



“I KNOW WHAT’S AT STAKE”

How Homelessness Impacts College
Success in New York City

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YOUNG  INVINCIBLES



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City is in the midst of an educational crisis: the increasing share of students experiencing homelessness. Today, one out of every ten students enrolled in New York City’s public schools lacks a reliable, safe place to sleep at night.¹ The city’s youth homelessness crisis does not, of course, end with high school. As young people enter into college, the challenge of homelessness remains far too common. A 2019 survey of 22,000 City University of New York (CUNY) undergraduates found that 14 percent had experienced homelessness while enrolled in classes.² More than half (55 percent) of the survey’s respondents experienced some form of housing insecurity over the last year.³

While the struggles of student homelessness in New York City remain acute, they are not unique to the city. Schools and universities across the United States are grappling with the country’s growing homelessness crisis — in rural and urban communities alike. Nationwide, the rate of K-12 student homelessness has nearly doubled over the last decade.⁴ Across New York State, nearly 150,000 P-12 students experience homelessness while enrolled in school — a number that has grown steadily over the past decade.⁵ And while numbers on student homelessness across all New York colleges remain limited, nationwide, college students are experiencing homelessness at alarming rates: 14 percent of four-year college students and 18 percent of community-college students experience homelessness in a given year.⁶

Both research and students’ experiences underscore how homelessness can rob young people of educational opportunity, and with it, a stronger likelihood of long-term economic stability. While longitudinal data on homeless students’ educational persistence is limited, studies have found that students who experience homelessness are more likely to miss more school⁷ and experience high stress.⁸ These conditions mean students are often forced to make the unfair choice between meeting their basic needs and fully participating in school.

Conversations with young people highlight the daily challenges of navigating college without a stable place to sleep at night — from homeless shelter rules that limit students’ ability to participate in on-campus activities, to the persistent stigma surrounding homelessness that compounds the message to students that they don’t belong and won’t succeed in college.

To better understand the many ways homelessness impacts New York City’s young adults and their plans for the future, Young Invincibles (YI) conducted focus groups with young people in eight drop-in centers and youth shelters in New York City. These discussions centered on how experiences of homelessness, and the issues accompanying it, impact young people’s ability to enter and complete a postsecondary pathway of their choosing — whether entering college, a high-quality job training program, or a meaningful career path. YI also interviewed researchers, policymakers, agency officials, program staff, and young adults to further investigate how the interplay of New York’s systems — from higher education



institutions to public housing programs — create opportunities and barriers for young adults experiencing homelessness. We also reviewed existing research on how housing insecurity and homelessness impacts a person’s ability to complete a postsecondary education.

Our conversations across New York City show that, despite the daily challenges these young adults face, many are considering their future options — often without sufficient support from family, P-12 and college staff, and broader community resources. Prevailing notions that homeless young adults are “too occupied” with their immediate struggles to plan ahead oversimplify the reality: many of the young adults we spoke with were exploring ways to stabilize their future while navigating their immediate concerns. Assuming these young adults are too occupied to think about college and careers ignores the fact that many are already exploring their options — whether that’s completing their high-school equivalency (HSE) with the hopes of entering a college program or balancing college coursework with their other obligations. Many spoke clearly about their plans for their future and their interests, while noting that colleges and universities don’t seem interested in supporting their educational goals.

Ignoring the role of stable housing in college completion not only undermines public investment in higher education, it also carries long-term consequences for a generation of students who face increasing pressure to earn postsecondary credential — just to survive.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Smoothing the Transition to Postsecondary Education by Increasing Academic Counseling and Supports

- Sustain the New York City Department of Education’s (NYC DOE) Pathways to Graduation (P2G) program
- Increase the Age of Eligibility for NYC DOE Alternative Pathways Program from 21 to 24
- Increase Capacity of NYC DOE Student-Tracking Systems to Flag Students in Temporary Housing for Critical Supports
- Increase Support of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
- Ensure NYC DOE Anti-Bias Training Includes Content Related to Serving Students in Temporary Housing

Increasing Financial Aid and Simplifying Processes

- Increase Aid Available to Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY) through the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and Stop TAP from Penalizing UHY for Applying as Independent Students
- Streamline State Financial-Aid Verification and Approval Process
- Eliminate Barriers to Accessing Transcripts

Promoting Greater Awareness of Homelessness on College Campuses and Providing Critical Wraparound Supports

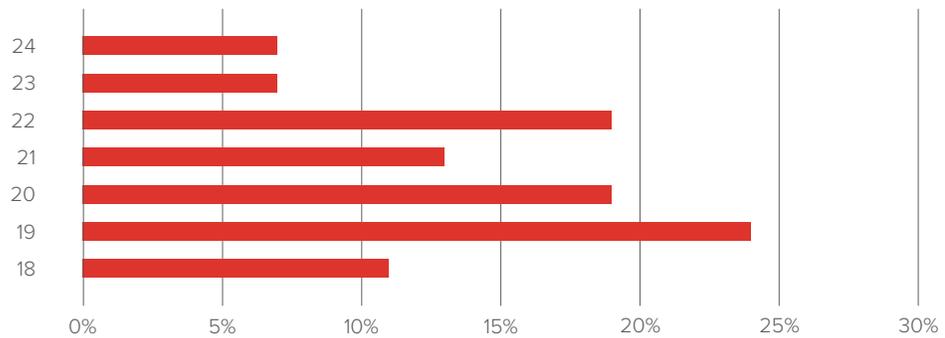
- **Increase Housing Supports for College Students**
 - Create On-Campus Liaisons Who Identify and Support Students Experiencing Homelessness
 - Ensure Students Experiencing Homelessness Receive Priority Enrollment in CUNY Campus Housing, and Maintain Housing through Breaks
 - Create On-Campus Housing Community for Students Experiencing Homelessness
 - Address LGBTQ+ Homelessness
- **Expand Wraparound Supports That Serve Housing-Insecure Students**
 - Increase State Investment in Campus Food Pantries to Improve and Better Market Services to Students
 - Invest in Single Stop Program on College Campuses
 - Expand Students’ Access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by Allowing College Coursework to Count as Work Requirements
 - Invest in Campus Childcare
 - Simplify and Expand Emergency Aid to Students Experiencing Homelessness
 - Create More Paid Internships in Areas of Study and Ensure Set-Asides for Homeless Students
 - Expand CUNY ASAP and ACE Programs and Target Marketing to Students Experiencing Homelessness



Perspectives from Young Adults: **METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW**

In order to understand the barriers young adults face when navigating homelessness and college, Young Invincibles (YI) held eight focus groups in drop-in centers and transitional independent living (TIL) facilities in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island, and Manhattan, speaking with 55 young adults. The organizations that we partnered for our focus groups with include the Ali Forney Center, Covenant House, Diaspora Community Services, The Door, Good Shepherd Services, The Jewish Board, SCO Family of Services, and Project Hospitality. Before each focus group, participants completed a focus group consent form, with an optional identity survey attached. Below is a demographic breakdown of our focus group participants who completed the identity survey.

STUDENT AGES



The average age of our focus group participants was 20.56 years.



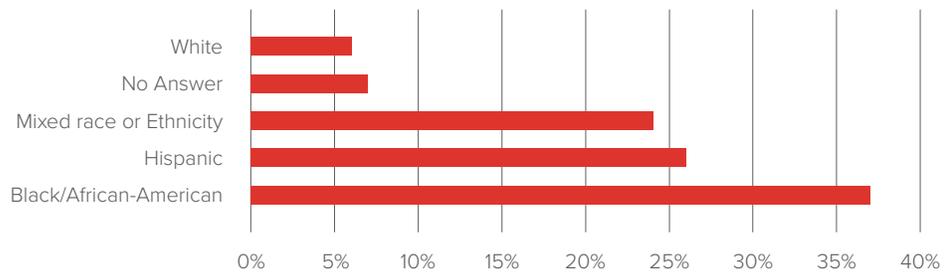
STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS



58 percent (32/55) said they had lived away from parents because it was unsafe for them.

