head Start enrollment relative to their Family Regeneration program participation. Of the children who had ever been enrolled in CPS pre-K or Head Start, 42 percent were enrolled while they were in the program, and just over half had been enrolled before entering. However, these percentages varied by age at program entry.

Table 24. Timing of Pre-K or Head Start Enrollment by Age at Program Entry (*N* = 171)

	Age at program entry in years						Total
	< 1	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>N</i>	8	24	23	30	42	44	171
Ever enrolled prior to entry	0.0	0.0	4.4	43.3	73.8	97.7	51.5
Last enrolled prior to entry	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.5	65.9	19.3
Enrolled at entry	0.0	0.0	4.4	43.3	31.0	20.5	21.1
Ever enrolled after entry	100	100	100	86.7	59.5	9.1	64.3
First enrolled after entry	100	100	95.7	56.7	26.2	2.3	48.5
Ever enrolled while in the program	37.5	41.7	47.8	73.3	42.9	18.2	42.1
First enrolled while in the program	37.5	41.7	43.5	40.0	19.1	0.0	25.1

Enrollment, Attendance, and Academic Performance in High School

Of the 952 children for whom we found school records, 27 percent were ever enrolled in a CPS high school (i.e., grades 9 through 12). Nearly all of these children were still enrolled in CPS at program entry, but less than half of children who were still enrolled were already in high school—primarily grades 9 and 10. Another quarter began high school while they were in the program.

Table 25. High School Enrollment

	No.	%
Ever enrolled in CPS high school ($N = 952$)	255	26.8
Still enrolled in CPS at program entry ($N = 255$)	238	93.3
Enrolled in high school at program entry ($N = 238$)	109	45.8
9	57	52.3
10	33	30.3
11	15	13.8
12	4	3.7
Ever enrolled in high school while in the program ($N = 238$)	168	70.6
First enrolled in high school while in the program ($N = 238$)	59	24.8
First enrolled in high school after exiting the program ($N = 238$)	70	29.4

We examined school attendance and academic performance among the 223 children who were continuously enrolled in CPS before and after program entry.²⁸ Unfortunately, the number of children for whom we had high school data grew progressively smaller moving from the fall semester of grade 9 ($N = 153$) to the spring semester of grade 12 ($N = 19$).²⁹ Regardless of the grade or the semester, we were more likely to have data for semesters that overlapped with program participation than for semesters that ended before entry or that began after exit.

Table 26. Number of Children with High School Data by Grade, Semester, and Timing ($N = 223$)

Timing of semester	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Semester ended before program entry	50	52	20	19	4	4	0	0
Semester overlapped with program participation	69	62	45	39	27	25	12	12
Semester began after program exit	34	32	21	19	15	8	8	7
Total	153	146	86	77	44	37	20	19

When we examined school attendance by semester and grade, we found that, with the exception of a difficult-to-explain spike during spring semester of ninth grade, the mean number of days absent ranged from 12 to 15. Given that there are only 180 days in the CPS school year, these children missed a significant amount of school.³⁰ Children were generally absent the least number of days during semesters that ended before they entered the program and the most number of days during semesters that began after they exited the program, but that was not always the case.

²⁸ Data for these analyses were from the high school transcript file.

²⁹ Children can be represented more than once if we found records for multiple grades and semesters.

³⁰ Individual student-level attendance data is not available for children in grades K through 8.

Table 27. Mean Number of Absences per Semester by Grade, Semester, and Timing (*N* = 223)

	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Timing of semester								
<i>N</i>	153	146	86	77	44	37	20	19
Semester ended before program entry	11.6	19.1	10.8	11.8	9.5	12.9	—	—
Semester overlapped with program participation	14.9	20.9	14.4	15.5	12.3	12.8	15.0	11.8
Semester began after program exit	17.8	22.9	17.0	16.9	17.3	11.8	9.6	13.4
Total	14.5	20.7	14.2	14.9	13.5	12.6	13.0	12.4

We used course grades for major academic subjects (i.e., math, English, science, social studies, and foreign language) to compute GPA's for each grade and semester.³¹ The grades were, on average, relatively low. Means ranged from 1.2 (~ D+) for the spring semester of ninth grade to 2.3 (~C+) for the spring semester of twelfth grade. Mean GPA's were usually lowest during semesters that began after the children exited the program and highest during semesters that ended before they entered. The two most notable exceptions—GPA's for the fall and spring semesters of grade 12—could simply be a reflection of the small sample size.

