

OPINION

What if schools could prevent student homelessness?

How early intervention in Boston is stabilizing families and improving student success rates.

By **Marty Martinez and Gautam N. Yadama** Updated May 25, 2026, 6:00 a.m.



Students at Dearborn STEM Academy applauded during a press conference held to discuss high school graduation rates in Roxbury on March 9.
JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

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Last year, 5,405 of the 48,159 students enrolled in Boston Public Schools experienced homelessness. That's 1 in 9 students in Boston, a rate that has climbed steadily since 2021.

While some of these students and their families were unsheltered or living in hotels, most were [living in shelters or doubled up in crowded homes](#), creating the daily instability of homelessness that disrupts learning, strains families, and widens inequities. It is well-documented that students experiencing homelessness have [higher rates of absenteeism](#), [lower graduation rates](#), and [lower course grades](#) than those with stable housing.

But what if the public programs could step in earlier and prevent a family from becoming homeless in the first place?

As part of a research-practice partnership, Boston College School of Social Work and United Way of Massachusetts Bay joined Boston Public Schools and FamilyAid to study the Early Homelessness Intervention Program, or EHIP, a partnership that was originally launched in 2019 to help stabilize families before they reach crisis and prevent homelessness.

The program identifies families at risk of homelessness in Boston Public Schools and connects them with case management support, public benefits such as housing and child-care vouchers, housing search and placement, and short-term flexible financial assistance to better support housing stability, parent and child well-being, and educational success. Since 2019, the program has served more than 10,000 children and parents, representing 3,000 families, with more than 1,300 of these families moving on to more stable housing.

[The report](#), released on April 10, provides evidence on the value of the EHIP program using data collected from March 2022 to May 2023.

The research showed:

- Housing stability increased among participating families, from 49 percent to 84 percent who were living in their own homes.
- Chronic absenteeism among participating students declined significantly, from 61 percent to 52 percent.
- Parents reported improvements in physical and mental health, including reduced anxiety and depression.

The research confirms what we've seen on the ground in Boston and other Gateway Cities such as Lynn and Lawrence: When schools and housing providers work together to ensure access to essential needs, families can stabilize and children are better supported to succeed.

The study also highlights a key systems challenge: Many families are not identified early enough to receive help. Because most children facing housing instability in the city attend public schools, school staff are often the first defense to recognize the warning signs. But more than 80 percent of school-based staff reported difficulty identifying students at risk of homelessness, pointing to the need for better screening and stronger coordination between schools, housing providers, and social services.

The study found that additional resources are required to ensure family access to safe, stable, and decent housing, including more affordable housing, increased investment in rental assistance and housing vouchers, expanded coordination of strategy and infrastructure to facilitate family access to benefits, and more funding to support the staffing of school-housing partnership programming.

The stakes are high for these students. Look no further than the 2025 standardized test scores of Boston Public Schools students to see the stark impact of instability: BPS students experiencing homelessness scored 10 to 15 percent lower than students in families with low incomes and as much as 45 to 50 percent lower than students in families without low incomes.

These are families who are struggling every day to make ends meet and are one unexpected financial disruption away from crisis and losing their housing. And too often the systems only step in to help once they've reached that breaking point.

As our communities face unprecedented uncertainty and strains on the safety net so many rely on, understanding the services and support networks that keep families housed is more critical than ever. The findings show that these approaches work, and together, policy makers, nonprofits, and education leaders must find ways to scale them with urgency.