



BOSTON COLLEGE

School of Social Work

School-housing partnership achievement and challenges in Boston, MA:

*Key insights from participant, educator, and
administrative data*

REPORT 2026

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Executive Summary

Family homelessness is on the rise across the United States, and it is an especially critical problem in Massachusetts – home to roughly 1 in every 10 families experiencing homelessness nationwide, according the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2024 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.

In the City of Boston, 3,384 persons in families were counted as experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2025.ⁱ This number does not include many more children who are living in doubled up situations due to economic hardship. In School Year 2024-25, 5,405 students at Boston Public Schools (BPS) were identified as homeless, a number that has been increasing as a percentage of the total enrolled student population in recent years (see Figure 1, page 5).ⁱⁱ These high rates of family homelessness have implications for children's educational experiences. Homelessness is a traumatic experience that interferes with child wellbeing and has been shown to be associated with lower attendance, test scores, and graduation rates.

Given the link between homelessness and academic outcomes, BPS and FamilyAid, a Boston-based social service provider, have partnered to implement the **Early Homelessness Intervention and Prevention program (EHIP)**. Designed as an “upstream” primary prevention strategy, EHIP targets families at risk of homelessness and connects them with services to stabilize housing and promote parent and child wellbeing and educational success. In some cases, this has included facilitating access to housing vouchers from the Boston Housing Authority.

Since 2019, when EHIP launched, FamilyAid has served nearly 3,000 BPS families – more than 10,000 children and parents – from more than 100 schools. FamilyAid and other housing providers have helped more than 1,300 of these families secure new permanent housing.

United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB) and Boston College School of Social Work (BCSSW) have a research-practice partnership that aims to improve the quality and use of research at the intersection of housing and education. This partnership joined with BPS and FamilyAid to study the EHIP program.





Over the last six years, our collaborative research has included:

1. Surveys and interviews with EHIP participants,
2. Surveys of BPS staff, and
3. Analyses of BPS administrative data to address the following research questions:
 - How did families' housing stability, wellbeing, and academic outcomes change after participating in the EHIP program?
 - What were parent and educator experiences with EHIP?

In the context of increasing interest in partnerships between schools and housing agencies,ⁱⁱⁱ this research provides the most comprehensive evidence to date about the potential impact of such partnerships in meeting the housing and educational needs of students facing housing instability. The unique and novel nature of these findings could inform the development, implementation, and refinement of school-housing partnerships both locally and nationally.

Percentage of BPS Students Recorded as Experiencing Homelessness

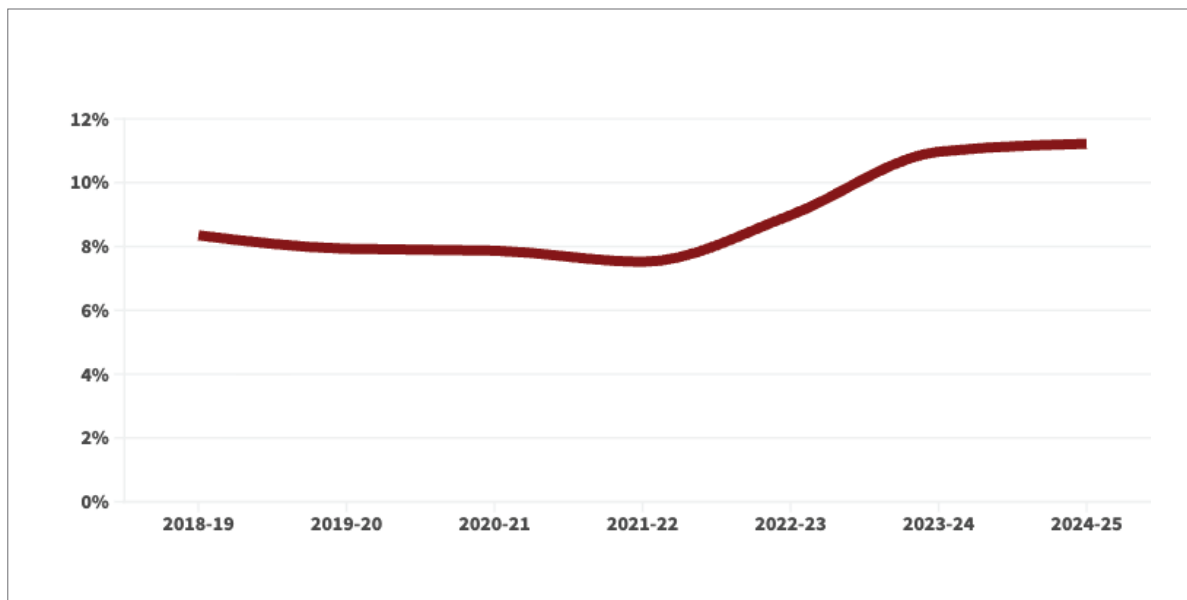


Figure 1.



*10th Grade BPS Students Meeting Expectations on 2025
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Tests*

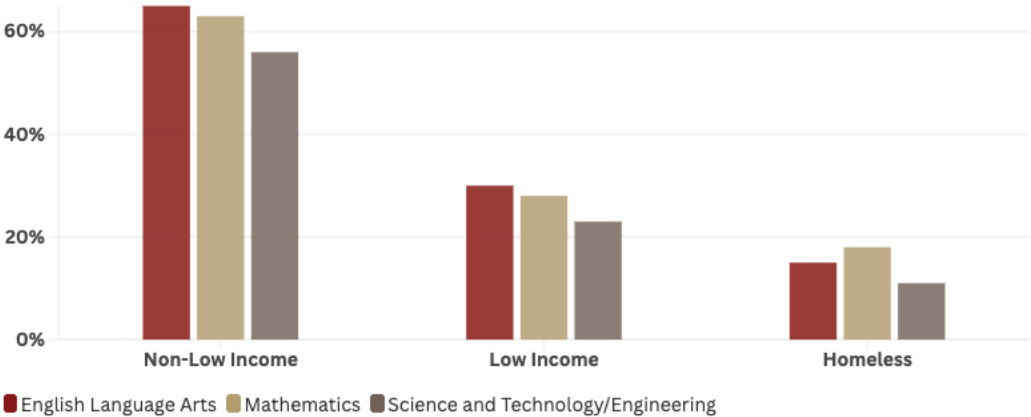


Figure 2.

