

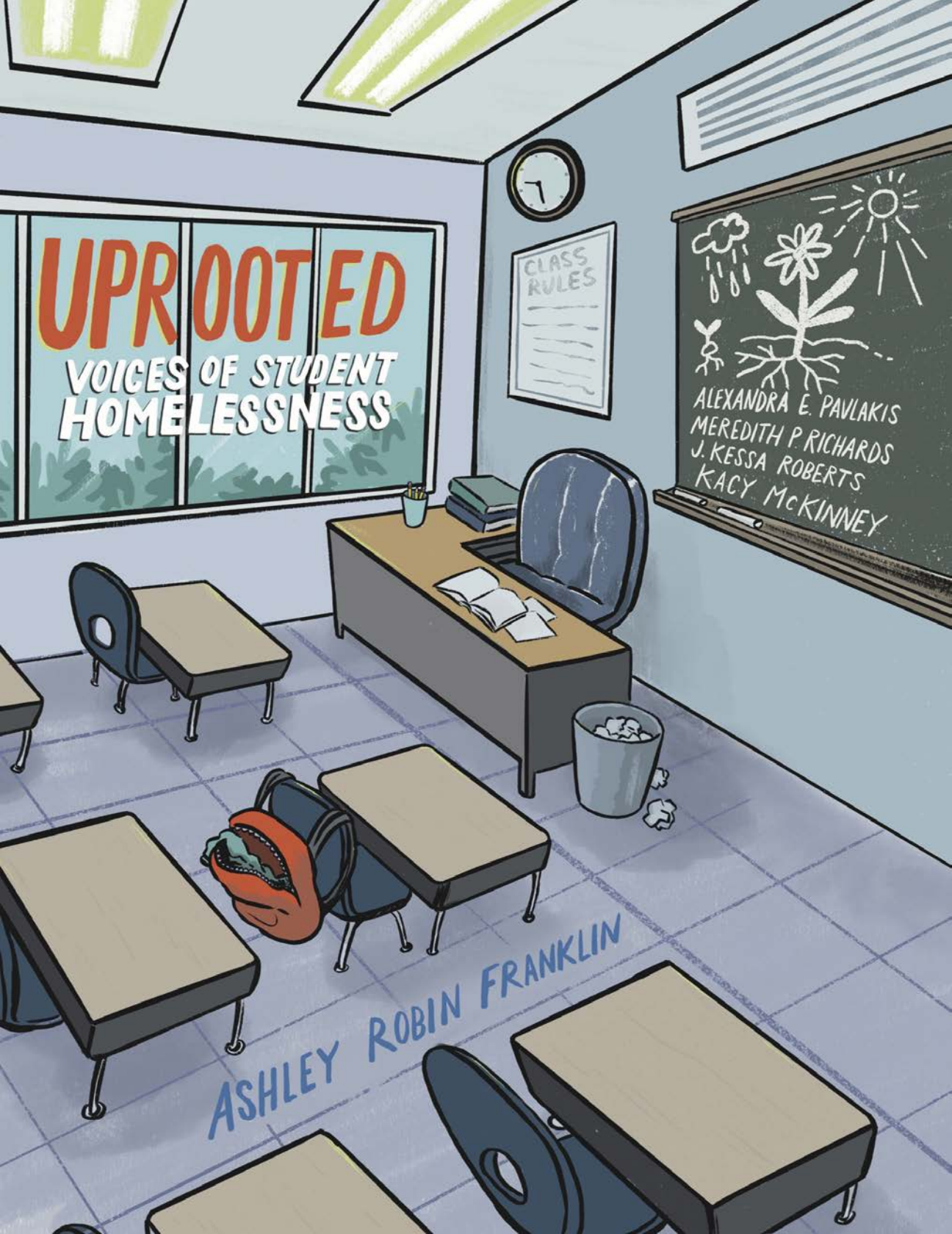
# UPROOTED

VOICES OF STUDENT  
HOMELESSNESS



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# Uprooted: Voices of Student Homelessness

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A digital copy of this comic and additional information related to the research supporting it can be found at: <http://smu.edu/uprooted>

