



Housing and School Partnership on the January 2017 Point-In-Time Count

About the Point-In-Time Count

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is an annual count of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in the last 10 days in January. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires its Continuum of Care (CoC) grantees¹ to conduct an annual count of sheltered homeless persons. CoCs also must conduct a count of unsheltered homeless persons every other year (odd numbered years).² Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally by service providers and trained volunteers. While many CoCs complete their count of unsheltered persons on the night designated for the count, given the additional challenges associated with counting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, some CoCs conduct their unsheltered count over the seven days following the night of the count.³ This “post-night” approach may be particularly useful for counting unsheltered youth, who tend to be an “invisible population” and, thus, even more difficult to identify.

The Importance of the 2017 PIT Count of Homeless Youth

In its [Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#), the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) established the goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness in 2020. As part of its youth-focused work, USICH’s Interagency Working Group to End Youth Homelessness is looking at the best way to use multiple data sources, including HUD’s PIT count data and data collected by the U.S. Department of Education’s Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) Program, to better understand youth homelessness and the resources needed to end it. The Working Group agreed to [establish the January 2017 count as the baseline PIT count year](#) for helping to measure progress in preventing and ending youth homelessness. As such, it will be critical that communities conduct a comprehensive and effective count of youth experiencing homelessness.

School-CoC PIT Count Collaboration

In its [Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide](#), HUD encourages CoCs to involve a variety of community partners to help plan and execute the count; local homeless education liaisons (local liaisons) and youth service providers are named specifically as important partners given their experience in reaching and serving homeless youth. While schools are restricted in the data they can collect and share without parental consent,⁴ schools can support CoC PIT count efforts in the following ways:

- **Planning:** School involvement in PIT count planning can provide valuable insights into and help with
 - selecting youth-friendly count sites and creating a welcoming environment there,
 - selecting youth-friendly incentives⁵ for count participation,

¹ Continuums of Care are local or regional planning bodies that coordinate housing and services for homeless individuals, families, and youth. Visit <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/> for more information.

² While only required by HUD during odd years, many CoCs conduct an unsheltered count every year.

³ CoCs using this approach must ensure that the persons counted are limited to people who were unsheltered on the night chosen for the PIT count and that the CoCs can properly deduplicate their data.

⁴ The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) generally prohibits schools that receive funds under any program administered by the U.S. Department of Education from disclosing student education records, and the personally identifiable information contained therein, without the prior written consent of a parent or eligible student (i.e., a student who has reached 18 years of age or is attending an institution of postsecondary education) (20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g(b)(1) and 1232g(b)(2); 34 CFR §§ 99.30 and 99.31). Further, under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), students may not be required, as part of a program administered by the U.S. Department of Education, to submit to any survey, analysis, or evaluation that reveals certain protected categories of information without prior written consent from the student (if s/he has turned 18 years of age or is an emancipated minor) or, in the case of an unemancipated minor, his/her parent(s) [20 U.S.C. § 1232h(b)]. Visit <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html> for more information.

⁵ Many CoCs provide incentives to homeless people who participate in the PIT count. Incentives may include transit passes, meal gift cards, toiletries, backpacks, blankets, and items of clothing.

- recruiting volunteers, and
- suggesting other local youth service providers to assist with the count.

Local liaisons and other school personnel may wish to volunteer to administer PIT count surveys to unaccompanied homeless youth, provided that survey administration is conducted off school premises and during non-work hours.

- **Information-sharing:** As noted on page 1, without the prior written consent of the parent or eligible student, schools are unable to share identifiable student-level data with CoCs for the purposes of conducting the PIT count and coordinating services; PPRA requirements also may pose difficulties for schools seeking to administer PIT count surveys through official school channels. Given that most school-age unaccompanied youth are minors who often have little or no parental contact, obtaining parent or eligible student consent for these youth could be challenging. Having said that, schools can help get the word out about the PIT count by
 - posting youth-friendly information about the count throughout schools. The information should communicate who the target population is (in this case, youth experiencing homelessness under the [HUD definition](#)), how/where/when to participate in the count, and what the incentives are for participation. It is worth noting that many CoCs provide an option to complete the PIT count survey online.
 - having local liaisons and/or other school personnel inform youth identified as unaccompanied and homeless about the count and the possible benefits of participation.

Getting Started

The first step in PIT count collaboration is to connect with your housing or education partner. To locate the CoC in your area, visit <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/>. To locate the local liaison(s) in your area, visit your [State homeless education webpage](#).⁶ Contact should be made early to ensure sufficient time for effective planning and implementation.

Beyond the PIT Count

The PIT count is one of a few key sources of data on homeless youth. Other sources include [EHCY Program data](#), [LEA level homeless student enrollment data](#), RHY administrative data, [Annual Homeless Assessment Report \(AHAR\) data](#), and [American Community Survey \(ACS\) data](#). Each data source provides unique insights into youth homelessness; as such, the most accurate and complete picture of youth homelessness can only be developed when considering all of these sources. CoCs and schools are encouraged to work together to share⁷ and leverage their respective data sets by referencing each other's numbers in reports and public talking points, as appropriate, and using multiple sources of data to inform local efforts to serve homeless youth.

For More Information

For more information on planning an effective and youth-friendly PIT count,

- visit the [True Colors Fund Youth Count Toolkit](#) webpage.
- download HUD's [Point-in-Time Count Planning Worksheet](#).
- download [HUD Point-in-Time Count Collaboration in North Carolina](#).

⁶ The McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, requires State education departments to post an annually updated list of local liaisons throughout the State on the department's website (Pub. L. No. 114-95, § 9102(5), 129 Stat. 2133).

⁷ While schools are prohibited from sharing identifiable student-level data with CoCs without prior written consent, they can share aggregate data that does not allow for the identification of individual students. For more information on data sharing between housing agencies and schools, download [Interagency Data Disclosure: A Tip Sheet on Interagency Collaboration](#).