BPS-FamilyAid Partnership Achievements and Challenges

How did families' housing stability, wellbeing, and academic outcomes change after participating in the EHIP program?

Families who participated in the EHIP program exhibited:

1. Improved housing stability and access to higher quality housing (*Key Finding #1*).
2. Higher levels of parent wellbeing (*Key Finding #2*).
3. Trends showing improved child wellbeing and academic performance; more research is needed to further understand impacts (*Key Finding #3*).
4. Reduced chronic absenteeism and improved overall attendance (*Key Finding #4*).
5. However, families face persistent challenges, including low levels of food and financial security and modest levels of social support (*Key Finding #5*).

What were parent and educator experiences with EHIP?

Parents referred to EHIP for housing vouchers shared that:

1. They appreciated how program staff connected them with housing stability resources, though some desired improved communication (*Key Finding #6*).
2. Housing stabilization positively impacted their children, though some navigated challenges in using housing vouchers that were likely outside the control of the school district and housing agencies (*Key Finding #7*).

BPS staff designated as homeless liaisons shared that:

1. They experienced challenges in identifying students experiencing housing hardship (*Key Finding #8*).

2. Systematic screening could improve identification of students experiencing housing hardship in the school setting (*Key Finding #9*).

Additional resources are required to ensure family access to safe, stable, and decent housing. These include:



More affordable housing.



Rental assistance, including housing vouchers.



Coordinating strategy and infrastructure to facilitate family access to benefits.



Funding to support the staffing of school-housing partnership programming.



Innovation to improve school capacity to identify students experiencing housing hardship.

There is a crucial need for state and local coordination to address homelessness amidst insufficient housing assistance and the recent nationwide rise in housing unaffordability.



*EHIP is a notable
success story.*

Since 2019



FAMILYAID

..... served



3,000

BOSTON
PUBLIC SCHOOL
FAMILIES

10,000

CHILDREN + PARENTS

..... from



more than

100
SCHOOLS



1,300

secured
NEW PERMANENT
HOUSING



Main Report





Background

Many children in the United States experience family homelessness (see Figure 3 for definitions, page 12). On a single night in January 2024, approximately 33% of the United States population living in shelters or in public places were people in families with children. Moreover, the number of families experiencing homelessness increased by 50% between 2020 and 2024.^{iv} Estimates using American Community Survey data suggest that, on any given night in 2019, an additional 3.7 million families lived in doubled up households under financial duress.^v

Family homelessness is a critical problem in Massachusetts and particularly in the City of Boston. In School Year (SY) 2024-25, more than 10% of students at Boston Public Schools (BPS) were recorded as experiencing homelessness (see Figure 1, page 5).

It is well-documented that child homelessness is associated with adverse educational experiences and outcomes.^{vi} In the United States, in SY 2022-23, the four-year graduation rate was 87% for students overall^{vii} and 69% for students who experienced homelessness.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, children experiencing homelessness have, on average, higher rates of absenteeism and lower course grades than their peers who have stable housing.^{ix} Lower educational attainment, in turn, has substantial negative impacts on health over the life course^x and lifetime earnings.^{xi}

In 2025, the percentages of BPS students experiencing homelessness who met or exceeded 10th grade assessment expectations in English Language Arts (15%), Mathematics (18%), and Science and Technology/Engineering (11%) were approximately 10 to 15 percentage points lower than students in families with low incomes, and 45 to 50 percentage points lower than students in families without low incomes (see Figure 2, page 6).^{xii}

The link between homelessness and educational experiences highlights the importance of preventing and addressing family homelessness. Amidst persistent housing assistance shortfalls, and an increasing number of housing cost-burdened households across the United States,^{xiii} there is a crucial need for state and local policy and program coordination to better address the structural determinants of homelessness such as high rent levels^{xiv} and social exclusion.^{xv} Cross-system coordination efforts, such as collaborations between schools and housing organizations, have potential to leverage the resources from multiple systems of care and are systemic solutions that could better meet the needs of students experiencing housing hardship.^{xvi}



Program Description

The Early Homelessness Intervention and Prevention program (EHIP) is an innovative joint school-housing effort in Boston that was first implemented in 2019. The program connects BPS families facing housing hardship with services to facilitate housing stability, parent and child wellbeing, and educational success.

School staff designated as “homeless liaisons” identify families at risk of or experiencing homelessness and refer them to FamilyAid for individualized case management and collaborative planning (see Figure 4, page 13). Families are offered a range of services including short-term financial assistance; benefit application support; linkage with other service providers; housing application support; and housing search assistance. FamilyAid continues to support families while they transition into permanent housing.

During the 2020-21 academic school year, BPS and FamilyAid began utilizing their existing partnership to distribute housing choice vouchers specifically designated by the Boston Housing Authority for BPS families experiencing homelessness. Approximately 600 BPS families were referred for Original Section 8 Vouchers in SY 2020-21, 300 for Emergency Housing Vouchers and City Funded Vouchers in SY 2021-22, and 400 for Housing for Education Vouchers in SY 2022-23.

To date, the program has served close to 3,000 BPS families – more than 10,000 children and parents – from more than 100 schools. FamilyAid and other housing providers have helped more than 1,300 of these families secure new permanent housing.

Definitions

Family homelessness:

Lacking “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” and living: in shelter; in public or private places not meant for human sleeping; at motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds because of no alternative adequate option; and doubled up under financial duress^{xvii}

Doubled up under financial duress:

Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason

At risk of homelessness:

Expected loss of stable, independent housing that is rented or owned as part of a household

Homeless liaisons:

Social workers, family liaisons, and other school staff designated as responsible for identifying and supporting students who experience homelessness, as required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Figure 3.