Note: Although the demographic survey included a definition of housing insecurity, not all respondents who indicated they were homeless also identified as housing insecure.

RACE/ETHNICITY



More than half of the respondents identified as Black or Hispanic.

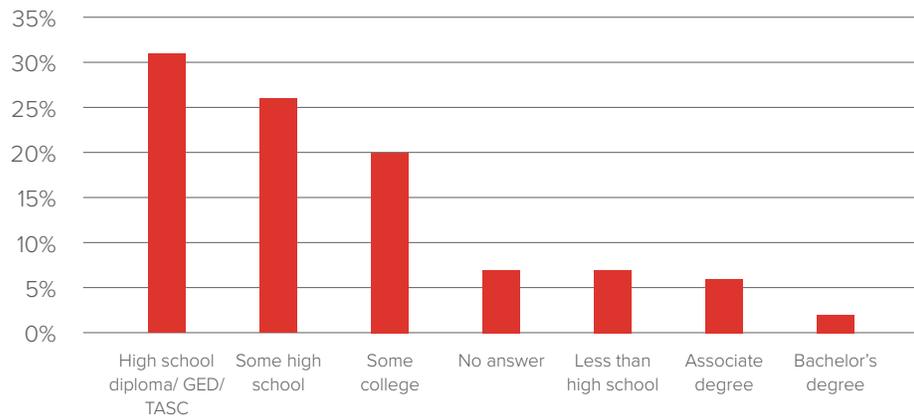
SEXUAL IDENTITY



Over half of the respondents were either bisexual, gay or lesbian, or identified as something other than gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, questioning, or something else (not heterosexual or straight).

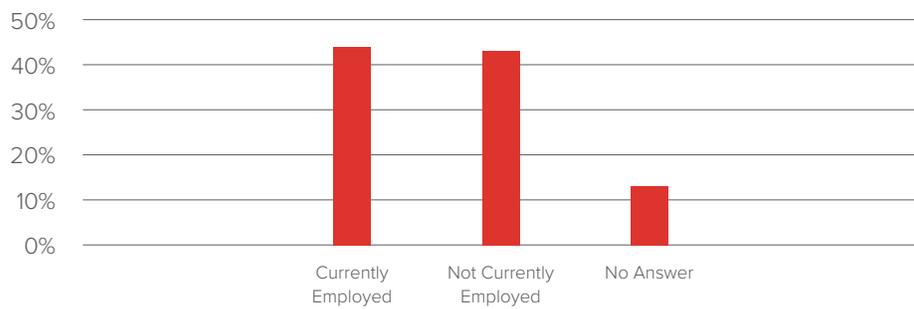


EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



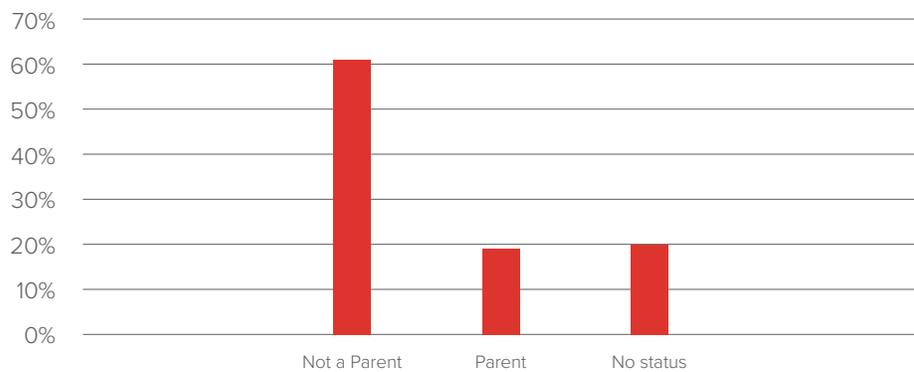
Over one-third of the respondents attained a high school diploma or equivalency or an associate or bachelor's degree.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS



Among those with a job, 46 percent reported having a full-time job or internship. 50 percent reported having a part-time job, part-time internship, or doing freelance work.

PARENTING/CARETAKER STATUS



11 percent of respondents (6/55) reported being the primary caretaker for a child that isn't their own.



In addition to our focus groups, we conducted 30-minute interviews with 14 young adults who had experienced homelessness and hour-long interviews with 20 experts in the field. These experts included housing and social-service providers, college access counselors, academic researchers, and policymakers.⁹

Based on these conversations and a review of existing literature on the intersection of postsecondary success and homelessness, YI identified key barriers that young adults face when planning, entering, and completing college in New York City. We also provide recommendations on how the city, state, and institutions can better support students who are experiencing homelessness complete a postsecondary pathway of their choosing. In both our barrier analysis and recommendations, we have identified four major areas that pose challenges — and opportunities — for New York’s homeless students:

- The pipeline from P-12 into college
- Affordability beyond just tuition
- The challenge of securing housing
- College culture and resources



DEFINING HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Definitions for “homelessness” and “housing insecurity” can differ across agencies and systems. The McKinney-Vento Act, the primary federal legislation concerning the P-12 education of homeless youth, considers someone who lacks “a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” to be homeless.¹⁰ Under this law, this could include a young person who is “sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason,” commonly known as “doubling up” or “couchsurfing.”¹¹ In contrast, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses a more narrow definition to determine if someone is experiencing homelessness.¹² For instance, an individual who is doubling up would not be considered homeless under HUD’s definition.¹³

Further complicating the issue is the lack of an up-to-date definition of “housing insecurity.” Though homelessness itself exists on a continuum of housing insecurity — as the most severe form of housing insecurity — the only HUD definition of “housing instability” was written in 1969.¹⁴

For the purposes of this project, we consider someone to have experienced “housing insecurity” if at some point in the last 12 months, they:

- Had trouble paying for rent
- Lived in crowded conditions in order to afford rent
- Were forced to move frequently

We consider someone to have experienced “homelessness” if they had, at some point in the last 12 months, had not had a permanent place to sleep at night. This might look like:

- Staying in a shelter
- Staying with others due to loss of housing, or lack of money (“doubling up”)
- Sleeping in hotels or motels without a permanent home to return to
- Sleeping on public transit or in cars
- Living on the street or another outdoor location
- Living in other unstable/unsafe conditions.¹⁵



BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HOMELESS STUDENTS

Given the wide range of reasons that drive an individual's experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness, the barriers that young people who are unstably housed face when entering college vary, and stretch across multiple systems — from P-12 schools, colleges and universities, to housing systems, and offices that administer public benefits. While little is known about how many housing-insecure and homeless students graduate college each year, our conversations with young adults, as well as experts in the field, reveal the difficulty in completing college when dealing with homelessness. As the country and New York struggle with a rising homelessness crisis, increasingly unaffordable housing, and growing college costs, it is critical to orient our higher education system to better support homeless students, and provide the necessary investments and structural changes to ensure this population of students is supported to attain college access and success.

Below are the four key barrier themes that emerged from the conversations. These challenges cut across the multiple systems that housing-insecure youth may navigate — from preparing for college in P-12, to navigating our federal and state financial aid system, to negotiating the policies and cultures of both New York City's housing system and its colleges and universities. The barriers we outline below represent not only issues within one particular system, but the problems that emerge when P-12 schools, colleges and universities, the housing system, and community-based organizations remain siloed — and the real impact that disconnection has on young adults.

