Record number of homeless school students in New York City—1 in 8

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The New York City public school system had a record 146,000 students experiencing homelessness during the 2023-2024 school year, according to data released in November by Advocates for Children (AFC). This amounts to one of every eight children in the largest school district in the United States with a million students.

Fifty-four percent of these children spent some time "doubled up," or unavoidably sharing the housing of others, while another 41 percent are in families that sought space in city shelters, leaving over 7,000 children who may have spent some nights on the streets or the subway system.

There are currently at least 350,000 people in New York City without a home, a rise of 19 percent over the past two years, according to a report by the Coalition for the Homeless (CFH). The city's longstanding problem of homelessness is compounded by inadequate government support for refugees, more than 210,000 of whom have arrived in the past two years, according to city statistics, about one-third of them school-age children.

As of August, there were 65,000 migrants living in shelters. The city's Department of Education estimates that 36,000 children of migrant families are enrolled in its schools.

The problem of homelessness is emblematic of the social inequality of American society, abysmally so in New York City, the richest city in the richest country in the world. Average rent in Brooklyn, the most populous of the city's five boroughs, is $2,772 per month, 78 percent higher than the national average, according to Apartments.com. While 54 percent of New Yorkers—more than 4 million—are classified as "low income," the city has about 800 centi-millionaires (with fortunes over $100 million) and 110 of America's 787 billionaires

The AFC report noted that homelessness for New York City students is a protracted problem, not rooted in the more recent surge of refugees. "2023–24 was the ninth consecutive school year in which more than 100,000 students were identified as homeless. . . This is more than there are seats at Yankee Stadium and Citi Field combined."

Homelessness is rampant across the US. A record 653,104 people experienced homelessness in the US in 2023, a 12 percent increase over 2022, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. One in every 30 American children goes to sleep without a home of their own each year. In Los Angeles County, 65,484 students were identified as homeless in the 2023-24 school year, in Chicago 26,800 students.

Record numbers of homelessness exist in the richer nations, such as in the UK, where 183,000 Londoners live in temporary accommodation. There are 117.3 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, according to the UN, much of which is the consequence of US imperialist war.

At the entrance to the Hall Street shelter in Brooklyn, where 3,000 new arrivals are concentrated, the WSWS spoke to Darwin, a father who along with other parents was bringing his son back from school, "I have been in New York for one month. I have two children, ages three and seven. There is only school for the seven-year-old. I come from Venezuela. We walked from there to the US border. I am thankful that we could get admitted to the shelter. The school helps with food and clothing." Asked what his biggest problem is, Darwin answered, "Work! I need work."

For more than a quarter century, alternating administrations of both Democrat and Republican presidents have rationed funding for housing and schools. Public money was diverted to privatizing initiatives such as charter schools and vouchers while trillions of dollars were thrust upon the unending wars.

The COVID pandemic resulting from the refusal of

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Democratic and Republican politicians to take adequate public health measures to stop the spread of the disease, produced an economic decline for which the working class has been made to pay in jobs, low wages and lives.

Biden's termination of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding, along with the end of declared public health emergencies has caused scores of school closings and is predicted to eradicate 384,000 educator jobs. The stated intention of Trump-appointee billionaire Elon Musk to cut $2 trillion a year from the federal budget would completely devastate social programs like education and housing.

Lack of adequate funding has created a shortage of teachers, paraprofessionals, and counselors in schools, especially needed for homeless and migrant children who often suffer from traumatic experiences and have special needs. Only half of city schools that enrolled asylum seekers last fall had a bilingual educator.

Homeless immigrant students and their families in shelters are easy targets of Trump's plan to deport 11 million undocumented immigrants. New York may be an early target for Trump to demonstrate that immigrants in cities with sanctuary policies are not protected, with ICE grabbing children out of schools as well as shelters, neighborhoods and workplaces.

At the state and local level, the report by the CFH also denounced Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams, both Democrats, as having "engaged in harmful and counterproductive strategies," resulting in "more people experiencing homelessness...less affordable housing available for those who need it most, and...more people in desperate need of social services and mental health than at any time in recent memory."

The American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who has prioritized support and funding for the wars against Russia and the Palestinians, and National Education Association President Becky Pringle have indicated they will seek to collaborate with Trump's pro-privatization nominee for Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon. Neither of them opposed Biden's mass deportations of immigrants.

President Michael Mulgrew of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City, who has been allied with Mayor Adams in attacking union members' healthcare, and opposition caucuses to Mulgrew in the UFT, have voiced token concern for immigrant students and their teachers. They have not spoken out, however, against the combined Democrat and Republican attack on immigrants since that would run counter the UFT apparatus' integration with Democrat Party.

At A. Philip Randolph Campus High School, which has a substantial immigrant student population, Michael, who teaches history, told the WSWS, "We have a ton of new immigrants. They do not have good English and it's difficult. Some subjects are dual language, but not history. In the beginning of the year, some of my classes were full with 30 or 40 students. It is a little better now with a little less than 30 students. We had to do rearranging because there is nowhere to put all of them. There are some classes for new immigrants, but not all are included. I think with the election and anti-immigrant measures that this society is showing it true colors."

Shay, an elementary school teacher in the Harlem area of New York City, told the WSWS, "There are homeless children in my charter school who are living in permanent shelters. They do not have enough space to do homework or read. They depend on school buses to get them to school and will be late if the bus is late. We are a Title I school so we are able to give them free lunch, which they need. This is one of the issues that makes me very much for socialism."

The intent of scapegoating immigrants for the capitalist crisis is to divide and weaken the working class. Nothing could better demonstrate the fact that immigrant workers and native-born workers face the same enemy that the fact that large numbers of both groups have homeless children. Educators and other school workers, students and parents, must start preparing to defend the rights of immigrants from Trump's coming onslaught. To do so, they should immediately contact the Educators Rank-and-File Committee.

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