EHIP Program Activities

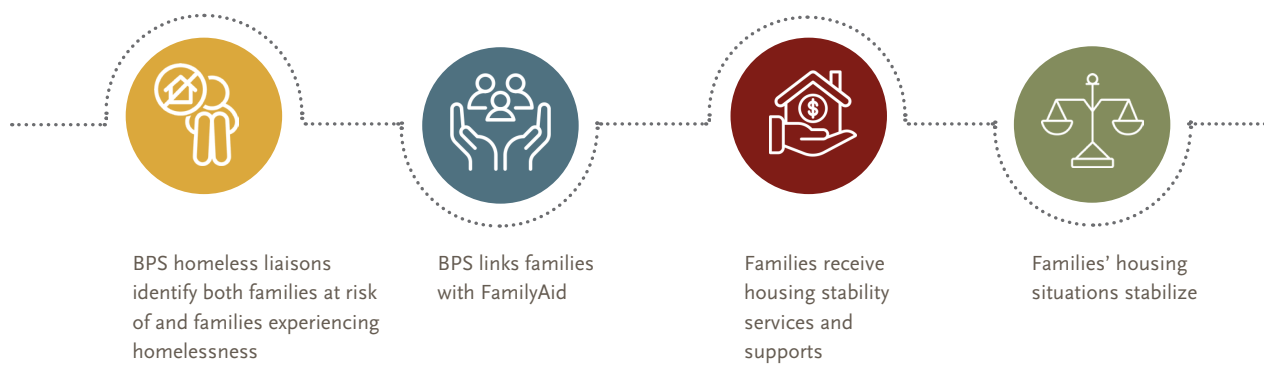


Figure 4



“

I think the change in our home helped a lot. The previous house, we were very worried [about] how long we could stay there, but now we know we have this home to live in.

*Parent EHIP participant
reflecting on housing stabilization*

He's doing amazing. The day I told him...the day that I showed him our apartment, he just cried and cried. He was so happy. He loves that he has his own space. He loves that he has his own house. He loves everything.

*Parent EHIP participant
reflecting on child's experience*

How did families' housing stability, wellbeing, and academic outcomes change after participating in the EHIP program?





OUR APPROACH (P.17)

SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES (P.18)

WHO PARTICIPATED (P.19)

WHAT WE LEARNED (P.21)



Our approach

Between March 2022 and May 2023, BPS homeless liaisons identified and referred approximately 461 BPS families experiencing housing hardship to FamilyAid for tailored case management and housing assistance.

A BCSSW research assistant attempted to contact these families to invite one adult member to participate in the study. Participants were required to (1) have a child at BPS, (2) speak either English or Spanish, and (3) have access to an internet-connect device for informed consent and data entry.

Upon referral and then 1 and 2 years later, parents enrolled in the study were phone surveyed about their housing, their financial resources, their well-being, and one child's wellbeing and educational experiences (this child had to attend BPS and was designated the "focal" child).

The core study sample consisted of the 116 people who responded at least partially to the first survey. In addition, we collected BPS administrative data for 196 students in this core sample of households that gave consent for this data to be shared.

Our analysis examined changes over time, using mixed effects regression models to adjust for differences in respondent characteristics (preferred language, gender, marital status, employment status, race/ethnicity), household characteristics (size, food security level, social support level, anyone with a disability), and, where relevant, child-related characteristics (age, gender, English language learner status, and Special Education Status). Unless otherwise noted, the differences we describe were statistically significant at the 5% level.





Supplementary analyses

We also analyzed BPS administrative data to compare outcomes for similar groups of BPS students who were and were not referred to FamilyAid for EHIP and housing vouchers (see Figure 5).

To understand the effects of referral to EHIP, we compared outcomes for 154 students who were referred to EHIP during SY 2021-22 with 245 similar students at risk of homelessness who were referred to BPS's Homeless Education Resource Network (HERN) for assistance, but were not referred to EHIP during that school year. Similarly, to understand the effects of referral to FamilyAid for housing vouchers, we compared outcomes for 182 students experiencing homelessness who were referred to FamilyAid for housing vouchers during SY 2021-22 with 160 students experiencing homelessness who were referred to HERN, but not referred to FamilyAid for housing vouchers during that school year.

Results from the analysis comparing students who were referred to FamilyAid for housing vouchers with students who were referred to HERN, but not to FamilyAid for housing vouchers are not included here, and will be forthcoming in future publications.

In conducting these comparisons, we used inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW) to account for differences in the characteristics of students referred to EHIP (or vouchers) and comparison group students that may be related to their academic outcomes. The characteristics we were able to account for using this approach included age, grade level, gender, race, presence of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) plan, English language learner status, and number of siblings.



Figure 5



Who participated

The core study sample who participated in our surveys looked very similar to all families referred to EHIP over the study period.

Survey respondents were predominantly female (93%) and single (i.e., 57% never married, 25% divorced/separated, and 3% widowed) (see Table 1). More than half identified as Hispanic (56%), and approximately a third were non-Hispanic Black (34%).¹ Most had a high school level of education (41%), but many also had some college experience (22%), or an Associate's or Bachelor's degree (19%). Upon enrollment, 30% worked part-time, and another 24% worked full-time. Nearly 25% had experienced a job loss within the past 12 months. Almost half reported a disability in the household (46%).

On average, families had between two and three children, and close to 40% of the “focal” children included in the study had a Special Education Status at BPS.