Table 28. Mean GPA by Grade, Semester, and Timing (*N* = 223)

	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Timing of semester								
<i>N</i>	153	146	86	77	44	37	20	19
Semester ended before program entry	1.43	1.42	1.67	1.64	2.55	2.35	—	—
Semester overlapped with program participation	1.38	1.16	1.53	1.67	1.89	1.88	1.88	2.31
Semester began after program exit	1.14	1.06	1.21	1.21	1.07	1.85	2.33	2.36
Total	1.34	1.23	1.49	1.55	1.71	1.93	2.05	2.33

A majority of these 223 children were still enrolled in a CPS high school as of June 2007. Another 14 percent had dropped out, and 10 percent had graduated or earned their GED. A more disconcerting picture emerges if we focus on the 101 children who were already enrolled in high school when their shelter stay began: 46 percent of the children who were in tenth grade and 41 percent of the children who were in eleventh grade at program entry (?) had dropped out.

³¹ We assigned the following values: A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, and F = 0.

**Table 29. Status of High School Students as of June 2007
by Grade at Program Entry (*N* = 223)**

Grade at entry	<i>N</i>	Still enrolled	High school diploma or GED	Dropped out	Other ^a	Missing
3	2	0.9	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	3	1.3	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	9	4.0	6.3	0.0	0.0	2.8
6	31	13.9	22.7	0.0	3.2	2.8
7	35	15.7	23.4	4.5	3.2	8.3
8	36	16.1	17.2	4.5	12.9	25.0
9	52	23.3	16.4	22.7	54.8	25.0
10	32	14.3	7.8	45.5	19.4	16.7
11	13	5.8	1.6	40.9	6.5	0.0
12	4	1.8	0.8	9.1	0.0	2.8
Total %		57.4	9.9	13.9	16.1	2.7
Total	223	128	22	31	36	6

^aOther includes children who transferred to a school outside of CPS, children who were institutionalized, and children who were (omission?).

School Characteristics

In addition to looking at the experiences of the individual homeless children in our study, we also examined the characteristics of the schools in which they were enrolled. More specifically, we compared the schools in which they were enrolled when they entered the Family Regeneration program, or in the case of children who entered during the summer, the school in which they were enrolled at the start of the next school year, with the schools in which the “average” Chicago Public School student was enrolled.

We focused on a number of dimensions for which school-level data were readily available, including demographic characteristics, attendance, mobility, and in the case of high schools, graduation and dropout rates. We calculated two means for each dimension and school year (i.e., 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006)—one for the homeless children in our study and one for the larger CPS population. Homeless children were only included in the mean for the school year in which they entered the program, or in the mean for the following school year if they entered during the summer. We calculated means for the “average” CPS student by weighting the value for each school by its total enrollment. Means were computed separately for elementary and high schools.³²

We began by comparing the demographic characteristics of the elementary schools in which the homeless children were enrolled with the demographic characteristics of all the elementary schools. The schools in which the homeless children

³² School-level data were not posted on the CPS website for the 2006-2007 school year. See <http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/download.html>

were enrolled usually had a higher percentage of African American students, a lower percentage of Hispanic (or limited-English-speaking) students, and a higher percentage of low-income students.

Table 30. Demographic Characteristics of Elementary Schools: Homeless Children Compared with All Students

Year	% African American		% Hispanic		% Limited English		% Low income	
	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools						
2002-2003	73.0	50.6	19.0	37.3	7.9	16.7	88.4	85.8
2003-2004	80.4	50.1	15.8	38.2	7.0	16.1	90.4	86.2
2004-2005	92.2	49.6	4.8	39.0	1.8	16.1	90.7	86.6
2005-2006	85.1	48.4	12.8	38.5	4.2	15.8	94.6	87.2

A similar pattern was evident at the high school level. Homeless high school students were enrolled in schools with a higher percentage of African American students, a lower percentage of Hispanic (and limited-English-speaking) students, and a higher percentage of low-income students (with the exception of 2005) than CPS high school students generally.

Table 31. Demographic Characteristics of High Schools: Homeless Children Compared with All Students

Year	% African American		% Hispanic		% Limited English		% Low Income	
	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools						
2002-2003	74.8	51.4	22.8	33.8	3.0	6.2	89.7	80.3
2003-2004	77.9	50.4	16.4	34.8	4.0	5.9	91.5	81.3
2004-2005	81.2	49.9	17.1	35.4	3.5	6.0	93.1	81.0
2005-2006	64.5	48.7	17.0	35.3	3.2	5.7	79.1	81.2

Although the differences in attendance and school mobility were not large at the elementary school level, average daily attendance was lower in the homeless children's elementary schools compared with elementary schools overall. The elementary schools in which the homeless children were enrolled also had higher mobility rates.