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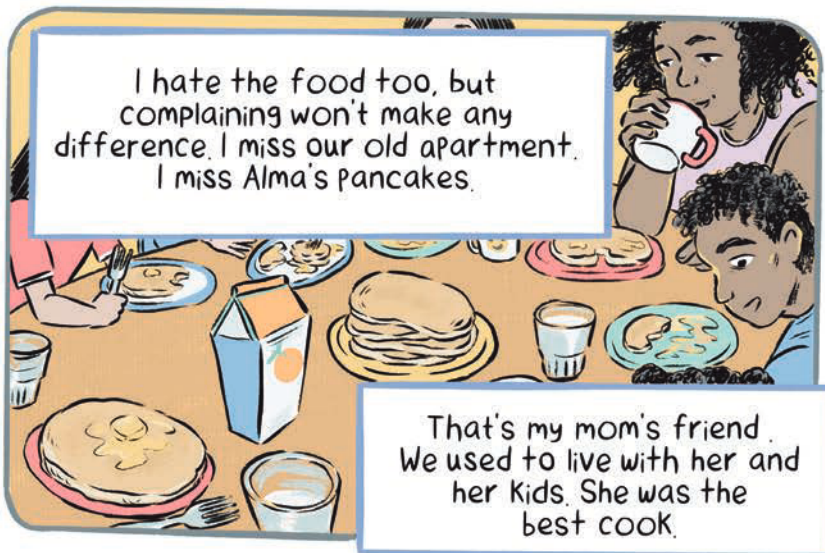
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We dedicate this comic to the families who participated in our research, whose voices are integral to conversations about homelessness, and without whom this work would not have been possible.





But more than anything,  
I miss my big brother, Lee.  
He's not allowed to stay here with us,  
so he's staying with his friend's family.

I wonder what he's eating  
for breakfast...  
I bet he misses pancake  
Sundays too.



Movie nights with popcorn  
and hot chips, me and him  
and Lacey, and Alma's kids.  
It was so good.



Before all the drama, anyway.



That's the thing I hate the most  
about this place. All the rules. No Lee.  
No good snacks. Like, really, me  
bringing in some hot chips is gonna kill  
somebody or something? But it's fine.  
Mom keeps reminding us—



I know you wish  
things were  
different, honey,  
but remember,

It's not  
forever.

I'm gonna go wait  
for the bus.

Alright  
Sweetie,  
have a  
good day.

You too.





VRRR



You're too big for that!





We missed the stupid bus. I'm THIS close to getting detention for tardiness. If it was just me, I bet I could run the whole way. But as always, my little brother is slowing me down.



I cannot handle Mr. Stevenson calling me out in front of everyone again.

It makes me so mad.



Everyone looking at me, I'm trying to be better, not act out. But it's like that guy has it out for me. It makes me so angry.

I feel like lately I'm angry more often than not.



Mateo!



Mateo's been afraid of storms since the hurricane.

I think what he's really afraid of is what comes after.



Everything getting all messed up, like our house.

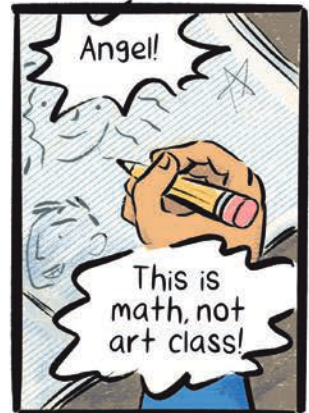
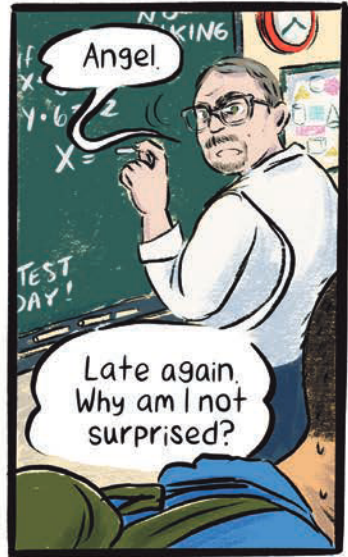
The motel isn't so bad. I think it's taking mom way more time to get used to it than us.



I'm sorry.

Do you still want me to carry you?