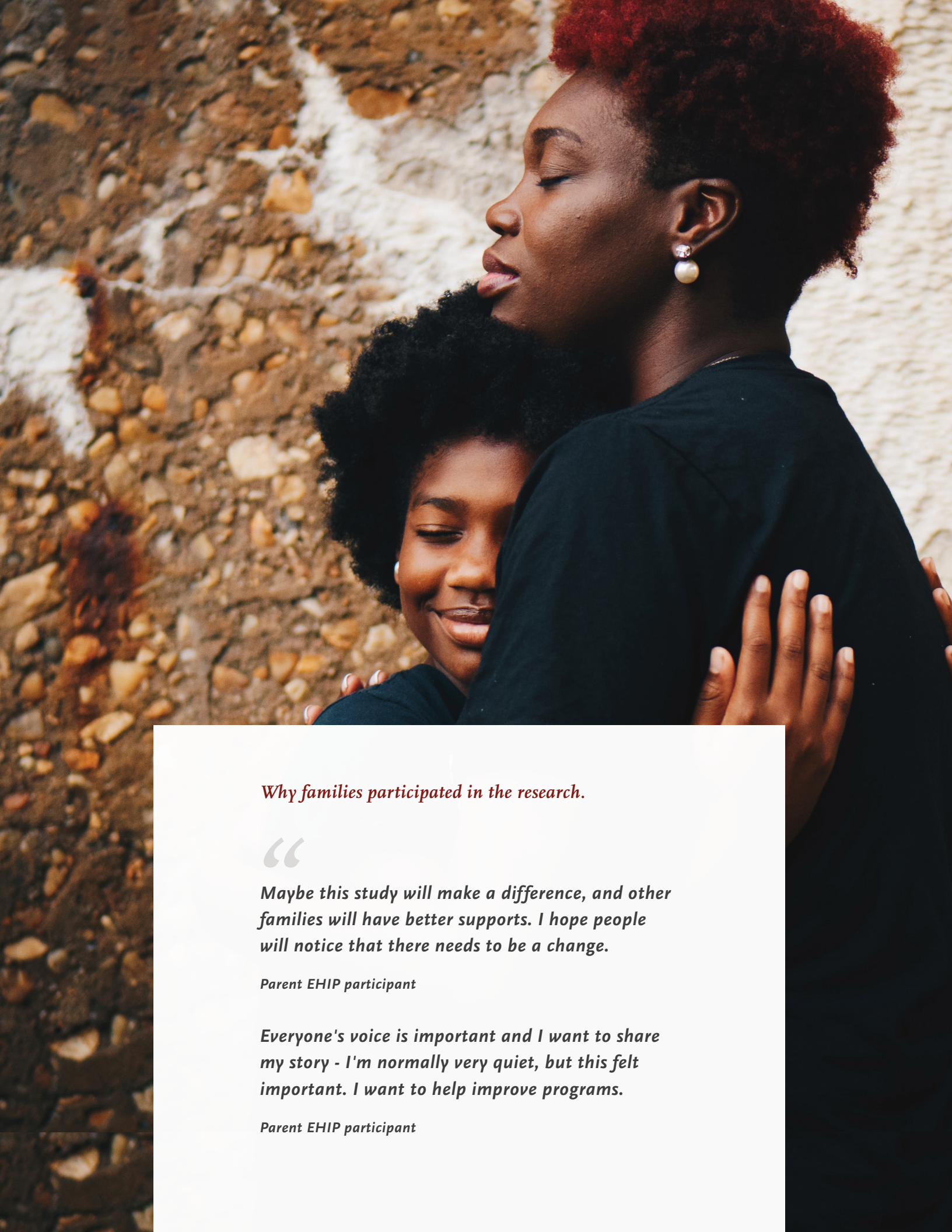
Survey respondents had experienced, on average, two Adverse Childhood Experiences, such as abuse, frequent moves, separation from family or a caregiver, foster care, receipt of public assistance, or living in a shelter.

Survey Respondent Sample at a Glance (N=116)

CHARACTERISTIC	LARGEST GROUP	% OF SAMPLE	INSIGHT
 Gender	Female	93%	Skewed female
 Education	At least high school	82%	Well-educated
 Marital status	Not married	85%	Predominantly single
 Racial identity	Hispanic	56%	> 1/2 were Hispanic
 Working status	Part-time or more	54%	Majority worked
 Reason for seeking help	Falling behind on rent	42%	Cost burdened

Table 1.

¹Percentage of those for whom we had racial/ethnic data. 16% (N=18) of respondents were missing this information.



Why families participated in the research.

“

Maybe this study will make a difference, and other families will have better supports. I hope people will notice that there needs to be a change.

Parent EHIP participant

Everyone's voice is important and I want to share my story - I'm normally very quiet, but this felt important. I want to help improve programs.

Parent EHIP participant



What we learned

Key finding #1

EHIP families experienced increases in housing stability and quality.

Two years after referral to EHIP, higher percentages of study participants were living in their own rented or owned apartment, had no reported moves in the past six months, and were feeling confident in their housing plans (see Figure 6). Further, there were decreases in the share of participants feeling stressed about their housing and who said that housing disruptions in the past six months had impacted their own or their child's activities.

Importantly, EHIP participants' housing stability, defined as living in one's own rented or owned home, significantly increased from 49% to 84% over the two-year study period. EHIP families also experienced significantly fewer housing quality problems as measured by a modified version of the Housing Quality Scale.^{xviii}

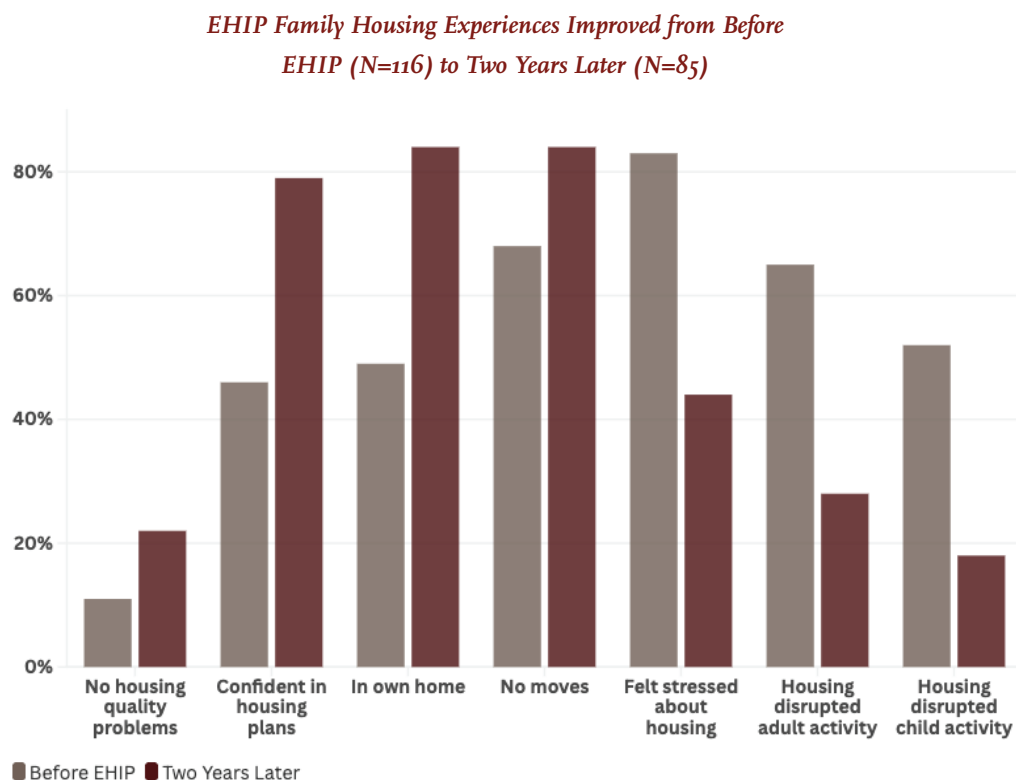


Figure 6

Key finding #2

EHIP parents experienced improvements in wellbeing.

