

# SMU professors detail how homeless students are doing educationally in Houston ISD

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Simmons professors Alexandra Pavlakis and Meredith Richards look at research information with Kessa Roberts, post doctoral fellow. Credit: SMU

A new report by SMU professors Alexandra Pavlakis and Meredith Richards details how homeless students in Houston ISD are faring

educationally.

Released by the Houston Education Research Consortium at Rice University, the report makes clear that homeless students are at an elevated risk of a range of adverse educational outcomes, and the findings also highlight the complexity of the relationship between homelessness and [student](#) outcomes. Pavlakis and Richards, who are both assistant professors at SMU's Simmons School of Education & Human Development, looked at students who were homeless from 2012-13 to 2016-17, the years immediately preceding Hurricane Harvey.

Some of the key findings include:

- Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to drop out of school than their matched, non-homeless peers.
- Students who were homeless four and five years tended to have higher attendance than students who were homeless for shorter periods of time.
- Unaccompanied youth had substantially lower attendance than accompanied homeless students, and less likely to pass the STAAR exams than accompanied homeless students.
- Where students sleep matters. Attendance gaps were large for unsheltered students and students in motels.
- Interestingly, homeless students tended to perform better on STAAR exams than their matched peers. This could hint at the potential value of educational supports and resources inherent in McKinney-Vento Act or provided at shelters or drop-in centers for homelessness. However, homeless students were also somewhat less likely to take STAAR tests—particularly in math.

Pavlakis and Richards also make recommendations on what the school district might consider to improve student outcomes. Simmons post doctoral fellow Kessa Roberts, Ph.D. assisted with the research. The

Moody Foundation and SMU's University Research Council supported the research. This is a long-term project for the researchers.

**More information:** [kinder.rice.edu/sites/g/files/...documents/Complexity%20in%20Student%20Homelessness.pdf](https://kinder.rice.edu/sites/g/files/...documents/Complexity%20in%20Student%20Homelessness.pdf)

Provided by Southern Methodist University

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