- 1. Limited Supports and Lack of a College-Going Culture in P-12 System**
 - Challenges to Attaining a High School Diploma or Equivalent
 - Cultural Bias and Limited Counseling and Academic Supports
- 2. College Affordability — Beyond Tuition**
 - Complicated Federal and State Financial-Aid Verification and Approval Process
 - Less State Financial Aid for Verified Independent Students
 - Navigating Past Debts to Return to College
 - Lack of Financial Support to Cover Non-Tuition Costs
- 3. Onerous Housing Eligibility Requirements from Multiple New York City Agencies**
 - Limited Affordable Housing for College Students
 - Unrealistic Housing Program Participation Requirements for College Students
- 4. Limited Supports and Visibility in Higher Education Institutions**



Limited Supports and Lack of a College-Going Culture in P-12 System

Challenges to Attaining a High School Diploma or Equivalent

While New York City's high school graduation rate has risen to 73 percent, just 55 percent of students experiencing homelessness in NYC DOE graduated high school in 2016.¹⁶ Lacking adequate housing can make it more challenging for students to prioritize school, and research shows its negative impact on academic access. Students who experience homelessness are more likely to be chronically absent from school,¹⁷ and may end up taking alternative pathways to securing a high school diploma, such as earning a high school equivalency (HSE). While New York residents can take the state's HSE exam (known as the Test Assessing Secondary Completion, or TASC) at no cost, the TASC exam is a more rigorous test than its predecessor, the GED.¹⁸ As a result, the share of New Yorkers taking and passing the TASC exam to obtain an HSE has declined in recent years.¹⁹ The challenge of earning an HSE also had implications to participants' access to living-wage work. "If you get a job without a GED, you're lucky," said a 22-year-old focus group participant from the Bronx. Moreover, the long-run impacts of not having a diploma or HSE are severe, particularly when it comes to addressing homelessness: a 2019 study from Chapin Hall found that young people with less than a diploma or HSE were 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than their peers who completed high school.²⁰

Cultural Bias and Limited Counseling and Academic Supports in the P-12 System

Transitioning from high school to college presents challenges for all students. But for students experiencing homelessness, these challenges can be heightened by feeling like educators, counselors, and other school staff have low expectations for their futures. In addition, obtaining adequate college counseling and getting facetime with a college counselor can be a tremendous challenge for New York City public high school students. In 2019, there were 2,958 school counselors serving the city's one million students, or one counselor for approximately every 333 students.²¹ To compare, guidance from groups such as the American School Counselor Association recommend having both one school counselor for every 250 students, and one social worker for every 50 students in schools with "intensive needs."²²

For many of the young adults we met with for this project, the lack of counselors and social workers contributed to the first major barrier to college access: successfully completing high school. Both young adults and experts interviewed for this report highlighted the lack of encouragement housing-insecure students receive when exploring postsecondary pathways. "One of the things I think is missing with youth experiencing homelessness is a focus on a career and future exploration," said Jama Shelton, Chief Strategy Officer of the True Colors Fund and a researcher on youth homelessness: "Young people still deserve the opportunity to work things out. They deserve to explore with someone what their dreams are."



College Affordability – Beyond Tuition

For many of the young people we met in our focus groups and interviews, the financial aid process — from applying for aid to receiving inadequate amounts — poses a substantial barrier to college entrance and success. Our conversations with young people highlighted the challenges that New York’s students face when applying for financial aid, including the way a student’s homeless status can undermine access to aid. And while there are many ways in which homeless and housing-insecure students are underserved by the financial aid system, four critical barriers emerged through the focus groups and interviews:

1. Complicated Federal and State Financial-Aid Verification and Approval Process
2. Less State Financial Aid for Verified Independent Students
3. Navigating Past Debts to Return to College
4. Lack of Financial Support to Cover Non-Tuition Costs

Complicated Federal and State Financial-Aid Verification Process

To qualify for state and federal financial aid, all prospective college students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Applicants who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness can indicate so on the FAFSA, and may apply as “unaccompanied,” meaning not living or otherwise in contact with their parents or guardians. The unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) status allows students to apply for financial aid without a parent or guardian’s financial information that is typically required for FAFSA, limiting a potential hurdle for those students who cannot contact their parents or guardians.

But the UHY status also poses challenges for students, including its verification process. Students who indicate their UHY status verify their housing status through a “homeless youth determination,” which is a signed letter from a McKinney-Vento liaison, the director of a homeless shelter (provided the shelters receive funding from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or under the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act), or a campus financial aid administrator. This verification process can be challenging for prospective students, particularly if they are no longer in contact with previous liaisons, case managers, or housing providers — individuals who may be more equipped to have a conversation about homelessness than a financial aid administrator. Furthermore, current rules require UHY students to obtain a determination of their housing status each year, adding yet another layer to the already complex FAFSA process every year a homeless student applies for aid. To make matters more complicated, both students and CBO staff report that verification documents might be scrutinized by campus financial aid administrators — though they shouldn’t, based on how federal law is written. Michael LoFaso, a former college access counselor and trainer at the Goddard Riverside Options Center, explained how this issue with implementation can create challenges for students: “[Verification approval is made] case by case, so [a financial aid administrator] reads the letter and then determine whether or not they believe you.”



To complicate matters, unaccompanied homeless youth in New York must provide additional information about their UHY status when applying for state aid, including the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). To access TAP aid, UHY must submit documentation beyond what is required for FAFSA — including a “sworn and signed” statement detailing the specific reasons why the student no longer has contact with their parents.²³ This letter must be submitted by someone other than the student or their parents, such as a social worker, a legal aid representative, or a clergy member. This creates yet an additional barrier for unaccompanied homeless youth who apply for financial aid in New York.

Less State Financial Aid for Independent Status Students

For UHY students in New York State, their independent status presents an additional barrier: the state’s current financial aid system provides less funding to independent students, compared to dependent students. For instance, under the state’s largest grant program, the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), dependent students can receive a maximum of \$5,165 annually in TAP aid. Independent students, on the other hand, are only eligible for a maximum annual TAP grant of \$3,025 — meaning that there is less state aid available for unaccompanied homeless youth than their dependent peers.²⁴ In addition, while the maximum TAP award for dependent students has nominally increased within the last decade (though still not keeping up with the cost of tuition, amid continued tuition hikes) the maximum award for independent students has not increased at all since 1995.

As Jennifer Pringle, project director of New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS-TEACHS), Advocates for Children explains it, this discrepancy stems from a narrow drafting of independent status: “Originally, independent status was conceived as...a young adult who is 25 and is going back to college without kids — we can give them less money than a family that has many kids. They were not envisioning a homeless young person who is completely alone, is struggling to get their basic needs met, and doesn’t have the support of family members.” In 2014, New York State amended the law to allow foster youth, orphans, and wards of the court to access the higher amount of state aid available to dependent students. Unaccompanied homeless students, however, were not included in that revision.

Navigating Past Debts to Return to College

For students whose academic pathway has been interrupted due to their housing status, past educational debts — from smaller fines like overdue book fees from campus libraries, to larger debts, such as repaying federal grants if students withdraw at the wrong time — can create an additional barrier to obtaining a quality college degree. Colleges and universities can withhold transcripts from students who have not paid their outstanding debts, making it impossible for students to re-enroll in college and complete their degree. The impact of these past debts poses a significant barrier to students across the country. A 2019 analysis from the Student Borrower Protection Center found nearly 400,000 instances of students’ past debts being sent to collections at Ohio’s public colleges and universities alone.²⁵ Students who enrolled



at for-profit colleges are also particularly vulnerable to outstanding educational debts and subsequent transcript withholding. Recent litigation against the for-profit college company Career Education Corp revealed the company held nearly \$600 million in students' past-due educational debts.²⁶

In our focus groups, we spoke with several students who were looking to re-enter college after dropping out of another postsecondary institution. For these returning students, the process of reapplying for college was challenged by the requirement of sending past transcripts to their prospective college — particularly if they left college with an outstanding tuition bill. As Ronan Tuggle, Vocational and Educational Specialist at the Ali Forney Center explains, this process does not take into account the trauma students may have faced or the reasons why they left: “There is often a reason [students] stopped going to that school, or it could be in a different state [from where students live now]. Often there is not a lot of leeway for people to get their transcripts if they owe an institution money.”