Two years after referral to EHIP, greater percentages of EHIP parents reported having good physical health and high psychological wellbeing, as measured by the Measure of Psychological Well-being^{xix} (see Figure 7 below). Further, anxiety, as measured by the Generalized Anxiety Disorder -7 Scale,^{xx} and depression, as measured by a modified Center for Epidemiological Studies Scale of Depression,^{xxi} decreased among EHIP parents after participating in the program.²

Further, we found evidence that improved housing stability was linked to improved parental mental health. In particular, as households moved to stable housing, they experienced significantly lower parental depression and anxiety (measured by the scales mentioned above but re-scaled to a 0-100 range, see Figure 8).

Reductions in EHIP Parents' Depression and Anxiety Scores as They Moved from Unstable to Stable Housing

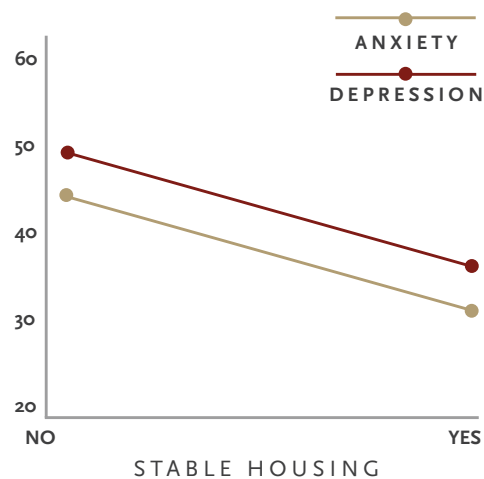


Figure 8

EHIP Parent Wellbeing Improved from Before EHIP (N=116) to Two Years Later (N=85)

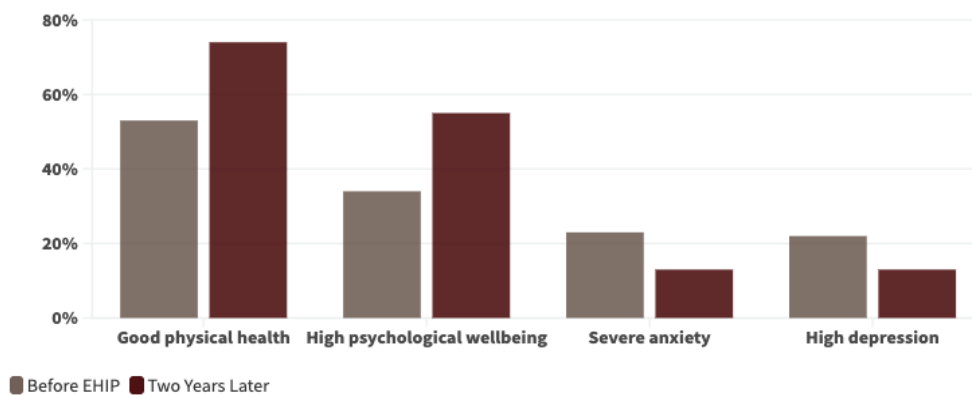


Figure 7

²The regression models used the continuous anxiety and depression scores as the outcomes.

Key finding #3

We found trends showing improved wellbeing and academic performance among children in EHIP families, but more research is needed to further understand these relationships.

As reported by their parents, children in households participating in EHIP showed improvements in selected learning behaviors included in the Family-School Relationships Survey^{xxii} (see Figure 9). Further, children experienced reductions in school transport problems and reduced internalizing behaviors (i.e., emotional distress), as measured by the internalizing subscales on the Pediatric Symptom Checklist-17.^{xxiii} These trends were all in the expected direction, but were not statistically significant, potentially due to the limited sample size at follow-up and the relatively low frequency of some of these outcomes (e.g. child internalizing behaviors).

Data on academic performance for EHIP participants comes from three sources: core study participant surveys, BPS administrative data on the core sample, and supplementary analyses of BPS administrative data. The survey and administrative measures may capture slightly different academic performance constructs.

Large portions of parents shared in surveys that their children exhibited good, very good, or excellent academic performance (labeled as “Good academics” in Figure 9), both before EHIP and two years later.

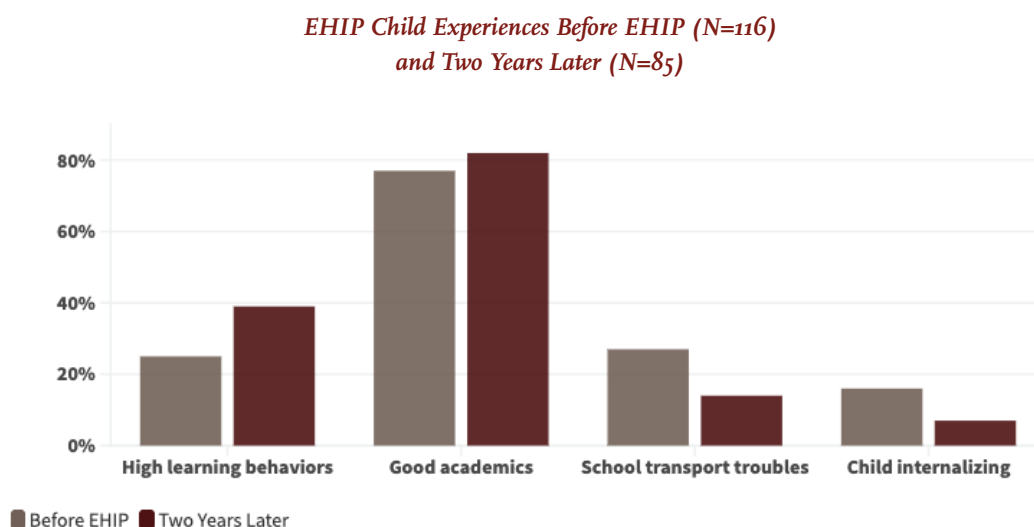


Figure 9



We found no statistically significant changes in scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests among children in our core study sample over the two-year study period. These tests aim to assess mastery of curriculum content, such as in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

In our supplementary analyses, higher shares of students who were referred to EHIP in the 2021-22 academic year met expectations on the MCAS

English Language Arts and Mathematics exams in the subsequent academic year than students in the comparison group, but these differences were not statistically significant (see Figure 10).

Both BPS administrative data analyses were based on the relatively small subset of students who were in grades that completed the test, which may have limited our ability to find statistically significant differences.