Table 32. Elementary School Attendance and Mobility: Homeless Children Compared with All Students

Year	Average daily attendance		Mobility rate	
	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools
2002-2003	90.4	93.6	33.0	26.9
2003-2004	91.0	93.9	35.4	24.7
2004-2005	90.0	93.7	35.8	24.1
2005-2006	92.9	94.0	37.3	23.7

The picture was similar at the high school level with respect to school mobility. The high schools in which the homeless children were enrolled had higher mobility rates, particularly in 2002-2003. Although differences in attendance were relatively small in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, homeless children were enrolled in high schools with lower

average daily attendance in 2004-2005 and particularly in 2005-2006 than CPS high school students generally.

Table 33. High School Attendance and Mobility: Homeless Children Compared with All Students

Year	Average daily attendance		Mobility rate	
	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools
2002-2003	84.0	86.8	68.0	30.8
2003-2004	85.0	86.8	31.6	26.4
2004-2005	80.8	86.4	41.2	24.9
2005-2006	67.4	86.2	30.2	26.7

We also compared high school graduation and dropout rates. In three of the four years for which we had data, the high schools in which the homeless children were enrolled had lower graduation and higher dropout rates than high schools overall. However, some of these differences were not very large.

Table 34. High School Graduation and Dropout Rates: Homeless Children Compared with All Students

Year	Graduation rate		Dropout rate	
	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools	Homeless children's schools	All students' schools
2002-2003	55.4	66.7	17.5	14.0
2003-2004	63.2	70.6	14.6	12.8
2004-2005	74.0	73.1	12.5	11.0
2005-2006	51.7	73.8	7.5	9.6

Finally, we looked at all of the schools in which the homeless children in our study were ever enrolled to find out whether they had ever been enrolled in a magnet, charter, or selective enrollment school. Enrollment in these schools was atypical. Only 6 percent of these children had ever been enrolled in a magnet, charter, or selective enrollment school, and magnet elementary schools accounted for nearly all of this enrollment.

	No.	%
Ever enrolled in a charter, magnet, or selective enrollment school (<i>N</i> = 952)	58	6.1
Ever enrolled in a charter school	13	
Ever enrolled in a magnet school	45	
Ever enrolled in a selective enrollment school	2	
Ever enrolled in a charter or magnet elementary school ^a (<i>N</i> = 943)	55	5.8
Ever enrolled in a charter elementary school	13	
Ever enrolled in a magnet elementary school	44	
Ever enrolled in a charter, magnet, or selective enrollment high school (<i>N</i> = 255)	3	1.2
Ever enrolled in a charter high school	0	
Ever enrolled in a magnet high school	1	
Ever enrolled in a selective enrollment high school	2	

^aTwo children were enrolled in both charter and magnet elementary schools.

Nearly two-thirds of the children who had ever been enrolled in a magnet, charter, or selective enrollment school had been enrolled in that school before their shelter stay began. Just one-third were enrolled in that school during their shelter stay.

Table 36. Timing of Charter, Magnet, and Selective School Enrollment Relative to Program Participation (N = 58)

	No.	%
Ever enrolled before entering the program	37	63.8
Ever enrolled while participating in the program	19	32.8
Ever enrolled after exiting the program	14	24.1

Discussion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of our analyses. First, consistent with prior research (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2000), the homeless children in our study had experienced a considerable amount of school mobility. On average, they had changed schools 3.2 times, although the number of school changes ranged from a low of 0.6 to a high of 5.3 depending on the number of years they had been enrolled.

Even more disconcerting was the frequency with which these school changes occurred during the school year. Mid-year changes, which tend to be especially disruptive to education, accounted for more than one-third of the school changes these children experienced. In fact, 60 percent had changed schools mid-year at least once.

Equally striking was the amount of school mobility these children had already experienced by the time they entered the Family Regeneration program. Three-quarters of the children had changed schools at least once, and more than one-third had changed schools three times or more. This probably reflects the fact that the Family Regeneration program specifically targets chronically and/or episodically homeless families; homelessness was probably not a new experience for most of these children. Either their families had been homeless before, or they had been homeless for quite a while before entering the program.