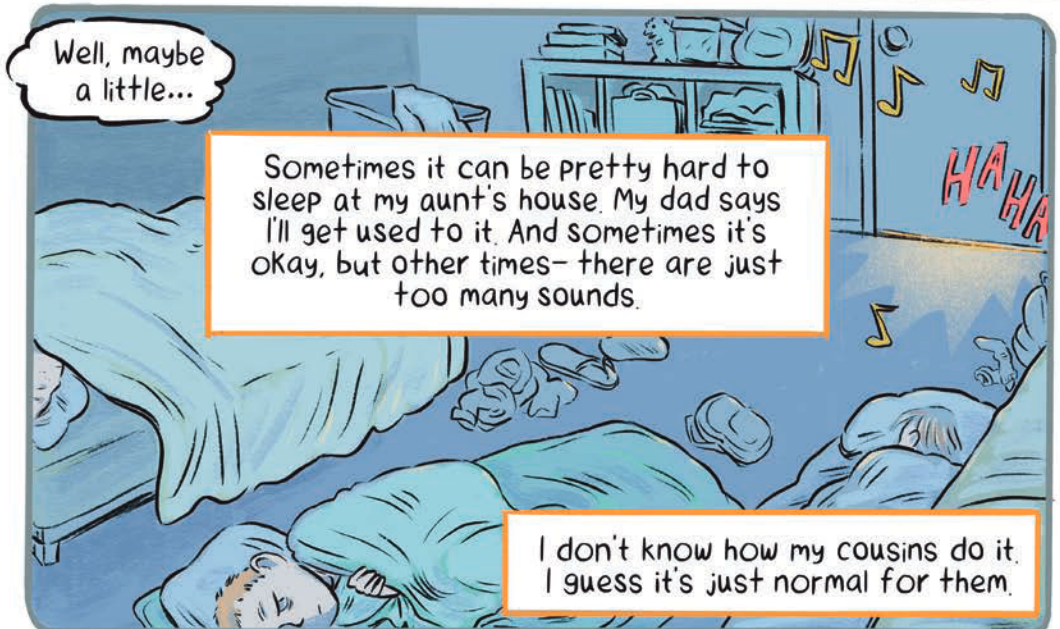








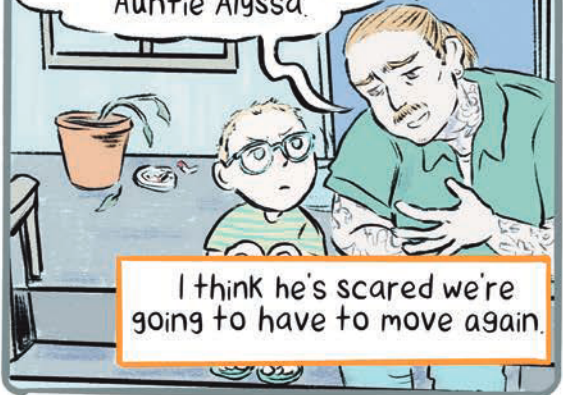
Ben fell asleep in class again - 3rd time this



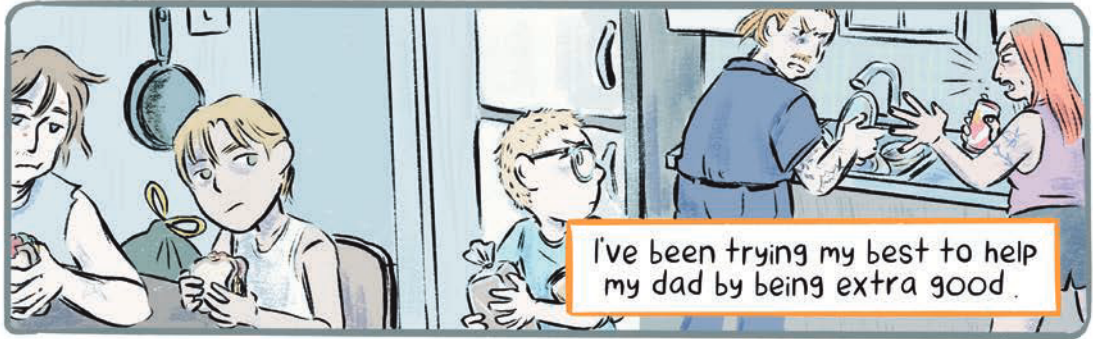
We had to leave our old house. "Victed" is what my dad calls it. We moved around a lot. I miss our old house. I don't really like Auntie's, but Dad says it's the best place for us.



Remember, we've got to be extra good guests so we can stay with your Auntie Alyssa.