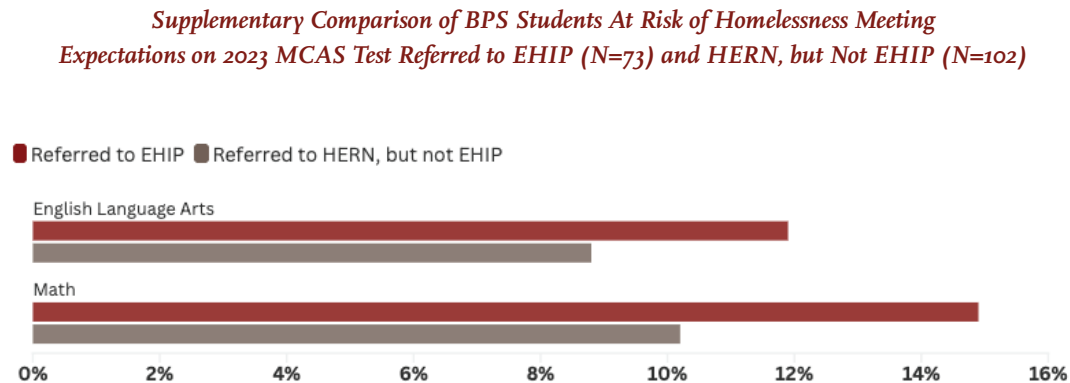


Figure 10

Key finding #4

Students in EHIP families experienced reduced chronic absenteeism over time. There was also some evidence of improved overall school attendance.

Data on attendance for EHIP participants comes from three sources: core study participant surveys, BPS administrative data on the core sample, and supplementary analyses of BPS administrative data. All three sources point towards reduced absenteeism among EHIP participants.

For example, upon referral, EHIP survey participants reported that the focal child missed, on average, 3.1 days in the past 30 days (see Figure 11). Two years later, this was significantly reduced to 1.7 days.

In the BPS administrative data, we did not observe any significant change in attendance rates for our core study sample (see Figure 12). However, rates of chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more school days,^{xxiv} declined significantly among children participating in EHIP from 61% to 52% (see Figure 12). This suggests that gains were largely driven by shifting students' attendance from below to above the chronic absenteeism threshold.

Absences in Past 30 days, Before EHIP (N=109) and Two Years Later (N=84)

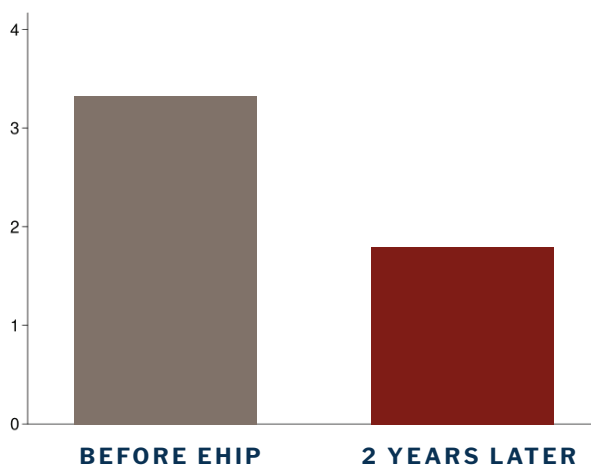


Figure 11

Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Rates, Before EHIP (N=168) and Two Years Later (N=152)

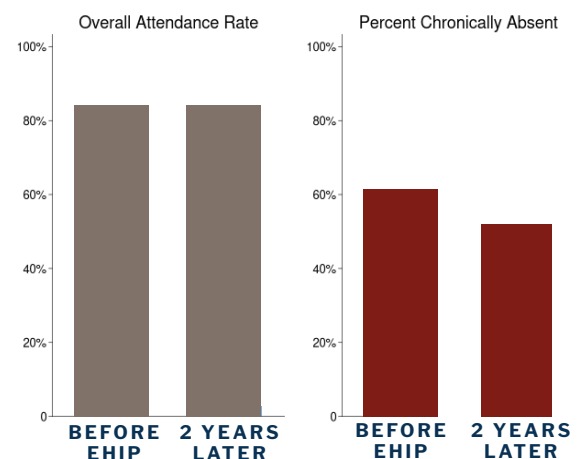


Figure 12



Lastly, our supplementary analyses found that students in families at risk of homelessness who were referred to EHIP had, on average, a statistically significant 5 percentage point increase in their attendance rate in the following

school year relative to the comparison group of characteristically similar students who were referred to the Homeless Education Resource Network (HERN), but not EHIP (see Figure 13).

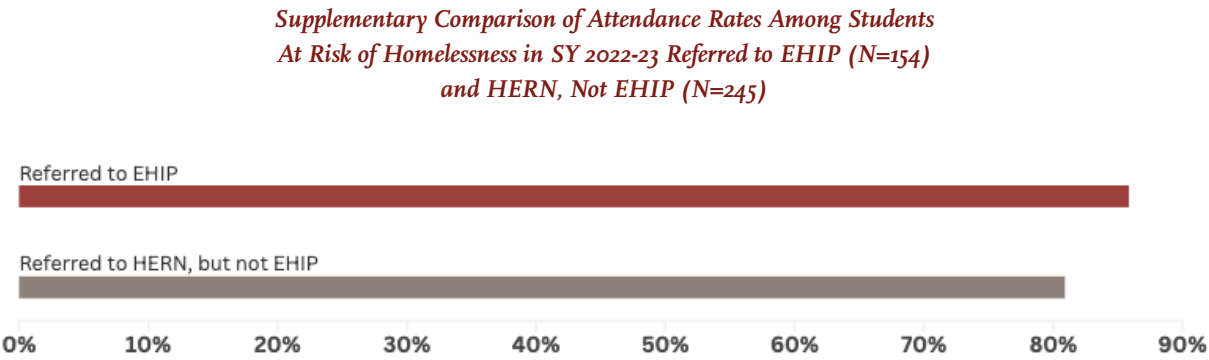


Figure 13

Key finding #5

EHIP families continued to experience low levels of financial and food security and moderate levels of access to social support; some also expressed concern about their future housing stability.