Lack of Financial Support to Cover Non-Tuition Costs

Even when homeless students are able to successfully complete their FAFSA and TAP applications, current aid often does not cover the true cost of college. Expenses such as housing, transportation, food, and textbooks can make or break a student's ability to persist in a postsecondary program — yet are largely not included in aid packages..

“ *It's a marathon to get to graduation. Having to buy groceries, transportation, rent — these roadblocks can stop people.*

CUNY student interviewed by Young Invincibles

New York has made some headway in addressing the costs college students face beyond tuition, including increased city investments in programs such as CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which provides students with not only a tuition waiver but also support with purchasing MetroCards and textbooks. Investments in programs like ASAP have shown to improve student retention and completion.²⁷ Yet, these programs have not received significant investment from the state to expand the program across all of CUNY's four-year colleges, nor to expand into the State University of New York (SUNY) system.

Onerous Requirements from Multiple New York City Agencies

Stable housing is foundational to an individual's well-being, impacting everything from one's physical and mental health to a person's ability to maintain employment and persist in education. Yet, in New York City, the increasingly unaffordable stock of market-rate housing, combined with decades of discriminatory housing policies, make it extremely difficult for low-



income young adults to find and maintain private-market housing. In our conversations across New York City, we heard from young adults who looked elsewhere for housing, whether that was through the city’s subsidized housing options, couchsurfing, or navigating other short-term arrangements. In each of these scenarios, young people shared how these stopgap housing options are often incompatible with college plans.

Limited Housing Programs for College Students

For young people who look to the city’s housing and rental-assistance systems to secure a place to live, navigating the onerous requirements of the shelter and rental-assistance programs can thwart efforts to become stably housed. Young adults experiencing homelessness in New York City may navigate a number of supports to secure both short- and longer-term housing. These programs include shorter-term housing placements in crisis shelters and transitional independent living (TIL) programs managed by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD); shelters operated by the City’s Department of Homeless Services (DHS), including three youth-specific DHS shelters, as well as single adult and family shelters; housing vouchers provided through the City’s Department of Social Services (DSS); Section 8 vouchers through the City’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR); and supportive housing units through the NY/NYIII initiative. These institutions often have their own set of participation requirements that prioritize employment status over postsecondary enrollment.

For the young people we spoke with who have navigated these programs, meeting the requirements to enter into these housing programs presented significant challenges. Many of these programs prioritize or restrict access to those who have had some of the most difficult experiences related to their homelessness, such as involvement in the foster care system, experiences of domestic violence, struggles with substance use, or a mental health diagnosis. While this carveout intends to support those in urgent situations, many of the young people we spoke to expressed frustration with being unable to meet these requirements, but still needing housing. And for those whose experience did align with these requirements, the long process of securing that housing could deprioritize other longer-term goals, such as enrolling in college.

Unrealistic Housing Program Participation Requirements for College Students

Our conversations with young people stress how being a college student can actually make it more difficult to secure housing through the city’s housing system — highlighting a major disconnect between homeless and housing services and higher education. For students who look for housing through the city’s homeless shelters, shelter rules and culture can also undermine efforts to continue their education. Curfews at shelters, for instance, limit students’ ability to stay late on campus to study, work on group projects, or engage in extracurriculars — particularly when students live in shelters that are far from their colleges.



Documented issues of safety, shelter cleanliness, and a lack of privacy can also undermine both a student's academic success, as well as their mental well-being. "Now that I'm in DHS, I can't have a laptop. I have a curfew, and mental health and substance abuse is around me," one focus group participant told us. But for this participant, unsafe shelter conditions served as a motivator to succeed in school: "I'm doing better at school because I know what's at stake." Students in supportive housing programs may also find their housing requirements incompatible with balancing college, jobs, and other commitments. For instance, housing units may require their residents to work a certain number of hours, or save a certain amount each month. Residents are usually required to adhere to curfews, which can make it difficult to study on campus, or maintain night-time employment.²⁸

“ *You have to have a place to stay before you can start [to] focus on school.*

Focus group participant from Brooklyn

In recent years, funding for the city's homeless programs has increased. Analysis from the New York City Comptroller's office shows funding for homeless services has increased by \$3.2 billion since FY 2015.²⁹ Mayor Bill de Blasio also increased funding for runaway homeless youth (RHY) housing, including the creation of 500 additional beds for RHY and a new 24-hour drop-in center. Yet, while the city's investment in homeless services increases, demand for these services remains high: the Comptroller's 2019 analysis shows the number of people in shelters and those seeking rent assistance has increased.³⁰

College Campus Visibility and Culture

For young people who enroll in college, the challenge of securing stable, affordable housing in New York City can deprioritize their academic obligations — threatening students' ability to persist in college, increasing their time to degree, and ultimately undermining completion. For the young people we spoke with, the balancing act of stabilizing their housing situation and staying on top of coursework and graduation requirements became even more acute when students encountered campus staff and faculty who do not understand or empathize with students' experiences of homelessness.

“ *I just feel like you're penalized for being in the situation that you're in. Your situation should not lower your qualifications of being a successful student.*

20-year-old student in the Bronx



Both focus group participants and experts we interviewed noted the stigma surrounding homelessness on campus, and its impact on students' college experience and successful completion. For example, focus group participants noted the lack of programs that specifically address homelessness on campus, and suggested that the absence of such programs not only limits students' ability to access critical supports, it also perpetuates the perception that homelessness is uncommon among college students. Even when students disclose their housing status with college faculty, staff, or their peers, they might still encounter stigma surrounding homelessness. They may also encounter inflexible campus policies that can affect their academic performance, including attendance policies, assignment deadlines, or expected technology use.

Homelessness and Identity

Our conversations also highlighted important intersections between students' housing status, their identities, and other life experiences — intersections that can ultimately impact students' persistence and completion. Research shows that young people of color, young parents with children, and LGBTQ+ young adults disproportionately experience homelessness and/or housing insecurity when compared to their white, non-parenting, and heterosexual peers, respectively.³¹

Our focus group participants highlighted the ways in which homophobia, transphobia, racism, and negative perceptions towards student parents can intersect with stigma surrounding homelessness, compounding the message that these students do not belong in college. A 21-year-old trans man we spoke with in our focus groups expressed harassment he faced while on campus, and how it impacted his ability to stay in his dorm: "I hadn't started medically transitioning at all and I was in a dorm with other dudes, and it was hell. They were so awful. Like they were just so invalidating in every possible way."



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENCOURAGING POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

for New York's Housing-Insecure Students

While our conversations with young adults, providers, experts, and policymakers across New York City underscored the substantial barriers that young people face when navigating both homelessness and college, they also highlight major opportunities for the city, state, institutions of higher learning, and community-based organizations to support the educational success and long-term stability of the city's growing share of youth who experience homelessness. These recommendations reflect the varied pathways that students may take to enter into a postsecondary program — particularly those whose education was interrupted, and fall into four themes:

1. Smoothing the Transition to Postsecondary Education by Increasing Academic Counseling and Supports;
2. Increasing Financial Aid and Simplifying Processes;
3. Minimizing Penalizing Housing Requirements Across Multiple Systems; and
4. Increasing On-Campus Housing and Wraparound Supports for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Smoothing the Transition to Postsecondary Education by Increasing Academic Counseling and Supports

In 2015, the de Blasio administration ushered in the Equity and Excellence for All Initiative to ensure that all New York City students receive a quality education that sets them on the pathway to postsecondary success. Although students in temporary housing (STH) may benefit from the initiative's signature programs, such as expansion of Advanced Placement (AP), our conversations highlighted the need for targeted supports that help STH plan and enter a postsecondary pathway of their choosing.

