

# UCLA reports expose explosive growth of student homelessness in Los Angeles County

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Two recent reports by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) on student homelessness in Los Angeles County constitute a devastating exposure of the social reality confronting millions of working-class families.

The reports, titled “Rising Numbers, Fading Resources” and “Hidden In Plain Sight,” provide a detailed statistical and qualitative portrait of a system incapable of meeting the most basic human needs, above all the right to stable housing and education.

The growth of student homelessness is extraordinary. Between the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, the number of homeless students in Los Angeles County surged by 28.4 percent, a rate that far exceeds both state and national increases. More than 61,000 students were officially identified as homeless.

This figure alone is staggering, but it captures only a portion of the real scale of deprivation. The rise reflects the combined impact of skyrocketing housing costs, the rollback of limited pandemic-era protections and the intensification of economic insecurity among working-class families.

Los Angeles County, with a population of roughly 10 million, is a region marked by extreme social inequality, with dozens of billionaires alongside vast layers of the population living on the brink of homelessness.

The UCLA reports underscore the link between student homelessness and social inequality. Latino students are disproportionately affected. English Learner students in some areas comprise up to half of the homeless student population.

These patterns reflect broader social conditions, including low wages, precarious employment and the vulnerability associated with immigration status in a system that systematically exploits immigrant workers

while denying them basic rights.

One in three homeless students in Los Angeles County is a high school student. Older youth facing housing instability are at heightened risk of educational disruption, disengagement and lasting economic marginalization. The transition to adulthood becomes even more precarious when basic shelter is uncertain.

Geographically, homelessness is concentrated in schools serving predominantly working-class and immigrant communities, where rates are two to six times higher than the state average.

Norwalk-La Mirada Elementary Unified School District exemplifies this, with the county’s highest rate: 1 in 3 students, over 4,700 out of 15,600, experiencing homelessness in 2023-24.

The educational impact is severe: over one-third of homeless students are chronically absent due to transportation barriers, frequent moves and unstable living conditions, disrupting both academic progress and social development.

Despite some districts implementing targeted interventions that produced limited improvements in test scores or dropout rates, homeless students continue to lag behind their housed peers.

Crucially, the second UCLA report shows that even these alarming figures significantly underestimate the scale of the crisis. Large numbers of students are excluded from official counts due to narrow federal definitions and inconsistent reporting. Those who are “doubled up,” temporarily living with other families because of economic hardship, are often left out, leaving tens of thousands of students experiencing housing instability effectively invisible.

This undercounting has direct consequences. Funding for programs that support homeless students is tied to identification rates; when students are not counted, they

receive no assistance. The result is a vicious cycle in which the most vulnerable are systematically denied essential resources.

Fear plays a decisive role. Many families avoid disclosing their housing situation due to concerns about immigration enforcement, child welfare intervention or social stigma. These pressures are particularly acute in immigrant communities, which comprise a significant share of Los Angeles County. Statewide data show homeless students are twice as likely to be migrants as their housed peers, underscoring the link between immigration status and housing insecurity.

Student homelessness is not the result of individual misfortune or isolated administrative failure, but the outcome of decades of policy decisions that have systematically prioritized the interests of the financial and corporate elite over the needs of the population.

Both the Democratic and Republican parties bear responsibility, as they have dismantled social programs while directing vast resources toward war, policing and the enrichment of the wealthy. Their claim that there is “no money” for education, housing or healthcare is exposed as fraudulent when billions are routinely allocated to military spending and corporate subsidies.

While the Trump administration gives crude and open expression to this logic, insisting that social needs be subordinated to war and national security, the Democratic Party has enforced the same essential policies in a more concealed form. This is particularly evident in California, a state dominated by Democrats for decades.

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest in the United States, exemplifies this crisis. With a budget of \$18.8 billion serving nearly 400,000 students, it is projecting an \$877 million deficit for the 2026-2027 school year. This has already led to layoffs, program cuts and further deterioration of strained services. At the same time, city authorities are advancing plans to privatize aspects of homelessness management, turning social catastrophe into an arena for extracting profit.

These policies are being implemented under Democratic leadership, including figures aligned with ostensibly “progressive” tendencies such as the Democratic Socialists of America. Their role is not to challenge the existing order but to contain opposition while enforcing austerity measures dictated by the

ruling class.

Efforts are being made by Democratic lawmakers to normalize homelessness. California’s AB 90, introduced by Corey Jackson and now dead only because of its cost, would have required community colleges to permit students to sleep in cars on campus, institutionalizing “safe parking” as a response to the crisis rather than addressing the root cause, the lack of affordable housing.

However, opposition is growing. The scale of social distress is generating mounting resistance among workers and youth. In Los Angeles, tens of thousands of educators and school workers are moving toward a potential confrontation with authorities. The United Teachers Los Angeles has announced a possible strike on April 14, involving 35,000 teachers and 30,000 service workers from SEIU 99.

At the same time, recent struggles highlight the role of the trade union apparatus in suppressing opposition. At the University of California, a strike by 40,000 graduate student workers was curtailed through the intervention of the UAW bureaucracy, which acted to block a broader confrontation.

The UCLA reports expose a society in which basic human needs are subordinated to the accumulation of wealth by a tiny minority. Addressing this crisis requires a fundamental reorganization of society based on human need rather than private profit, through the independent political mobilization of the working class against both parties and the system they defend.



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