Despite evidence that EHIP participants experienced improvements in housing stability and quality, parent and child wellbeing, school attendance, and chronic absenteeism, families continued to experience high levels of financial and food insecurity and modest levels of social support. Two years after referral to EHIP, only 14% of families could pay for an unexpected emergency \$500 expense from savings; most commonly, families said they would have to borrow from family or friends (49%), and one quarter said they did not know or refused to respond. Further, food insecurity remained high among EHIP participants over the study period. Approximately 61% of study respondents reported that they experienced low or very low food security two years after referral to EHIP, compared to 55% upon referral (see Figure 14).

Such persistent financial precarity is concerning, especially in the context of moderate levels of social support. At the two-year mark, only 38% of study participants reported that they could count on someone for a place to live, similar to the share upon enrollment in EHIP (43%).

The percentage with access to a \$200 loan increased slightly (64% v. 72%), while the percentage with access to emergency childcare remained steady at 56-57% over the study period.

At the two-year survey point, when asked if there was anything else they would like to share about their housing situation, some EHIP families shared concerns about their future housing stability.

These findings highlight the fact that, despite some promising evidence linking EHIP to improved housing, education, and wellbeing outcomes, many families who face housing challenges face ongoing economic and social precarity. Taken together, these findings suggest that a relatively short-term, and low-intensity intervention like EHIP may need to be paired with more robust and broader policy and programmatic initiatives that can support family housing stability, economic security, and wellbeing over the longer term.

Percentage of EHIP Families Experiencing Food Insecurity and Access to Social Support Before EHIP (N=116) and Two Years Later (N=85)

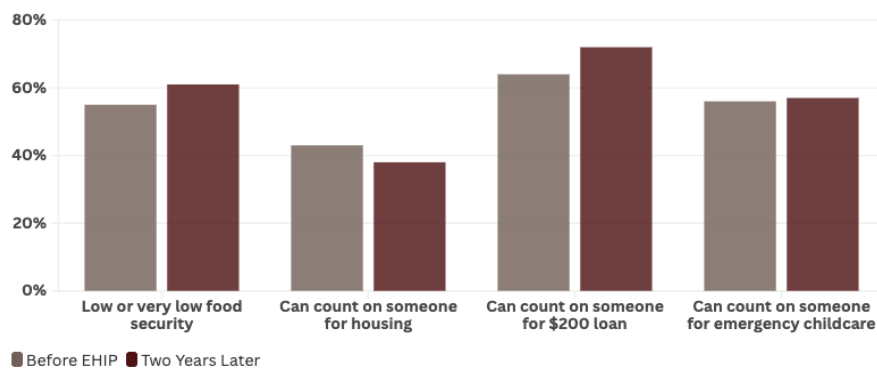


Figure 14



“

We're about to be homeless again soon. I wish I was never in this situation. I just, I don't know. It's very stressful...

Parent EHIP participant

What were parent and educator experiences with EHIP?





OUR APPROACH (P.31)

WHAT WE LEARNED (P.32)



Our approach

Between September 2021 and February 2022, BPS homeless liaisons referred 240 families to FamilyAid for housing vouchers distributed via EHIP.

We recruited 11 of these families to pilot the English version of the telephone survey prior to implementation for the main study. Approximately one year later, 9 of these 11 adults participated in 45-minute semi-structured virtual interviews that sought to understand families' housing and program experiences during the previous year.

Separately, in June 2022, to gain insight into the functioning of EHIP, we invited all 186 BPS homeless liaisons to respond to a 10-minute, self-administered, confidential survey.

Our analysis focused on questions related to:

1. The strategies liaisons use to identify students experiencing housing hardship;
2. The challenges liaisons face in identifying such students; and
3. Potential improvements in processes for identifying homeless students.

51 liaisons responded to the survey, 42 completed all of the above-described questions.



They paid the realtors fee, they paid the security deposit. You know, they followed up weekly checking in, stuff like that. So, they were very helpful!

Parent interview participant

Sept. 2021 - Feb. 2022



240

BPS FAMILIES

referred for



**HOUSING
VOUCHERS**

referred by



**BPS HOMELESS
LIAISONS**



FAMILYAID



What we learned

Key finding #6

EHIP interview participants appreciated that staff connected them with housing stability resources, though some desired improved communication.

Families viewed staff responsible for addressing homelessness at school, the housing agencies, and shelters as valuable sources of support because they both communicated about and facilitated access to resources.^{xv} Respondents appreciated the pragmatic support housing agency staff were able to offer.

While families were complimentary of school and housing staff, and expressed gratitude for their assistance, they also pointed to opportunities for improved communication. Some desired more frequent or thorough updates from housing agency caseworkers, particularly about key resources and at crucial moments, suggesting a need for additional coordinating infrastructure. Not hearing from caseworkers could be discouraging. Participants also shared frustration with systems of interagency and intra-agency communication. This could potentially be addressed by shared data systems.

Key finding #7

While parents reported that permanent housing obtained with vouchers positively impacted their children, some navigated challenges in using vouchers. These challenges were likely outside the control of the school district and housing agencies.

For some families, the process of using a rental voucher, once they had it, was relatively smooth. Other families experienced challenges while trying to use vouchers to rent apartments.

Interviews suggested that children's wellbeing improved once they settled into new homes.

While in the midst of homelessness, respondents conveyed that their children had experienced sadness, depression, and/or anxiety; one mentioned that their children had exhibited negative behaviors in connection with their homelessness. Upon stabilizing, parents observed improvement.



Oh, yeah, I searched for a place. I got approved for one place 30 days after I got the voucher. I waited for maybe a month for inspection. And then once they did the inspection, they denied the unit because there was lead on outside. So, then I had to start my research all over again.

Parent interview participant

You know, emotionally, since we've moved, I noticed a change. Like, I feel like he's definitely happier.

Parent interview participant reflecting on child's experience



Key finding #8

BPS Homeless liaisons reported challenges in identifying students experiencing housing hardship.

As accurate identification of housing unstable students is a crucial first step for connecting them with appropriate housing supports, we collected data from BPS school homeless liaisons about their experiences in identifying students who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A large proportion of liaison respondents indicated that they had problems identifying students at risk of homelessness (N=35; 83%) (see Figure 15). This was similar to the percentage who reported problems identifying students currently experiencing homelessness (N=34; 81%).

Key finding #9

BPS homeless liaison respondents suggested innovative approaches such as systematic screening could improve identification of students experiencing homelessness.

The majority of BPS homeless liaison respondents (N=32; 76%) said that the process of identifying students experiencing homelessness could be improved. The most common response to the open-ended question of how to improve this process (mentioned by 20 respondents) was by using routine and systematic screening or reporting procedures.