While the NYC DOE has recently begun to address the crisis of P-12 student homelessness, more work must be done to ensure a lens of student homelessness is applied across the city's P-12 system, including connecting students in temporary housing to NYC DOE's broader college and career readiness initiatives. Recent NYC DOE initiatives within the Office of Community Schools are trying to address this issue. Within the last year, the Students in Temporary Housing (STH) division within the Office of Community Schools was created to better serve the more than 100,000 students in the New York City Department of Education that are experiencing homelessness. In the last year, the STH staff has grown from 186 to 324



employees. The field staff includes 100 social workers, 107 community coordinators, and 117 family workers. These community coordinators serve as school-based liaisons, identifying school and community supports for students. Family workers are based in shelters and communicate with schools to ensure that students living in shelters are attending school and accessing supports. The STH division also has created 18 regional manager roles to support school and shelter staff, building their skills and increasing resources. To date, two-thirds of these regional manager roles have been hired. Although the NYC DOE has increased capacity to better support STH, 300 staffers to serve over 100,000 students is just a start. More support is needed for students in temporary housing to ensure that they graduate and are connected with high-quality postsecondary programs.³²

Sustain the NYC DOE's Pathways to Graduation (P2G) Program

For young people whose high school education has been interrupted by factors related to their housing status, attaining a diploma or HSE is critical to postsecondary success. In New York, the HSE exam is known as Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) which replaced the General Education Development exam (GED) in 2014. Research demonstrates that the TASC exam is challenging for students: a 2017 analysis from the Center for an Urban Future found that fewer New Yorkers are passing the TASC exam when compared with results from the GED.³³

In part to address the low pass rates of the HSE, the NYC DOE supports students as they work to achieve a diploma or HSE via the Pathways to Graduation (P2G) program. This program, housed within the NYC DOE's District 79, provides day and evening classes to students ages 17-21 in young adult borough centers and HSE preparation courses. P2G sets the students up for success by meeting them where they are. The P2G program also offers wraparound supports that help ensure students obtain their HSE and employment. To accomplish this, the program offers paid internships and has a career center in every borough. The program also allows for rolling admission and provides meals and MetroCards for eligible students.³⁴

During the 2018-19 school year, the Pathways to Graduation program served 7,972 students. 2,171 graduated from the program with an HSE diploma. Given that the average daily enrollment (that reflects rolling admissions and discharges) was 3,189 students, the graduation rate of students enrolled in the Pathways to Graduation was 65 percent. These numbers are promising and demonstrate the need for the city to continue investing and supporting the work of this program.³⁵

Increase the Age of Eligibility for NYC DOE Alternative Pathways Program from 21 to 24

While the alternative pathways programming offer some promising outcomes for students working towards completion, most of the Department's programs that provide alternative pathways to high school completion limit the age of eligibility to 21 — meaning that for some of the young people we've talked to have aged out of critical supports that can help them attain their HSE. In recent years, both the New York State legislature and the New York City Council have expanded the age eligibility for youth homeless shelters up to the age of 24. NYC DOE should follow suit, and expand the age of eligibility for alternative pathway programs to at



least the age of 24.

Increase Capacity of NYC DOE Student-Tracking Systems to Flag Students in Temporary Housing for Critical Supports

NYC DOE's recent expansion of services for STH also poses a critical opportunity to smooth the pipeline into quality postsecondary programs. In 2018, NYC DOE Chancellor Richard Carranza announced the hire of 100 Community Coordinators, as well as 31 additional Bridging the Gap social workers (bringing the total number to 100), all of whom are focused on supporting homeless students through to graduation. This infusion of resources for STH offers an important opportunity to support these students' education beyond high school.³⁶

Beyond the additional hires aimed at supporting STH, recent developments in DOE internal systems can help the DOE's staff further support STH in the college-going process. The DOE is working to build the data infrastructure to ensure that all students, including STH, are on track to graduate. The current DOE data tracking system, known as Automate the Schools (ATS), does have the capacity to track data and flag students in temporary housing, and can differentiate STH based on their living situation, including students living in shelter, hotels, doubled up, or in other temporary living situations. However, this database is not intended for tracking whether students are prepared for high school graduation and college.

To improve the ability to track the system's 1.1 million students from high-school graduation and beyond, the DOE has implemented a web-based postsecondary planning tool in a selection of DOE schools, which will soon be rolled out citywide. This tool will be a resource for school counselors, social workers, and other staff to see if their students are on-track for high school completion, and will flag vulnerable populations, including STH. The DOE's efforts to improve tracking students' pathway to high school completion and into college aligns with recent recommendations from the City's Youth Homelessness Taskforce, which called for automatically flagging homeless students who were at risk of not completing high school.³⁷ As the DOE prepares to rollout this postsecondary planning tool, there is a critical opportunity to not only flag STH for enrollment in high school completion supports, but also flagging STH students for programs that can help students successfully enter and complete postsecondary programs, such as FAFSA completion support, as well as automatically receiving information about postsecondary completion programs at the state's public colleges, such as CUNY ASAP and College Bridge programming within the CUNY system.

Increase Support of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

NYC DOE Chancellor Carranza's November 2018 announcement of increasing supports for the system's students in temporary housing included a \$12-million investment for hiring the aforementioned Community Coordinators, improving oversight of STH resources, and expanding professional development for staff who work with STHs.³⁸ This investment in the STH division of DOE will also allow for hiring staff who specialize in working with specific subpopulations of STH, including unaccompanied youth.



Across the country, national data shows that the share of unaccompanied youth in K-12 schools has grown by more than a quarter over the last three years alone.³⁹ Thus, the NYC DOE staff working with unaccompanied homeless youth must be trained on navigating the specific challenges faced by students who are not living with their families or guardians. While the DOE has provided staff with information on working with unaccompanied youth, this recent effort to strengthen the DOE's service to STH, including unaccompanied students, must be paired with ongoing conversations with community-based organizations who serve and support these students and ensure that the system's efforts align with services available across the city, and best practices being developed.

Ensure NYC DOE Anti-Bias Training Includes Content Related to Serving Students in Temporary Housing

Recent moves to provide anti-bias and culturally responsive training to NYC DOE teachers and other school staff offers an opportunity to expand staff knowledge on serving students in temporary housing. As part of this effort, the NYC DOE is in the process of reviewing books and other materials used in classrooms to help ensure the material is inclusive of students from different socio-economic, ability, and racial backgrounds. Given the high share of NYC DOE students living in temporary housing, and the intersection between housing status and a student's racial, sexual, and gender identity, it would behoove the DOE to include best practices on serving STH in these trainings.⁴⁰

Increasing Financial Aid Accessibility and Simplifying Processes for Housing-Insecure Students

While New York State touts its recent investments in increasing access to higher education, many of these most recent investments don't support students with the highest need — particularly its students experiencing homelessness. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's signature "free college" program, the Excelsior Scholarship, does not serve the state's lowest-income students by design. The program's strict rules on full-time enrollment and even where students can live after college graduation do not align with the lived realities of housing-insecure students, who are likely to move frequently and juggle multiple time demands. Meanwhile, the underinvestment in the state's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) — the state financial aid program that most directly serves New York's low-income students — undermines the state's ability to educate a more diverse student body. New York's unaccompanied homeless college students, for instance, receive, on average, \$631 less in financial aid each year in TAP aid than their dependent college peers. In short, New York's higher education system does not operate under a lens that prioritizes the challenges homeless students face — to the detriment of students, campuses, and taxpayers alike.

National research has shown that the continued disinvestment in public higher education systems has disproportionately harmed low-income students, students of color, and parenting students.⁴¹ These are the very student groups that are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness and housing insecurity. The state must reorient its approach to financial aid



to serve students with the highest need, including the growing shares of students who have experienced homelessness. Below are recommendations for addressing student homelessness through a revamping of the state's financial aid system.

Increase Aid Available to Unaccompanied Homeless Youth by Changing Their TAP Status from Independent to Dependent

Homeless students applying for TAP are classified as independent students, and in New York, independent students are eligible for less financial aid than their dependent peers: In the 2017-2018 school year, the maximum TAP award for independent students was \$3,025, more than \$2,000 less than the maximum TAP award of \$5,165 for dependent students.⁴²

In 2014, the state acknowledged the aid disparity between independent and dependent students by allowing certain groups of students previously considered independent under TAP — namely, orphans, wards of the court, and youth aging out of foster care — to be reclassified as dependent students, thus allowing these students to access up to \$2,140 more in state financial aid. Given the prevalence of homelessness on college campuses, the state should expand this dependency status change to students who indicate they are experiencing homelessness on their FAFSA applications.

