# Children in Houston face educational disruption due to housing instability and evictions



In Houston, Texas, the story of 10-year-old Mackenzie Holmes illustrates the profound challenges faced by children experiencing housing instability and eviction. Since her birth, Mackenzie has moved repeatedly between homes, from her grandmother's house to several apartments that ended in evictions, motels, and temporary shelter. Most recently, Mackenzie and her grandmother, Crystal Holmes, found refuge in a women's shelter, escaping nights spent on an inflatable mattress. These frequent moves have brought frequent school changes, forcing Mackenzie—a child recently diagnosed with dyslexia—to catch up on shifting lessons and social adjustments. She has just one friend she has known for over a year and has often missed extended periods of school during the transitions.

Research conducted by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, shared with The Associated Press' Education Reporting Network and analysed alongside court filings and student records from the Houston Independent School District (HISD), highlights a concerning pattern. Between 2002 and 2016, researchers identified over 18,000 instances of students living in homes threatened by eviction filings. Findings indicated that children under threat of eviction were more frequently absent from school than their peers. Even students who remained at the same school after eviction threats missed an average of four additional school days in the following academic year.

The Eviction Lab documented 13,197 children in Houston between 2002 and 2016 whose parents faced eviction filings, with a quarter of those children experiencing multiple evictions. The research draws attention to the broader issue of housing instability's impact on education, particularly in Houston as eviction rates continue to rise.

Seventeen-year-old Neveah Barahona, another student affected by frequent moves, shared her experience in Houston where she started kindergarten but has attended six different schools since. Her mother, Roxanne Abarca, attempted to maintain consistency by allowing Neveah to finish school years despite financial struggles requiring multiple relocations. Neveah spoke candidly about the emotional toll of constant transition, explaining to the Daily American Republic, “It is kind of draining, meeting new people, meeting new teachers, getting on track with ... what they want to teach you and what you used to know.” Neveah also disclosed that bullying exacerbated her distress until she accessed counselling services. Still, she remains hopeful and aims to join the military.

Peter Hepburn, lead author of the Eviction Lab study and a sociology professor at Rutgers University-Newark, stressed the focus of eviction discourse often overlooks children. “It’s … worth reminding people that 40% of the people at risk of losing their homes through the eviction process are kids,” he said. Research by the Eviction Lab underscores that households with children are twice as likely to face eviction compared to those without, amounting to approximately 1.5 million children annually affected by eviction nationwide. Furthermore, about one in twenty children under five years old living in rental homes face this threat.

The vulnerability of families to eviction is often linked to the financial strain of having children, especially in low-wage households, where access to paid parental leave is minimal, at just 5%. Federal law mandates protections for homeless students, encouraging school districts to maintain children in their current schools even if housing is lost midyear, providing transportation support. However, many evicted children do not qualify for these services, and even those who do frequently encounter difficulties because schools may be unaware of the students’ housing situations or subsequent moves.

As eviction pressures intensify across Houston, the experiences of children like Mackenzie Holmes and Neveah Barahona highlight the ongoing intersection of housing insecurity and educational disruption, underscoring complex challenges faced by families struggling to maintain stable lives.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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