Taken together with the finding about significant challenges identifying students at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness (Key Finding #8), this finding led to the development of ongoing research by our team that seeks to develop and test new screening tools and procedures to improve identification of housing hardship in schools.

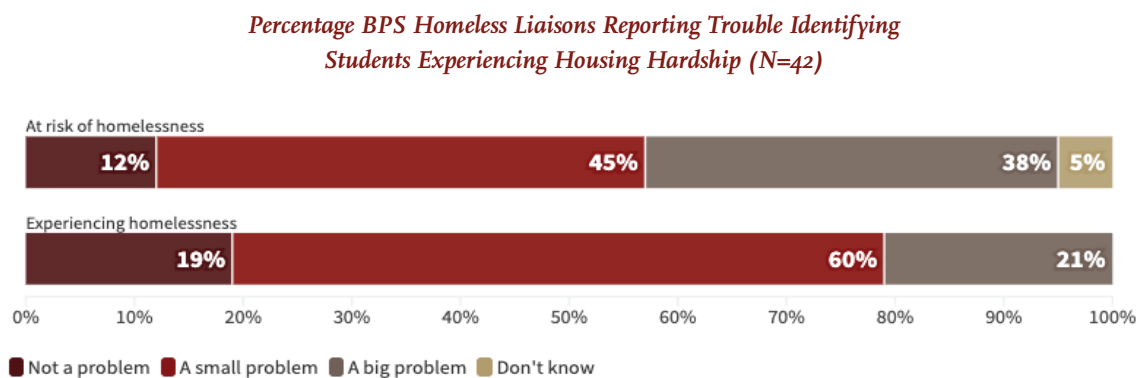


Figure 15



“

Is there a tool used to identify those who are at risk? If so, please share!

BPS homeless liaison survey respondent

There should be an assessment completed to learn about the concerns early on and ensure all families are provided with the necessary support.

BPS homeless liaison survey respondent

Sustaining and Scaling EHIP & Implications for School-Housing Partnerships

In the context of growing challenges of housing affordability and homelessness among families with children both in Boston and throughout the United States, findings from our research break new ground by providing the most comprehensive evidence to date about the experiences and outcomes of families served by a school-housing agency partnership.

These partnerships are increasingly common, reflecting recognition of the strong connection between housing stability and educational outcomes and the shared responsibility of housing agencies and school systems in fostering positive housing and educational outcomes among children. Our research thus represents an important step in enhancing the impact of these partnerships; educators and social service agency staff can draw on results from this research in further building school-housing partnership programs in Boston and beyond.

Our research illustrates a clear success story. Families participating in EHIP experienced improved housing stability, access to higher quality housing, higher levels of wellbeing, and reduced chronic absenteeism. These findings point to the value of interventions that seek to prevent homelessness among families at risk of housing loss, and suggest that school-housing partnerships in other localities would be well served to focus on prevention as a key part of their work. We did not find statistically significant changes in scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. As noted above, however, this could be because of small sample sizes.

It is also possible that these annual test scores are less sensitive to housing changes within the time frame of our analyses than other academic outcomes. Future research might further explore the associations between housing changes and test scores.

Indeed, the results have already helped:

- 1. Generate support from BPS district leadership and staff to sustain EHIP*
- 2. Expand EHIP to include initiatives like the City of Boston's Access to Counsel pilot program for families facing eviction*
- 3. Reinforce philanthropic fundraising for EHIP*
- 4. Support the establishment of Massachusetts and Boston-based housing policy and coordination deliberation bodies*

Although EHIP participant families experienced many positive changes, they also face several persistent challenges, including high levels of financial precarity and food insecurity and modest levels of social support. These findings highlight the fact that, while programs like EHIP can provide many benefits, the supports are ultimately short-term in nature and geared towards resolving an acute housing crisis. Thus, more robust and ongoing resources are required to reinforce school-housing partnership programming and ensure family access to safe, stable, and decent housing. They include: more affordable housing to counter the recent rise in the share of households that is housing cost-burdened;^{xxvi} rental assistance, including housing vouchers, which evidence shows promotes housing stability;^{xxvii} coordinating strategy and infrastructure, such as shared data systems, and other practices like those outlined in the recently developed Coordinating to Improve Family Experiences Toolkit;^{xxviii} funding to support the staffing of school-housing partnership programming to serve the large number of families who could benefit; and innovation to improve school capacity to identify students in families experiencing housing hardship.



Research Progress and Plans

Boston Public Schools (BPS) and FamilyAid are working with United Way of Massachusetts Bay (UWMB) and Boston College School of Social Work (BCSSW) to improve the quality and use of research at the intersection of housing and education.

Our collaborative research thus far has studied the Early Homelessness Intervention and Prevention program (EHIP) through surveys of EHIP participants, analysis of BPS administrative data, surveys of BPS homeless liaisons, and qualitative interviews with parents.

While all of our research was conducted in a single school district, Boston is a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse district with a substantial number of families impacted by housing difficulties, and thus may not be that dissimilar from other large urban school districts. A key strength of our research is that we used multiple methods to allow us to triangulate findings and address some of the limitations associated with each single approach. For example, our core study sample size was relatively small and did not have a comparison group. We were also unable to perfectly align the timing of survey and administrative data collection.

Key limitations of our supplemental administrative data analyses were twofold. First, we were only able to identify students who received a referral to EHIP, not all of whom may have received EHIP services. Thus, our analyses may underestimate the actual effect of receiving EHIP services. Second, our analysis was limited to students who were continuously enrolled in BPS during the school year in which they received an EHIP (or a HERN) referral and the following school year. As a result, our results may be biased if the outcomes of students who were not continuously enrolled differed from those included in our analysis.

Our surveys of BPS homeless liaisons included a limited set of questions, and also had a relatively small sample. Our qualitative interviews were with English-speaking parents only. Combined, however, our results compellingly illustrate the achievements of BPS-FamilyAid school-housing partnership programming, while also recognizing remaining challenges.

We are now using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to develop a homelessness risk screener for use in the school setting. We are also further analyzing BPS administrative data to better understand the relationships between housing hardship and academic outcomes over time.



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Authors:

Jessica K. McCabe Johnson

Indrani Saran

Tom Byrne

Kedan A. Harris

Brian S. Marques

Giovanna Nelkin

Ellen Dickenson

Gautam N. Yadama

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