Streamline State Financial-Aid Verification and Approval Process

For homeless students submitting their FAFSA application, verifying their homeless status and potentially their Pell Grant eligibility can create a significant hurdle in unlocking both federal and state financial aid. While overhauls to the FAFSA require federal action, New York State and its colleges and universities can take steps to lessen the challenges of verification. At the state level, New York could implement a standard verification form to be used across the state's colleges and universities, so students who are selected for FAFSA verification do not have to complete different processes and track down different documentation for the various colleges to which they're applying.⁴³ In addition, the implementation of homeless liaisons on New York's college campuses (discussed in more detail below) can support financial aid administrators navigating the homeless determination process, including with trainings for these administrators on how to best serve students in this situation.

Eliminate Barriers to Accessing Transcripts

Past educational debts should not prevent students from completing their education and earning a degree. Unfortunately, New York's colleges and universities continue to utilize this practice. New York State has acknowledged the barrier that transcript-withholding creates for students through the introduction of legislation that would prohibit colleges from withholding transcripts from students who had outstanding tuition debts. While this legislation has been introduced in the state legislature since 2010, it has not passed through the state Assembly nor the Senate. As other states actively work on legislation that would ban this practice, New York should revisit the drafted legislation to ensure debt does not stand in the way of students' successful completion of college.



Increasing On-Campus Housing and Wraparound Supports for Housing-Insecure College Students

In K-12 education, the link between homelessness and an undermined education resulted in the passage of the McKinney-Vento Act, the federal legislation that guarantees homeless students an equal opportunity for academic success. Yet, as students transition into colleges and universities, the same guarantee of educational access does not exist — despite the growing economic necessity of a postsecondary credential. In the absence of major federal legislation focused on college homelessness, states, cities, and postsecondary institutions are increasingly tasked with addressing basic needs insecurity among college students.

As higher education institutions become increasingly aware of the intersection of homelessness and its impact on college success, it is critical to increase programs that help students access housing and other basic needs, such as food, emergency aid, and public benefits. Indeed, across the country, more states are passing legislation to address college student homelessness on their campuses — from instituting homeless student liaisons at the college-level to increasing students' access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through state-level statutory changes. New York can learn from these states, and expand equitable access to postsecondary programs for the growing share of students experiencing homelessness.

Increase Housing Supports for College Students

Create On-Campus Liaisons Who Support Homeless Students

In the last three years, states such as California, Louisiana, Tennessee, Maine, and Nevada have passed legislation that establishes liaisons specifically tasked with supporting homeless students navigate college.⁴⁴ Each of these states offer promising models on which New York can base its own legislation that would extend targeted supports for homeless students from K-12 through higher education.

All five states' legislation requires liaisons to support students navigate and access financial aid. From there, the bills vary in approach. For instance, in four of these states that have passed such legislation — California, Louisiana, Maine, and Tennessee — the liaisons are to be housed across the state's college campuses. Nevada's homeless-student liaison legislation, passed in 2019, does not place the liaison at individual colleges, but rather at the Nevada System of Higher Education. Nevada's legislation also addresses the lack of data on homeless college students and their persistence and completion by calling for annual analyses of homelessness among college students, and tracks retention and completion among housing-insecure students. Given the difficulty in tracking the number of students experiencing homelessness, combining the service coordination of the liaison role with data collection can ensure that campuses are not only adequately serving their students, but also learning about the scope of the issue to better inform future targeted investments for the vulnerable population.



The prevalence of housing insecurity and homelessness across New York’s colleges should compel New York elected officials to introduce legislation to establish homeless liaisons across its postsecondary institutions. In addition to supporting students navigate financial aid and other campus resources, this role should connect faculty and staff with training on the prevalence of campus homelessness and supporting students who experience homelessness. The establishment of these on-campus liaisons should also coincide with stronger data collection, not only to hold these institutions accountable for effectively serving these students, but to learn more about this population in order to effectively support students through graduation.

Ensure Housing-Insecure Students Receive Priority Enrollment in CUNY Campus Housing, and Maintain Housing Through Breaks

Colleges and universities should be equipped to ensure that students experiencing homelessness can receive priority access to campus housing and other housing resources. In recent years, several states have passed legislation to pilot programs that connect homeless students with housing. In 2019, Washington State passed SB 5800, creating a six-campus pilot program aimed to provide housing assistance to students experiencing homelessness, along with additional wraparound supports. Among the supports this program provides, students can access short-term housing or housing assistance, especially during seasonal breaks, as well as case management services.⁴⁵

In California’s 2019-20 state budget, the state allocated \$19 million for California’s public colleges and universities to create rapid rehousing programs for housing-insecure college students.⁴⁶ California, Louisiana, and Tennessee have also passed legislation that requires the state’s postsecondary institutions to develop plans for ensuring housing-insecure students receive priority enrollment in campus housing, and can maintain housing during breaks.⁴⁷

Create On-Campus Housing Community for Students Experiencing Homelessness

New York City has also recently embarked on increasing on-campus housing for a particular subset of college students at risk of homelessness — youth aging out of foster care. Launched in 2016, the Fostering College Success Initiative (also known as the “Dorm Project”) is a partnership among the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), the City University of New York (CUNY), and New York Foundling. FCSI participants receive full tuition, room, and board, including year-round housing at dorm sites affiliated with Queens College, City College, and John Jay College. Students also receive dorm-based support services at each of these locations, including support from academic tutors and full-time college success coaches.⁴⁸ The program has a \$2.7-million annual budget that is funded through ACS, and today serves 122 students. CUNY should leverage the innovation of the Dorm Project’s model and explore creating a similar program for students who were not necessarily part of the foster care system, but are still at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Address LGBTQ+ Homelessness

Many of the youth we spoke to strongly suggested the need to create a welcoming campus climate for LGBTQ+ homeless youth by educating students and faculty on sexuality and gender, as well as holding students and faculty accountable for harmful behavior. Ideas



included adding a training to freshman orientation and adding LGBTQ+-inclusive content into college curriculum. One focus-group participant suggested, “I think classes on gender and sexuality should be incorporated into schools. It should be something that everybody should be informed on.” Researchers have affirmed the value of adding LGBTQ-relevant content into college curricula, and noted the role that inclusive curriculum can have on improving queer visibility on campus.⁴⁹

Expand Critical Wraparound Supports to Homeless Students

Increase State Investment in Campus Food Pantries to Improve and Better Market Services to Students

In 2018, Governor Cuomo announced a new initiative aimed at ensuring no college student in New York goes hungry, calling for a \$1-million investment towards implementing a food pantry at each of the state’s public colleges and universities. While the effort to end college-student hunger is laudable, advocates have consistently raised concern that this one-time, \$1-million investment in the campus-hunger mandate is insufficient for addressing food insecurity across all of New York’s public colleges and universities.⁵⁰

A 2018 survey from Healthy CUNY found that CUNY’s food pantries need additional staff, space, and other supplies to meet demand.⁵¹ The survey also showed that 77 percent of CUNY students surveyed were not aware of services that address food insecurity on their campus, highlighting the need for additional funding for outreach and education about these services.⁵² In fact, only 13 percent of our focus group participants were aware of on-campus food pantries in New York. The state should at least double its investment in its campus-hunger initiative to \$2 million, and ensure that investment is maintained annually.