Second, again consistent with what other researchers have found, many of these children were struggling academically. This was evident when we looked at grade retention. One-third of the children had been retained at least once before entering the program, and more than one-quarter of the retained children had been held back repeatedly. Retention rates remained high after program entry, when nearly one-quarter of these children were held back.

Academic difficulties were also evident when we examined performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Over a five-year period, the proportion of children in grades 3 through 8 who scored at or above the median in reading or math never rose

above one-third. Their performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) was somewhat less discouraging. Indeed, there was a significant net gain in the percentage of children meeting or exceeding reading and math standards over time. However, the comparatively large increase that occurred between the last two school years for which we had data can be attributed, at least in part, to a number of changes in the test and how it was scored. Notwithstanding their progress, the children in our study were still less likely to have met or exceeded standards than CPS students generally.

As alarming as the low standardized test scores of the children in grades 3 through 8 were the course grades of the children in grades 9 through 12. Mean GPA ranged from a low of 1.2 (~ D+) to a high of 2.3 (~C+) between the fall of grade 9 and the spring of grade 12. Although we should be cautious about drawing conclusions because the eleventh and twelfth grade sample sizes were so small, we are concerned about how poorly these children were performing in high school, because low grades are associated with an increased risk of dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Roderick & Camburn, 1999). Some of these children had already dropped out before entering the program, and others dropped out after program entry.

Another of our more striking findings was that 22 percent of these homeless children were identified as having special education needs. Although that percentage varied greatly depending on the grade that they were in when they entered the program, it was consistently higher than the frequency of special education needs among all CPS students. How much these special education needs might have contributed to their academic difficulties is a question we did not address.

Overall, 37 percent of the homeless children who entered the program before age six were ever enrolled in CPS pre-K or Head Start. This figure was as high as 60 percent among children who were five years old; in addition, pre-K and Head Start enrollment may have been considerably higher because this figure does not include Head Start programs not administered by CPS.

When we shifted our focus from the experiences of individual homeless children to the schools in which they were enrolled, we found a number of differences between those schools and CPS schools generally. On average, the schools in which the homeless children were enrolled had a higher percentage of African American students, a lower percentage of Hispanic (or limited-English-speaking) students, and a higher percentage of low-income students. This was true at both the elementary and high school level. Although the differences were not large, the schools in which the homeless children were enrolled tended to have more problems with attendance and mobility. In addition, in some years, students were somewhat less likely to graduate from and more likely to drop out of the high schools in which the homeless children were enrolled.

Finally, very few of the homeless children were able to take advantage of opportunities to attend schools other than neighborhood schools. Only 6 percent had ever been enrolled in a magnet, charter, or selective high school, and most of these children had been enrolled in magnet elementary schools.

Limitations

Although our analyses answered a number of important questions about the educational experiences of this particular group of homeless children, other equally important questions could not be addressed because of data limitations. Perhaps the most significant limitation was that the data we received from Inner Voice contained no information about prior episodes of homelessness or when a current episode of homelessness began. Without this information, we were unable to examine how the school changes these children experienced were related to the beginning or end of episodes of homelessness.

Because the Family Regeneration program specifically targets chronically or episodically homeless families, it is quite likely that many of the school changes these children had experienced before their shelter stay began were associated with prior homeless spells or episodes of living doubled up, which is considered homelessness under McKinney-Vento. This might explain why so many of these children had changed schools several times before their families entered the program. However, without specific beginning and end dates of spells of homelessness, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the causal relationship between homelessness and school mobility.³³

Not knowing when the families in our study became homeless also precluded us from examining whether homeless children who remain in their school of origin—that is, the school they were in before becoming homeless—fare better than homeless children who move to a different school. We could not identify each child's school of origin without information about when their homeless spell began. For similar reasons, we could not examine whether becoming homeless led to gaps in school enrollment. Although we could identify periods during which children were not enrolled in CPS, we could not look at the overlap between these periods and episodes of homelessness.

Another limitation of the data we received from Inner Voice was the lack of any information about the reasons families left the program. Presumably, most of these families became housed, but some may have left under less auspicious circumstances. More importantly, we have no information about what happened to families after they left. Did they remain stably housed or did they become homeless again? This information is critical to understanding children's experiences in school after the conclusion of their shelter stay.

