# Eviction disrupts education and wellbeing of Houston children



Since her birth a decade ago, Mackenzie Holmes has experienced frequent upheaval in her living situation, rarely calling one place home for long. Her early years were spent in Houston at her grandmother Crystal Holmes’s house until Crystal lost her job at Southwest Airlines, resulting in the loss of their home. Following that, the pair moved through a series of three apartments in suburban areas, enduring three evictions along the way, followed by another rental eviction, then stays in motels and her uncle’s small one-bedroom apartment, where they slept on an inflatable mattress. Eventually, Crystal secured a place in a women’s shelter to prevent further nights spent on the floor.

Each move meant Mackenzie had to adjust to a new school environment, new classmates, and new academic expectations, often missing significant periods of class amidst the transitions. She has maintained only one friendship lasting more than a year and was only diagnosed with dyslexia this year after years of undiagnosed struggles.

Researchers have found that schoolchildren threatened with eviction are more likely to experience school transfers, sometimes to institutions with less funding, elevated poverty, and poorer academic results. Furthermore, these children are more prone to absenteeism and are suspended more frequently when transfers occur. This analysis, conducted by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University and published in the peer-reviewed Sociology of Education journal, utilised Houston Independent School District court filings and student records from 2002 to 2016. The study uncovered over 18,000 instances where students lived in homes facing eviction filings. Students in these scenarios missed an average of four more school days in the following academic year compared to their peers, even when they did not change schools.

Within the study period, 13,197 children had parents who faced eviction filings, and a quarter of those children experienced multiple evictions. As evictions in Houston continue to rise, experts anticipate there could be growing numbers of children with stories like Mackenzie’s.

In a similar situation, 17-year-old Neveah Barahona of Houston has moved schools about six times since starting kindergarten. As a big sister to seven siblings, Neveah's mother, Roxanne Abarca, tried to mitigate the educational disruption caused by eviction by allowing her children to finish their school years at their original schools whenever possible, even when this meant driving long distances. Neveah described the frequent moves as “kind of draining,” noting the challenge in adjusting to new teachers and coursework, alongside social hurdles such as bullying, which resulted in her receiving counselling.

The Eviction Lab’s research has shown that households with children are about twice as likely to face eviction than those without children, translating to roughly 1.5 million children evicted annually in the United States. One in twenty children under five years old lives in rental accommodations. However, the public conversation often centres on adult tenants and landlords, overlooking the significant proportion of children involved in eviction proceedings. Peter Hepburn, the lead author of the study and a sociology professor at Rutgers University-Newark, highlighted that “40% of the people at risk of losing their homes through the eviction process are kids.”

Eviction risks increase particularly when households welcome children, partly due to a lack of support structures such as paid parental leave, which only 5% of low-wage earners can access. Although federal laws mandate schools to try to keep homeless students in their original schools by providing daily transportation, many evicted children do not qualify for these services or slip through the system due to unawareness of their circumstances by educational institutions.

This comprehensive research underscores the challenges faced by children like Mackenzie and Neveah, whose educational stability and wellbeing are affected by housing insecurity in Houston and beyond.

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

## Bibliography

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