Children Experiencing Homelessness

DEFINITION

Children experiencing homelessness is the number of children in preschool through grade 12 who are identified as homeless by public school personnel because they meet the federal *McKinney-Vento* definition of homelessness, which includes any child who does not have a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence," including children doubled up with families due to financial hardship.

SIGNIFICANCE

In the United States, 1.4 million school-age children experience homelessness each year, meaning that one in 41 school-age children are homeless. The rate is even higher for young children under age six -- one in 18. Black children and families are more likely to experience homelessness than other racial and ethnic groups.

Many families living in deep poverty are caught in a cycle of housing instability that often includes living in housing that is unaffordable and/or unsafe, doubling up with families or friends, being evicted, and falling into homelessness. For these families, the shortage of housing that is affordable to them is the primary reason they become homeless. However, family violence is another major factor. More than 80% of women with children who experience homelessness have experienced domestic violence.³

Lack of stable housing is often a

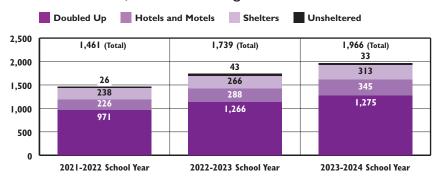
precipitating factor for a family's involvement in the child welfare system, and unstable or inadequate housing can delay family reunification. Addressing families' housing needs can reduce child neglect and abuse and help families stay together.^{4,5}

Children experiencing homelessness have higher rates of acute and chronic health problems than low-income children who have homes. Compared to their peers, homeless children have four times as many respiratory infections, twice as many ear infections, and five times as many gastrointestinal problems. They are also at higher risk of abuse and exposure to violence. This trauma can lead to an increase in developmental delays and emotional stress. When homeless children are exposed to multiple traumatic events, they may have increased levels of anxiety, poor impulse control, or difficulty developing trusting relationship.^{6,7,8}

In Rhode Island in 2024, 479 families with 951 children (including 355 infants, toddlers, and children under age six) stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, transitional housing facility, or hotel paid for by DCYF. Children made up almost one fourth (22%) of the 4,349 people who used emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing in 2024. As of January 21, 2025, 95 families with 100 children reported that they had slept outside for at least one night in the previous month.⁹

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Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2021-2022 through 2023-2024 School Years



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 school years.

Supporting Homeless Children in Schools

- ♦ Family residential instability and homelessness contribute to poor educational outcomes for children. Homeless children are more likely to change schools, be chronically absent from school, and have lower academic achievement than children who have housing.¹¹⁰
- ♦ The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) requires that states identify homeless children, allow them to enroll in school even if they lack required documents, allow them to stay in their "home school," provide transportation when needed, and provide access to all services and programs that the child is eligible for, including preschool, before- and after-school care, school meals, and services for Multilingual Learners.¹¹
- ♦ The McKinney-Vento Act defines a child as homeless if he or she does not have a "fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence."¹²
- ♦ During the 2023-2024 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,966 children as homeless. Of these children, 65% (1,275) lived with other families ("doubled up"), 18% (345) lived in hotels or motels, 16% (313) lived in shelters, and 2% (33) were unsheltered. The number of students identified as homeless in Rhode Island has increased by 35% (505 students) from the 2021-2022 school year.¹³٬¹⁴

Children Experiencing Homelessness

Table 7. Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2023-2024 School Year

Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

- ◆ Children under age five are the age group most at risk of eviction in the United States.¹⁵ Eviction, crowded housing, frequent moves, and homelessness can all have negative effects on a child's early development.¹⁶
- ◆ Homelessness during pregnancy is associated with low birthweight and preterm births, and homelessness during infancy is associated with language, literacy, and socioemotional delays. The younger a child is and the longer they are homeless the more severe the impact can be.¹7
- ◆ Access to high-quality early childhood programs can help mitigate the effects of homelessness on young children, but many families with young children have difficulty accessing these programs. Congress has updated requirements for many federal early care, education, and homelessness programs to increase access. For example, children experiencing homelessness are now categorically eligible for Early Head Start and states must prioritize young children experiencing homelessness for child care assistance.¹8
- ◆ In Rhode Island, only 27.3% (about one in four) of young children experiencing homelessness are enrolled in an early childhood program.¹⁹

Rhode Island, 2023-2024 School Year		
SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL
Barrington	3,309	*
Bristol Warren	2,794	19
Burrillville	2,037	51
Central Falls	2,539	126
Chariho	3,008	24
Coventry	4,133	32
Cranston	10,126	44
Cumberland	4,868	28
East Greenwich	2,521	10
East Providence	5,314	48
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,578	*
Foster	226	0
Foster-Glocester	1,331	*
Glocester	550	*
Jamestown	412	*
Johnston	3,172	32
Lincoln	3,340	36
Little Compton	211	0
Middletown	1,961	87
Narragansett	1,072	*
New Shoreham	126	0
Newport	1,856	51
North Kingstown	3,781	58
North Providence	3,543	51
North Smithfield	1,664	*
Pawtucket	7,887	140
Portsmouth	2,161	17
Providence	19,856	408
Scituate	1,175	*
Smithfield	2,402	43
South Kingstown	2,348	41
Tiverton	1,562	25
Warwick	7,914	84
West Warwick	3,562	38
Westerly	2,215	59
Woonsocket	5,574	272
Charter Schools	11,834	64
State-Operated Schools	1,757	32
Collaboratives	435	<10
Four Core Cities	35,856	946
Remainder of State	86,272	915
Rhode Island	136,154	1,966

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

- Rhode Island Department of Education, Public School Enrollment in grades preschool to 12 on October 1, 2023.
- Number of children identified as homeless by public school personnel includes children in preschool through grade 12 who are identified by public school personnel as meeting the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, which includes any child who does not have a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." This includes children who are living with other families ("doubled up"), in shelters, living in hotels or motels, and unsheltered.
- Charter schools include the Achievement First Rhode
 Island and Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy
 Networks, Blackstone Academy, Beacon Charter High
 School for the Arts, Chartete High School, Excel
 Academy Rhode Island, Highlander Charter School,
 The Hope Academy, The Learning Community,
 Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, Rhode Island
 Nurses Institute Middle College, RISE Prep Mayoral
 Academy, SouthSide Elementary Charter School,
 Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The
 Village Green Virtual Public Charter School.
- State-operated schools reporting include the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center and William M. Davies Jr. Career and Technical High School and Rhode Island School for the Deaf.
- Collaboratives reporting include Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy.
- The Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Providence, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket school districts received grants that provide additional resources to identify and serve homeless students.
- *Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of state, and state totals.
- Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.
- Rhode Island totals are not the sum of all the districts because some students move districts during the school year and are counted as homeless in both districts.

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Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Cost of Housing

- *Rhode Island Housing 2024 Rhode Island Rent Survey data are not available. Average rent used for these communities is the HUD FY 2024 Fair Market Rent for the metropolitan area as reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The average rents calculated for the four core cities and the remainder of state do not include communities for which data from the 2024 Rhode Island Rent Survey was not available.
- **Typical monthly housing payment for Providence includes the East Side and therefore cannot be compared to data reported for Providence in Factbooks between 2013 and 2021.
- Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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