I think he's scared we're going to have to move again.



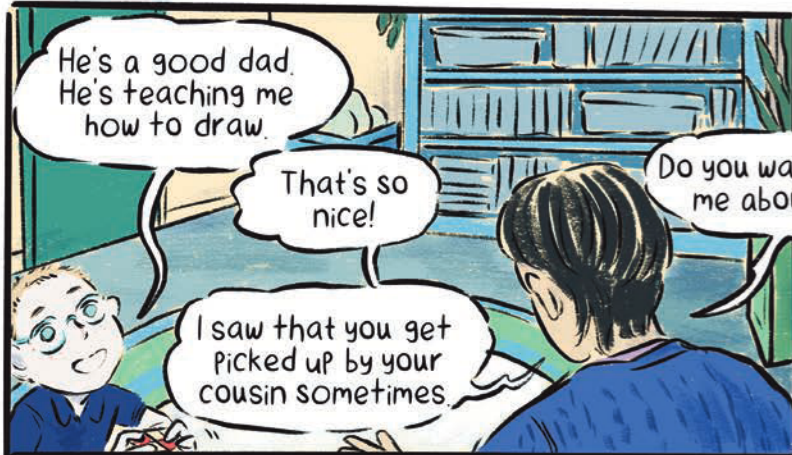
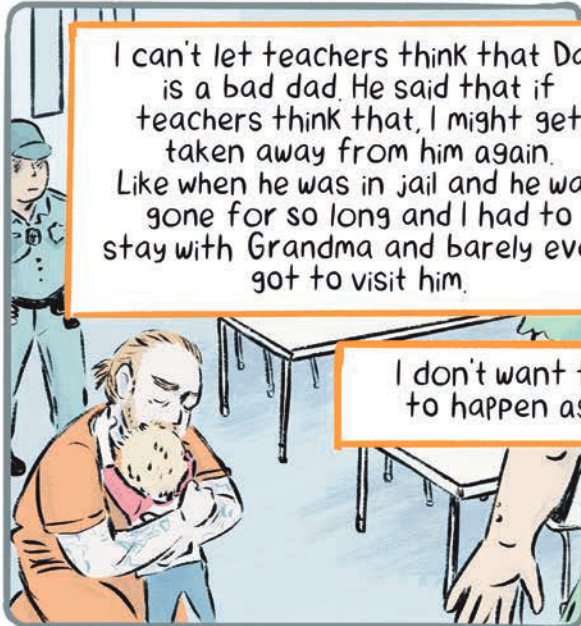
I've been trying my best to help my dad by being extra good.

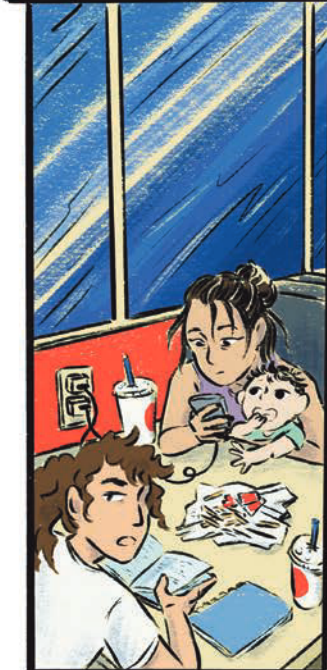
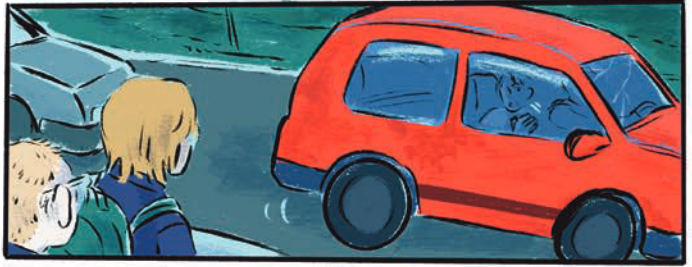
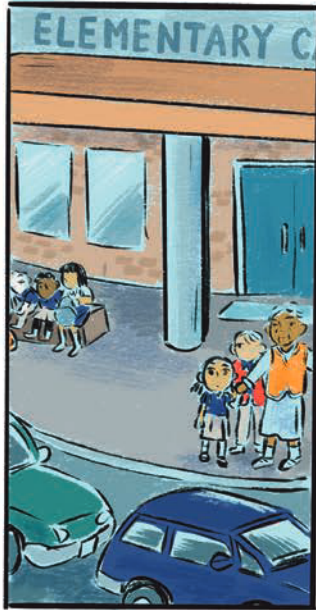


Sometimes I really don't like my cousins, even though Dad says family has to try to get along.



