

Homelessness rates increase

ELIANA GUTIERREZ
Staff Writer

Unsanitary living conditions. Empty cupboards. Lack of privacy.

These are just a few of the challenges that the 83 students categorized as homeless last year faced every day.

That's the number documented by the district's Project HELP program, which tracks homelessness among students and works to help them. Akins had the most homeless students out of all other campuses in the Austin school district for the 2014-2015 school year. The actual number could be higher because some students and families do not share that information out of embarrassment.

"Sometimes people don't tell us their situation," school social worker Colleen Arnold said.

Out of more than 84,000 students who attended Austin schools last year, 2,642 were considered homeless by Project HELP last year. Homelessness takes many different forms, including living on the streets and shelters, families "doubling up" with relatives, and foster care situations among others.

The overall number of homeless students increased throughout the district by 152 students when compared to the previous school year.

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Akins has most homeless students in Austin ISD Recent floods could increase numbers of those who do not have stable housing

Arnold said she is concerned about the increase in homelessness because of the effects it has on students' success.

"They're often distracted because it's hard for them to focus on homework and other things when they don't have some of the school supplies they need, and they're spending a lot of their time thinking 'where can I stay next,'" Arnold said.

Arnold also said Akins has partnered with Manchaca United Methodist Church since May. Brenda Richmond, Austin schools data system manager and church member, contacted pastor Tracey Beadle wanting to find a way for Manchaca UMC to help homeless students. After reaching out to Akins college adviser Sarah Simmons, the church donated \$1,500 worth of gift cards to 15 homeless seniors that were accepted to a college or university.

Even students who are temporarily without a home, such as

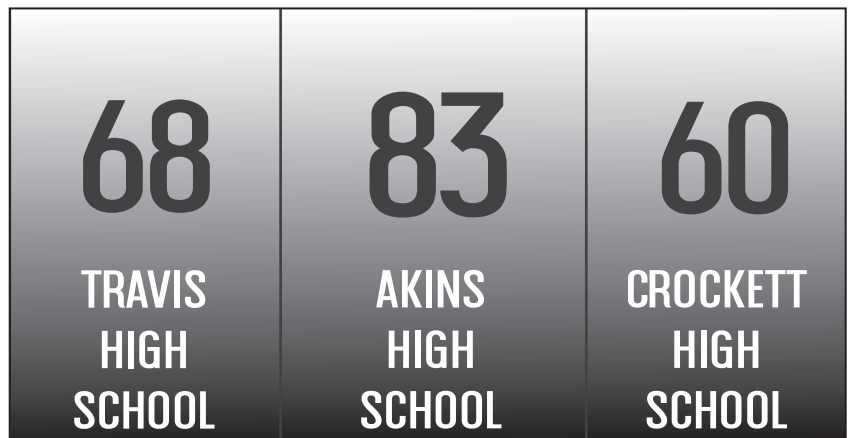
victims of floods, are considered homeless and are eligible to receive assistance.

Two years ago sophomore Jacob Gomez woke up to two feet of water inside his house.

"I was raised in that house all my life, it's really heartbreaking at first when you hear your house is going to be torn down," Gomez said.

The Halloween floods of 2013 left 825 homes in the city destroyed or badly damaged. On Oct. 30, Austin again suffered flooding in the Akins attendance zone area along Onion Creek in the Dove Springs neighborhood, which has now left many homes in the same state as those in 2013.

The Gomez family lived in a hotel for one month after the first flood and for one year in a trailer. The family rebuilt their home and moved back in, not knowing they would later encounter yet another flood. Now they're back to living in a hotel with many of their former neighbors.



Stephanie Valle

▲ Homeless Rates

Akins High School has the highest number of homeless students in Austin ISD, according to statistics provided by the district's Project HELP office.

Administrators said they are worried that this year's flood will increase the number of students who are classified as homeless, making their efforts to succeed in school even harder.

Ultimately, Hosack said they plan to work to support homeless students by listening to students and speaking with them about their home lives.

"They are part of our fami-

ly. Every single student on this campus has a place and matters and belongs here, and it takes all of us to make sure that we wrap our arms around them to support them," Hosack said. 🐾