

One in ten New York City public school students is homeless

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Over the last year almost one in ten students in New York City lived in homeless shelters, doubled up with other families, lived in cars, abandoned buildings or outside, according to a new report by Advocates for Children of New York. This means that over 104,000 children were homeless, out of a total school enrollment of more than one million. This marks a 3 percent increase for the 2021-22 school year at a time when enrollment has dropped because of the COVID pandemic.

The social blight of homelessness in New York City never paused during the last three years, although the increase in numbers slowed somewhat because of temporary rent moratoriums that the Democratic Party politicians were forced to implement in the early months of the pandemic. There are approximately 61,000 people living in city-run homeless shelters and another 3,000 living on the street. The official homeless figures, unlike those in the study cited here, do not count those families or individuals that have doubled up or are living in cars. The number of homeless in the United States is estimated at 552,830, one third of which are families.

The worst-hit schools are in the poorest areas of the city. In District 24, which includes the Queens neighborhoods of Corona, Elmhurst, and Maspeth, for example, there was, according to the study, a 1.3 percent drop in enrollment and a 21.9 percent increase in students who had experienced some form of homelessness. That means that in District 24, about one out of eight students was homeless, a jump from a figure of one in ten from the year before. These neighborhoods have also had some of the highest fatality rates in the US from COVID-19 since the pandemic began in 2020. Other areas with significant increases in the number of homeless students were in the Bronx, the poorest urban county in the United States, where one in every seven students had experienced homelessness. The highest rates in the city were in the southwest Bronx District 9, where over one in five students was homeless in 2021–22. Upper Manhattan's District 6, which includes Washington Heights and Inwood and Districts 23 (Brownsville) and 32

(Bushwick) in Brooklyn also had high rates.

These figures do not include special education districts or the 6,000 migrant children that have come into the city in the last four months, expelled from the US-Mexican border by Republican Texas governor Greg Abbott. Many of these children and their families are escaping abominable living conditions in Venezuela and Central American countries.

Homeless youth have suffered disproportionately from the effects of the pandemic because of lack of high-speed internet connections for remote learning in homeless shelters and from the inability to meet with counselors located in schools. The study also showed that 60 percent of homeless youth do not graduate high school in four years and they are three times more likely to drop out than other students. Homeless children have a 64 percent chronic absentee rate, while that figure has climbed sharply for all students since the pandemic began to over 40 percent.

A key factor in the growth of homelessness has been the lapsing of the moratorium on evictions. Democratic politicians from Biden to New York Governor Hochul permitted evictions to resume in January 2022, despite the high levels of joblessness and prevailing low wages for the poorest sections of the working class that, in real terms, are being pushed even lower by high inflation. Hundreds of thousands of workers now find themselves unable to pay months of back rent built up during lockdowns early on in the pandemic.

As a result, the population of the city's homeless shelter system increased by 25 percent from May to September to nearly 58,000. The shelter system is a concoction of 300 buildings mostly rented from private landlords and operated by dozens of nonprofit groups. Former Mayor Bill de Blasio's promise to open 90 dedicated shelter buildings was never completed. The city has ended its use of 3,600 apartments in substandard shelter buildings, with only 1,200 of them converted into permanent housing for the homeless. The city, moreover, built or refurbished only 16,000 of the planned 25,000 affordable apartments between July 2021 and June 2022.

As affordable housing has become harder to come by, “the average length of stay in a family shelter increased to 534 days in fiscal year 2022 from 443 days in fiscal year 2020,” the *New York Times* reports.

To say that big real estate developers and large landlords have enormous influence in the New York state and city governments, which are dominated by the Democratic Party, is a gross understatement. Housing prices and rents have been allowed to rise steeply in the last year, reducing the availability of affordable housing for the working class. Housing at market rate is unaffordable for most of New York City’s population. The median monthly rent in New York City for a one-bedroom apartment has risen to \$3,940, according to the Zumper housing website. The national median rent is \$1,503 for one bedroom.

Although de Blasio was forced to stop the practice of placing families in unsafe and costly hotels, Democratic mayor Eric Adams resumed renting hotel rooms again because most of the new migrants bused from Texas and other southern border states are families with children. The law requires each family to be placed in its own room.

The expense to the city for renting hotel space was the motivation behind Adams’s creation of a miserable tent city on Randall’s Island for the new migrant families who will live in a part of the city difficult to reach and under the supervision of the National Guard, in shelters that will not protect residents from the cold weather. Far from addressing the need for more services and educators, Mayor Adams has imposed large budget cuts on schools, with hundreds of educators being “excessed” (a form of internal layoff) shutting down scores of programs.

Adams has also ordered every city department, including those for the homeless or involved in housing, to cut their budgets by 3 percent. Homeless children, as with all students in New York City schools, are now in danger from illness from COVID-19 as new variants of the virus begin to spread throughout the city in the cold months. The Adams administration has abolished all mandatory COVID mitigations, including masking, social distancing, testing and contact tracing in schools—as thoroughly inadequate as these measures were. Governor Hochul has done the same on a state-wide level and both Democratic politicians are following the game plan of the Biden administration, which is to accept mass infection, death, and debility for the American population.

The latest figures, released by the city only as raw data, show that in the first part of last week, the city’s Department of Education reported 2,038 new student and staff COVID cases, making a total for the first month of school of 20,958 infections. COVID cases for both students and staff were up 30 percent over the last week

Children living in the crowded conditions of homeless shelters are particularly vulnerable to infections not only from COVID but from the wide range of airborne pathogens such as RSV and the flu, which are sending children to hospitals in record numbers this year. The crisis of education, including the spread of contagious disease in school buildings, budget cuts and the preparation of a sell-out contract with the city by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), is a part of a much broader, international crisis of capitalist rule brought about by inflation, the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine, and the systematic cultivation of a recession by the ruling elite itself, and the rise of far-right forces. These express themselves in the form of the greater social crisis in New York City not only of education but also of poverty and homelessness, low wages and the increasing absence of affordable housing. This crisis has launched millions of workers into struggle around the globe, including nurses in the United States and Germany, railway workers in the United States and Britain and educators in Canada, to name only a few.

Notable has been the enormously favorable reaction of autoworkers in the Midwest and South to the campaign of socialist Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for presidency of the United Auto Workers, who is running on the platform of abolishing the union bureaucracy and returning power to rank-and-file workers. The same struggle is pending in New York City, where conditions have reached a breaking point. Adjunct professors at New York University are expected to strike next month over poverty wages and inadequate medical care.

Educators, students, and parents have faced attack after attack by Democratic Party politicians, from Biden to Hochul to de Blasio to Adams, with the assistance of the unions such as the UFT. A movement will invariably erupt in the schools, and it will need new forms of organizations and political independence from the capitalist parties. Educators, parents and students who want to prepare this fight should join the Northeast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee.



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