We could not answer a number of questions about the concentration of homeless children and its effects, because the only homeless children we could identify were the children in the Family Regeneration program. Most notably, we could not examine how the concentration of homeless children varied across schools. For example, we could not tell whether schools located near shelters had a particularly high concentration of homeless children. Nor could we examine how variation in the concentration of homeless children across schools might be related either to the performance of individual homeless children or to the overall performance of the school.

³³ Even with specific dates, other potential causes could not necessarily be ruled out.

That our study was limited to children in the Family Regeneration program also raises concerns about generalizability. Our findings may have been quite different if we had included children who could be considered homeless because they were living doubled up, or alternatively, children whose families received services for the homeless from other programs.³⁴

Policy and Program Implications

Despite these problems with external validity, our results have policy and practice implications for educating homeless children. To begin with, the number of school changes these children had already experienced before their shelter stay began illustrates why the McKinney-Vento emphasis on keeping children in their school of origin is so important. Although much progress has been made since that legislation was first enacted, it appears that some barriers to keeping children in their school of origin still need to be removed.

Second, the pervasiveness of academic difficulties among the children in our study highlights the need for shelters and other service providers that work with homeless families to broaden their focus beyond helping parents achieve self-sufficiency. Although this focus is essential if families are to become stably housed, the educational needs of homeless children cannot be ignored. Shelters could provide tutoring or homework help after school and create a quiet space where children can study. Or, shelters might work with community-based programs to which school-aged children could be routinely referred at the beginning of their shelter stay. Opportunities for remediation or academic enrichment could also be provided during the summer.

Third, the unusually high percentage of children with special education needs among the families in our study raises particular concerns. Schools must make a concerted effort to identify homeless children with individualized education plans (IEP's) when they first enroll, and monitor the implementation of those IEP's. At the same time, care must be taken to differentiate the effects of homelessness and school mobility on school performance from learning or other disabilities.

Fourth, a concerted effort must be made to educate the parents of homeless children about different types of schools, including charter, magnet, and selective enrollment schools. Although a parent may ultimately decide that the neighborhood school is best for her children, this should be an informed choice.

Perhaps most importantly, the results of our qualitative interviews point to a need for much greater coordination between schools and shelters. The annual back-to-school workshops notwithstanding, there was a feeling among the shelter staff we spoke with that CPS needed to "reach out" more and that shelter staff's communication with the

³⁴ Of course, as has already been mentioned, some of these children may have been living doubled up before their shelter stay began.

schools tended to be one-way. However, we also heard that shelter staff did not make much effort to work with the schools. No matter where the truth lies, far too many of the children in our study seemed to be falling through the cracks, and unless the shelters and schools do more to work together to address their needs, this will continue to happen.

What is less clear from our findings is how such concerted action might be achieved. One possibility is for shelter staff to have regular meetings with the CPS homeless liaisons to discuss recurrent problems affecting homeless children generally or, in some cases, a specific homeless child. Although FERPA regulations could complicate the latter effort, parents could be asked to sign a release of information during the intake process to facilitate communication between shelter staff and schools.

Another option is to build upon what seemed to be a consensus about the need for more afterschool programs. To date, only a handful of shelters have taken advantage of CPS's invitation to set up tutoring programs run by VISTA volunteers. This would require commitment of staff or other resources by CPS and the shelters, but doing nothing also has a cost.

Finally, meaningful participation of homeless parents in the education of their children should be encouraged by shelter staff as well as by the public schools. At a minimum, parents must be fully informed about their children's rights under state and federal law. For this to happen, school principals and shelter directors have a responsibility to educate members of their respective staffs. Rather than only becoming involved when problems occur, homeless shelters need to be proactive. For example, questions about the educational needs of each homeless child should be a routine part of the intake process, and shelter staff should make a point of "checking in" with parents about their children's progress or concerns about their children's education throughout their shelter stay. Likewise, teachers, principals, and other staff must reach out to engage the parents of homeless children in their school instead of waiting until a problem arises.

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About Chapin Hall

Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center at the University of Chicago that is dedicated to providing rigorous research and innovative ideas to government officials, service providers, and funders working to improve policies and programs for children and youth, their families, and communities. Chapin Hall's multidisciplinary research focuses on the needs of all young people and devotes special attention to those experiencing significant problems, such as maltreatment, poverty, delinquency, and mental illness. Chapin Hall research looks across human service systems to understand the experiences of the families they serve. Our aim is to learn more about how systems and programs interact with one another, and to inform decision makers seeking to improve their institutions and initiatives.