

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 18.¹ Black children and families are more likely to experience homelessness than other racial and ethnic groups.²

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.²

Lack of stable housing is often a

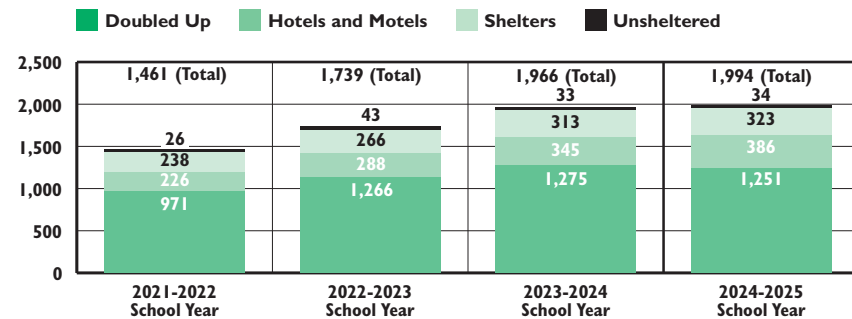
precipitating factor for a family’s involvement in the child welfare system, and unstable or inadequate housing can delay family reunification. Addressing families’ housing needs can reduce child neglect and abuse and help families stay together.^{3,4}

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.⁵⁻⁷

In Rhode Island in 2025, 440 families with 819 children stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, transitional housing facility, or hotel paid for by DCYF (including 326 infants, toddlers, and children under age six).⁸ An additional 291 children stayed at a domestic violence shelter or transitional housing facility.^{9,10} In 2025, Rhode Island phased out the use of hotels for emergency shelter and moved from a coordinated entry system with one statewide hotline to seven regional access points for shelter, including a mobile unit.¹¹



Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2021-2022 through 2024-2025 School Years



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 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.¹²
- ◆ 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.¹²
- ◆ 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 2024-2025 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,994 children as homeless. Of these children, 63% (1,251) lived with other families (“doubled up”), 19% (386) lived in hotels or motels, 16% (323) lived in shelters, and 2% (34) were unsheltered. The number of students identified as homeless in Rhode Island has increased by 36% (533 students) from the 2021-2022 school year.^{13,14}

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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.¹⁶

◆ 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.¹⁶

◆ In Rhode Island, only 19% of infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness are enrolled in an early childhood development program.¹⁶

Table 7. Homeless Children Identified by Public Schools, Rhode Island, 2024-2025 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL
Barrington	3,294	13
Bristol Warren	2,693	21
Burrillville	1,993	60
Central Falls	2,560	104
Chariho	2,966	40
Coventry	4,056	40
Cranston	10,037	52
Cumberland	4,881	28
East Greenwich	2,490	*
East Providence	5,225	41
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,544	17
Foster	241	0
Foster-Glocester	1,273	*
Glocester	563	*
Jamestown	406	0
Johnston	3,191	28
Lincoln	3,278	27
Little Compton	218	0
Middletown	1,860	74
Narragansett	977	*
New Shoreham	126	0
Newport	1,795	63
North Kingstown	3,786	74
North Providence	3,488	62
North Smithfield	1,637	10
Pawtucket	7,816	128
Portsmouth	2,134	*
Providence	20,250	325
Scituate	1,194	*
Smithfield	2,361	30
South Kingstown	2,253	29
Tiverton	1,520	*
Warwick	7,853	68
West Warwick	3,469	64
Westerly	2,139	56
Woonsocket	5,541	297
Charter Schools	12,630	183
State-Operated Schools	1,979	29
Collaboratives	261	*
Five Core Cities	37,962	917
Remainder of State	83,146	862
Rhode Island	135,978	1,994

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, Public School Enrollment in grades preschool to 12 on October 1, 2024.

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, Charette 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 and Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy.

Collaboratives reporting include UCAP and YouthBuild.

In 2025, the Central Falls, Middletown, North Kingstown, North Providence, Providence, Scituate, Warwick, West Warwick, Westerly, Woonsocket, the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center, and Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College 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 five core cities, remainder of state, and state totals

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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- Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Cost of Housing**
- *Rhode Island Housing 2025 Rhode Island Rent Survey data are not available. Average rent used for these communities is the HUD FY 2025 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 five core cities and the remainder of the state do not include communities for which data from the 2025 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.
- Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.
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