Invest in Single Stop Program on College Campuses

NYS must also invest in programs that help students access critical public benefits that can support persistence, such as food benefits and healthcare access. One such program is Single Stop, which allows students to apply for multiple public benefits, tax supports, and legal services all in one on-campus location. A recent study by the RAND Corporation found that Single Stop users were more likely to persist into their next year of college.⁵³

Expand Students’ Access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by Allowing College Coursework to Count as Work Requirements

One critical resource to helping alleviate hunger amongst food-insecure students is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a program that allows for electronic benefits to be used like cash to purchase food.⁵⁴ Yet, certain requirements of the program, including rules regarding recipients’ employment status, make it difficult for college students to access SNAP benefits. A 2018 Young Invincibles analysis found only 18 percent of college students are eligible for food stamps, and just three percent of college students receive SNAP.⁵⁵ To increase access to this program for college students, states have begun to alter state rules to allow community college to count towards SNAP work requirements — including in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and New Jersey.⁵⁶ Given the state’s commitment to



addressing college student hunger, New York State should follow these states' example and increase access to food stamps for its college students.

Invest in Campus Childcare

Twenty-three percent of our focus group participants were pregnant or parenting young adults. This number aligns with national data, which shows that one-in-five college students are parents.⁵⁷ For parenting students, navigating the cost of college, housing, and childcare can make a postsecondary education an economic impossibility — not to mention the time demands placed on student parents, who juggle school, parenting, and work to make ends meet. Given that young parents are three times as likely to experience homelessness than their non-parenting peers, it is critical that campuses support parenting students and ensure that the high cost of childcare does not push them towards housing insecurity or homelessness. While New York City recently increased funding for CUNY campus childcare for the first time since the 1980s, moving from \$500,000 to \$900,000, funding is not adequate to meet students' needs, nor has it been baselined, meaning this critical source of aid to CUNY's campus childcare centers can fall vulnerable to budget negotiations each year. Meanwhile, funding from state and federal sources has also not kept pace with the share of student parents enrolled in New York, and in some cases has been cut.⁵⁸ Investing in campus childcare can not only stabilize the economic livelihood of students, but also another generation. Thus, it is critical for New York to increase and baseline campus childcare funding to increase the availability of convenient, high-quality childcare available to the state's sizeable student-parent population.

Simplify and Expand Emergency Aid to Housing-Insecure Students

Many of the young people we spoke to for this project underscored how unanticipated expenses can derail their efforts to persist in school. Increasing the availability of emergency aid can play a critical role in ensuring that a student can navigate financial challenges, such as rent and housing-related costs, medical bills, and other major and unexpected financial costs without having to choose between tuition and making sure their basic needs are being met.

Today, some CUNY and SUNY campuses do offer emergency aid, largely through private foundations funding pilot programs at select campuses.⁵⁹ For SUNY, aid is available at only six of its 64 institutions, and is made available through private, philanthropic investments.⁶⁰ Emergency aid is also limited to certain CUNY campuses, with emergency aid available at only 13 of its 25 campuses, with funding from private foundations.⁶¹ It is critical to ensure that students across all campuses have access to emergency aid, and in order to do so, the state should make investments to institutions, including community colleges, that do not already have funding for this program. To support effective implementation, the national non-profit SchoolHouse Connection issued guidance on best practices, including creating a simple application, marketing the availability of aid in multiple locations (including on classroom syllabuses, in student-facing offices, and in common spaces on campuses), and developing a strategy to ensure emergency aid can be distributed quickly to meet students' pressing needs.⁶²

Create More Paid Internships in Areas of Study and Ensure Set-Asides for Homeless Students

In 2017, 58 percent of CUNY students were Pell Grant recipients, 42 percent had



household incomes less than \$20,000, and 57 percent of freshmen were assigned to some remediation.⁶³ With less than 22 percent of CUNY community college students graduating within three years, it's clear that there is room to better support students on their journey towards a degree and meaningful employment. Roughly 53 percent of CUNY students are working while enrolled in college, yet limited connections are made between students' work experiences and college coursework.⁶⁴

Many students experiencing homelessness are working while they are in school and cannot afford to participate in unpaid internships. Paid internships allow students to learn professional and technical skills in jobs related to their area of study, introduce them to a network of professionals who can provide advice and connections within the field, and ultimately lead to well-paid employment post-graduation. Currently CUNY does offer paid work-based learning opportunities, but in a decentralized and uneven way. Many times, students are not aware that these opportunities may exist on their campus, or how to take advantage of them if they do exist.

CUNY can do more to ensure that these students are connected to valuable paid internships and other work opportunities that put them on the pathway to establishing a meaningful career after college. CUNY can do this by creating paid internships specifically for students experiencing homelessness, and providing additional career counseling and support, especially through the internship and job application process. Both CUNY and the NYC DOE should work to ensure that eligible students in temporary housing are made aware of and provided assistance to apply for the Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), a program that pairs students with employers for a six-week summer internship. Students work twenty-five hours a week for six weeks and are paid minimum wage by the city. Students in temporary housing can apply to the Vulnerable Youth SYEP until age 21,⁶⁵ students in select NYCHA developments can apply until age 24, and CUNY Central has dedicated SYEP slots for students up to the age of 21 years old.⁶⁶ CUNY can also create set-asides for students experiencing homelessness to participate in paid work-based learning opportunities such as the CUNY Service Corps, a program that provides CUNY students with paid work in the public sector, primarily at community-based organizations and government agencies.

Expand CUNY ASAP and ACE Programs and Target Marketing to Students Experiencing Homelessness

The troubling increase in public college tuition and high cost of living in New York City create an even greater hurdle for students pursuing a higher education. Costs beyond tuition, such as textbooks, transportation, housing, and food are often not fully communicated to students. For the students we spoke with in our focus groups, these additional costs can make or break a student's ability to persist in college.

In New York City's public college system, there are several programs that help students afford costs beyond tuition. Research shows these investments improve student persistence and completion. The CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) is an initiative that



helps students earn associate degrees within three years by providing financial, academic, and counseling supports, including waivers for tuition and mandatory fees, MetroCards, and additional financial assistance to cover the cost of textbooks.⁶⁷

Enrollment in CUNY ASAP is strongly associated with increased college completion. A study by MDRC found that students enrolled in CUNY ASAP graduated with an associate's degree at nearly double the rate of their non-ASAP peers.⁶⁸ Today, the ASAP program's three-year graduation rate is 53 percent — more than three times higher than the national urban community college three-year graduation rate of 16 percent, and more than double that of similar CUNY associate degree-seeking students.⁶⁹ The strong returns associated with CUNY ASAP has led to similar models both regionally and across the country, with recent expansions to community colleges in Westchester County and in Ohio. Here in New York City, CUNY also expanded the model to some of the system's four-year colleges through the Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) program. Today, ACE serves students at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Lehman College, and has led to comparable improvements to student retention and completion.⁷⁰

In our focus groups, we talked with students about CUNY ASAP, along with other CUNY student support programs. About two-in-five of our focus group participants (36 percent) were familiar with CUNY ASAP. Those who had accessed ASAP spoke of its utility. "I feel like in college ASAP is one of the best programs anybody can join," one student parent on Staten Island told us. "Unfortunately they are only in the community colleges. If they bring it to the four year colleges, I'd go back to school to purposefully get in that program."

Currently, the cost of ASAP is \$3,900 per student per year, costing approximately \$100 million per year.⁷¹ The cost of the ACE program is similar, at \$4,000 per student per year.⁷² With investments from the Office of the Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity, ASAP was able to expand enrollment from 4,300 in 2014-15 to more than 25,000 students today.⁷³ Given the success of the program, it seems only natural for CUNY to expand this program to serve more of its students. However, without investment from the state, its expansion is limited. Rather than continue to invest in programs such as Excelsior, which are limited in the low-income, non-traditional students they can serve, NYS should transfer its funding to the CUNY ASAP and ACE programs. In fact, NYS should contribute at least \$25 million to grow the ASAP program and another \$25 million to expand ACE across all CUNY senior colleges.