Ben?







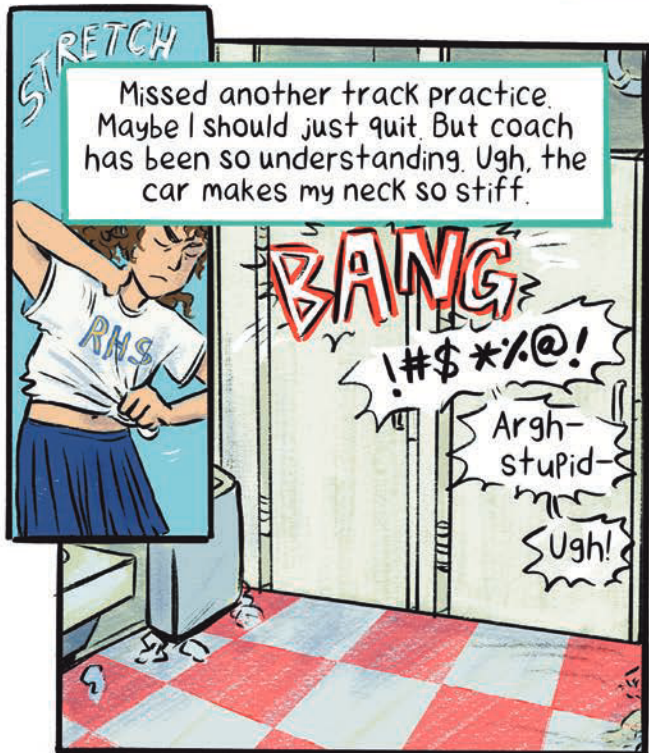
I wonder what my friends would say if they knew we've been sleeping in the car all week.



I haven't told anyone, not even Rachel, even though she's my best friend.



She's been asking what's going on with me but, I don't know...



Missed another track practice. Maybe I should just quit. But coach has been so understanding. Ugh, the car makes my neck so stiff.

Mom lost her job a few months ago.



We're supposed to be on some kind of list for a cheap place to live. I don't know. Mom says getting approved might take a while.

After mom lost her job, we went to live with my dad and grandma.



My parents aren't together anymore, but my dad said he wanted to take care of us.

It... it wasn't a good situation though. Especially not for Mom.



Dad's so nice when he isn't drinking. And Grandma... well, she had so many rules. We were always doing something wrong, me, even the baby, but especially Mom.



But when Dad started yelling, acting all mean and weird and drunk, she'd just ignore it. Or blame Mom. This sucks, but I'd take it over Grandma's any day.

I mean, it's not so bad. As long as the cops don't hassle us again... that was scary.



Kayla, can you-

Yeah, I got it.





Mom's looking for a new job. If she can't find one, I don't know what'll happen. We can't live in the car forever.



This one looks good, huh?

Pay's not that bad...

Yeah.



What are you working on? You studying for your science test?

No, algebra homework.

You gotta get that science grade up. I can help you study if you want

Maybe later...



Alright, well, I-

Ugh!

I gotta get a new cord. My phone died!

Wanna use mine?



No, no, I'll work on the application tomorrow at the library.



Kayla?

Yeah, mom?

You okay, baby?

Yeah. I don't know, I guess.



WRRRR



## Afterword

Drawn from years of research, the composite stories you just read – Jackie, Angel, Ben, and Kayla – represent a slice of the varied experiences of student homelessness across the country.

Students who experience homelessness move frequently and are often uprooted from their homes, friends, neighborhoods, and schools. They may spend the night in different places such as motels, shelters, public spaces, or stay with other people – such as friends, extended family, or acquaintances – out of financial need or loss of housing.

Contrary to stereotypes, homelessness is not just an urban problem. Students experiencing homelessness live in urban, suburban, and rural areas. These different contexts can shape their access to school and community supports as well as housing resources.

Due to structural racism, homelessness tends to disproportionately affect already marginalized students. Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), emergent bilingual, and LGBTQIA students are particularly likely to experience homelessness.