In addition to expanding these programs, the city, state, and CUNY must ensure these programs are marketed to housing-insecure students, including in youth shelters, supportive housing programs targeting young adults, and shorter-term housing provided through DYCD, where efforts are already underway to increase access to city services beyond housing supports.⁷⁴



CONCLUSION

Across the country, an increasingly diverse group of students are enrolling in college, and bringing with them a variety of life experiences — from students raising children, to first-generation students, to working students who struggle with costs beyond tuition, such as textbooks and transportation. As colleges and universities work to create campus climates that better serve today’s students, it is critical that campus leaders and policymakers understand how many students deal with homelessness while navigating college. Moreover, as research and conversations with young adults reveal, students who have unstable housing while in college are often at the intersection of multiple identities and experiences, including being a queer or trans student, a student parent, and/or identifying as Black or Brown.⁷⁵ Thus, conversations around equity in postsecondary education must also acknowledge the reality of homelessness among today’s college students. The economic stability and livelihood of thousands of New York’s college students depends on it.



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APPENDIX

NATIONAL NUMBERS ON YOUNG ADULT HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

<i>Homelessness</i>	
Source	Finding
Morton, Matthew, A. Dworsky, and G.M. Samuels. (2017). Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America. National Estimates.	One in 10 young adults ages 18-25 will experience homelessness within a year (N= 26,161 individuals from nationally representative phone survey).
Goldrick-Rab, Sara, V. Coca, C. Baker-Smith, E. Looker, and T. Williams. (2019). College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report.	14 percent of four-year university students experience homeless, while 18 percent of community college students experience homelessness (N= 86,000 college students who took an online survey).
SchoolHouse Connection. (2018). Youth Homelessness and Higher Education: An Analysis of FAFSA Data. Retrieved from: https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/An-Analysis-of-FAFSA-Data.pdf	32,739 FAFSA applicants from the 2016-2017 cycle were determined to be unaccompanied homeless youth.
Morton, Matthew, A. Dworsky, and G.M. Samuels. (2017). Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America. National Estimates.	LGBTQ youth had a 120 percent higher risk for homelessness when compared to youth who identified as cisgender and heterosexual. (N= 26,161 individuals from nationally representative phone survey).
Morton, Matthew, A. Dworsky, and G.M. Samuels. (2017). Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America. National Estimates.	Black or African American youth had a 83 percent higher risk for homelessness when compared to youth of other races (N= 26,161 individuals from nationally representative phone survey).
Morton, Matthew, A. Dworsky, and G.M. Samuels. (2017). Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America. National Estimates.	Nearly 1 in 4 young black men between the ages of 18-25 who identified as LGBTQ reported homelessness (N= 26,161 individuals from nationally representative phone survey).
<i>Housing Insecurity</i>	
Source	Finding
Goldrick-Rab, Sara, V. Coca, C. Baker-Smith, E. Looker, and T. Williams. (2019). College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report.	48 percent of students at four-year universities are housing-insecure, while 60 percent of young adults at community colleges experienced housing insecurity (N= 86,000 college students who took an online survey).



NEW YORK NUMBERS ON YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSECURITY

<i>Homelessness</i>	
Source	Finding
Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence. (2018). New York City Youth Count 2018. Retrieved from: https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/NYC-Youth-Count-Findings-2018.pdf	The 2018 Youth Count found that on a given night (January 22, 2018), there were more than 7,374 homeless youth under the age of 24 in New York City. Of those, 220 were unsheltered.
Goldrick-Rab, Sara, V. Coca, C. Baker-Smith, and E. Looker. (2019). City University of New York #RealCollege Survey.	14 percent of CUNY undergraduates surveyed experienced homelessness within the last year (N=21,665 undergraduates)
<i>Housing Insecurity</i>	
Source	Finding
Goldrick-Rab, Sara, V. Coca, C. Baker-Smith, and E. Looker. (2019). City University of New York #RealCollege Survey.	55 percent of CUNY students surveyed experience housing insecurity within the last year (N=21,665 undergraduates).
Tsui, Emma, N. Freudenberg, L. Manzo, H. Jones, A. Kwan, and M. Gagnon. (2011). Housing Instability at CUNY: Results from a Survey of CUNY Undergraduate Students. Retrieved from: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Centers/Center percent20for percent20Human percent20Environments/cunyhousinginstability.pdf	The proportion of CUNY students living in a shelter is three times higher than that of the overall population of New Yorkers living in shelter (1.2 percent vs. 0.5 percent).



PROTOCOL FOR YOUNG INVINCIBLES FOCUS GROUPS ON HOUSING INSECURITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Your Future Goals

1. What's the first word that comes to mind when thinking about your college and career options?
Probes:
 - What words come to mind when you think about yourself and what you want to do in the next 2-5 years?
2. Thank you for sharing. There are many reasons why young adults make the decision to enroll in college or in a job-training program or not. On the wall is a list of reasons that affect young adults when deciding to go to college. We are giving you three stickers. Please put the stickers on the factors that most impact your college and career plans.

Factors:

- A. I need to work to stay eligible for my housing program.
 - B. I need to work to stay eligible for my job training program.
 - C. I need to stay home and support my family.
 - D. I don't want to take on student debt.
 - E. It's hard for students like me to get financial support to attend college.
 - F. I need to get my high school diploma/equivalency first.
 - G. I don't know how I'd afford basic costs like food and rent if I attended college.
 - H. The job I want does not need a college degree.
 - I. Few people in my life have attended college before.
 - J. I'm too stressed to attend college.
 - K. I don't think I can handle the classwork.
 - L. I want to decide what I want to do for a job before going to college.
 - M. I need to go to college so I can make more money.
 - N. Going to college will give me the skills I need.
 - O. My friends are attending college.
 - P. Going to college will help my family.
 - Q. Going to college will help me meet new people, and engage in new social settings.
 - R. Going to college will teach me new ways to think, and will expose me to new ideas.
 - S. I want to be involved in extracurriculars and student clubs.
 - T. College will help me become the person I want to be.
2. (continued). It looks like many of you indicated that X, Y, Z are important factors when you think about college and careers. What are some of the reasons for choosing those answers?
 3. I want you to think about colleges or job-training programs you might have considered attending. Where did you get information about these programs? Which were the most helpful resources for you? Were any not helpful?

Probes:

- My high school teachers
- My high school counselors



- My parents
- My relatives
- My friends
- My boss
- My coworkers
- Case managers
- Staff working at colleges
- Ads (on the subway, online, on TV)
- College resource books
- Searching for information online

3a. Follow up: Why did you ultimately decide — or not decide — to enroll in college or a job-training program?

Paying for College

4. There are several programs to help people pay for college and certificate programs. Some of these are national, and some are programs are specifically for people living in New York. I am going to ask you to raise your hand for a program that you've heard of.

- Pell Grants
- The New York Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)
- The Excelsior Scholarship
- CUNY ASAP
- CUNY SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge)
- CUNY College Discovery
- SUNY Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)
- New York State's Higher Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP)
- SUNY and CUNY food pantries
- Single Stop

4a. Follow up: Has anyone used any of these programs?

5. We know that a person's identity and life experiences can affect their desire or ability to attend college or prepare for a meaningful career. Is there a part of your identity or experiences that impacts your decision to attend a college or career program?

Probe:

- That might include being...
 - An immigrant
 - A woman
 - A person of color
 - Transgender
 - Someone with disabilities
 - Someone who identifies as LGBTQI



- Someone with experience in the criminal justice system
- Someone with experience in the foster care system
- Someone who has not had the support of their parents
- A parent
- A caretaker (someone who takes care of their siblings, for instance)

Your Housing Experience

6. Now, I want to talk specifically about how your housing situation has influenced how you think and prepare for college and careers. In what ways has your housing situation impacted your ability to attend and complete a college or job-training program?

Probe:

- Are there any other rules or complications related to your housing situation that prevent you from pursuing education? This could be a curfew set by your housing provider. It could also mean having concerns about your safety.
7. What do you wish people knew about the challenges of unstable housing and homelessness when pursuing a college degree?
8. Is there anything else you think we should discuss today?



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