Not surprisingly, the educational outcomes of students experiencing homelessness vary: While some outperform their peers, many struggle with social isolation and low attendance, grades, or test scores.

Fortunately, students experiencing homelessness have rights under the federal McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 USC 119, VI, B). Under McKinney–Vento students are considered homeless if they lack a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." Their rights include immediate school enrollment, access to resources, and the option to stay at their current school even if they move. McKinney–Vento also requires schools and communities to collaborate to ensure that families know their rights and have access to resources.

Implementing McKinney–Vento can be challenging, especially due to a lack of awareness on the part of some educators, providers, and families about the policy. Furthermore, stereotypes that blame the individual and ignore the structural factors behind poverty, food insecurity, and housing instability also hinder implementation. We hope this comic centers the diverse realities of students who experience homelessness and counters deficit framing and myths.



Ashley Robin Franklin is a cartoonist and illustrator based in Austin, Texas, who makes art and comics for both kids and adults. They're the creator of the young adult graphic novel *The Hills of Estrella Roja* (Clarion Books, 2023), as well as several other shorter form comics including *Fruiting Bodies* (Silver Sprocket, 2022) and *That Full Moon Feeling* (Silver Sprocket, 2021). This was their first time collaborating with scholars. They feel especially honored to have had the chance to give voice to the many ways young people experience homelessness.

Alexandra E. Pavlakis is an Associate Professor in the Simmons School of Education at Southern Methodist University. Informed by her experiences as a N.Y.C. public school teacher, her research examines student and family homelessness, family-school-community relations, and educational leadership. Pavlakis has studied student homelessness for over 15 years and has had the privilege of conducting and analyzing numerous interviews with youth and parents experiencing homelessness, as well as the school, district, and community providers who serve them.



J. Kessa Roberts is an Assistant Professor in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University. A former school psychologist, her research focuses on the intersection of school leadership and policy, most often in rural or urban spaces, with an emphasis on connections between schools, families, and communities.

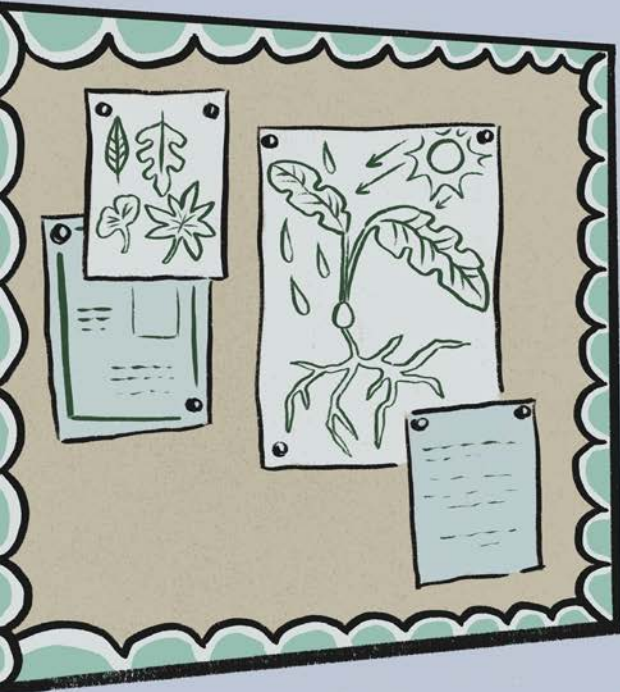
Meredith P. Richards is an Associate Professor of Education Policy in the Simmons School of Education at Southern Methodist University. Her research focuses on understanding how education policies perpetuate racial and socioeconomic inequality and segregation in public schools.



Kacy McKinney is Artist-Scholar in Residence at the Homelessness Research and Action Collaborative at Portland State University. She's the creator of *Changing the Narrative: Stories of Student Homelessness and Housing Instability* (2022) and *Changing the Narrative: Epilogue* (2024). These community-based collaborative research projects use comics to build empathy to change how we talk, teach, and think about homelessness and poverty.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our research partners at the Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) and other participants from schools and community organizations in the Houston area who helped to facilitate and inform this work. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the contributions of our fantastic doctoral students and thank them for their work on the research that guided this comic: Maria Jose (MJ) Hernandez, Cheyenne Phillips, Shanae Neal, and Shanea L. Neal.



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