



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Data on Students Experiencing Homelessness

2024

Authorizing Legislation: RCW 28A.300.540

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
BACKGROUND	4
Legislation.....	4
UPDATE STATUS.....	6
Enrollment.....	6
Figure 1: Change in the Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness.....	6
Figure 2: Student Enrollment by Student Group, SY 2023-24.....	7
Figure 3: Student Enrollment by Grade Level, SY 2023-24.....	8
Figure 4: Student Enrollment by Nighttime Residence Type, School Year 2023-24.....	9
Student Outcomes.....	10
Figure 5: Students Graduation Rates, 4-Year Adjusted Cohort, Class of 2023	10
Figure 6: Homeless Students Graduation Rates, 5-Year Adjusted Cohort, Class of 2022	11
Figure 7: Homeless Attendance and Truancy by Student Group, SY 2022-23	12
Figure 8: Suspensions and Expulsions by Student Group, SY 2022-23.....	13
CONCLUSION and NEXT STEPS.....	15
Legal Notice	17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act broadly defines homelessness in an effort to provide protections and supports for students living in a variety of unstable housing situations. This ensures school stability and continued enrollment at a time when a student's nighttime residence may be constantly changing. In Washington, the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness has increased since 2001 when the McKinney-Vento Act began requiring all school districts to annually report the number of students experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in schools.

In 2014, the Washington State Legislature passed [Senate Bill 6074](#), which aims to improve educational outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness by bolstering student homelessness identification and establishing further data reporting requirements. [RCW 28A.300.540](#) requires the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to report this data every other year.

BACKGROUND

The National Center for Homeless Education's December 2023 publication reported that in school year (SY) 2021–2022 there were more than 1.2 million children and youth experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in schools across the nation. [Decades of research](#) show that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to suffer academically and are more likely to drop out of school when compared to their housed peers. Students experiencing homelessness are less likely to engage in school, have higher absentee rates, and have lower achievement test scores.

Legislation

The 2014 Washington State Legislature passed Senate Bill 6074 (RCW 28A.300.540) which requires OSPI to report data on student homelessness to the Governor and the Legislature every other year starting January 10, 2015. This report provides a more in-depth analysis of homeless student data than is currently required by the U.S. Department of Education under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (per Title IX, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)) defines **homeless** as follows:

The term "homeless children and youths"--

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and

(B) includes--

(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;¹

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

¹ *Per Title IX, Part A of the ESSA, "awaiting foster care placement" was removed from the definition of homeless on December 10, 2016.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (the Act) was reauthorized in December 2015 under ESSA and fully implemented in all public schools on October 1, 2016. The Act ensures that school districts provide identification, enrollment and access to children and youth experiencing homelessness and serves to provide school stability for students in homeless situations as each change of schools may cause a significant delay in a student's academic progress. The Act promotes the academic success of homeless students and ensures that children and youth experiencing homelessness can enroll and participate fully in all school activities, ensuring a free, appropriate education. Provisions of the Act include immediate enrollment even if a student lacks records, the right to remain in their school of origin when in the student's best interest, access to transportation, and other academic supports. Washington currently provides approximately \$2 million in federal McKinney-Vento grant funding to two multi-district consortium grants and 27 individual school district grants.

In 2021, in an unprecedented action by Congress, \$800 million was awarded to states through the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth fund (ARP-HCY). This grant provides a one-time funding opportunity through 2024 for the remediation of learning loss created by COVID-19 and to address the particular impacts of the pandemic on students experiencing homelessness. Washington received \$12 million in ARP-HCY funding, which was provided to 203 local school districts, most of which had never received Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funding in the past. These funds are used to support the identification, enrollment, and school participation of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including through wraparound services.

In addition to McKinney-Vento and ARP-HCY grant funding, in 2016, the Washington State Legislature passed the Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act, creating funding and a collaboration between OSPI and the Washington Department of Commerce to improve educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness through increased identification, school-based services, community-based resources, and housing stability. The resulting program complements the Federal McKinney-Vento Act by providing grant funding to 49 school districts, to be used for a range of LEA-determined priorities.

UPDATE STATUS

Enrollment

During the 2023–24 school year, the number of students statewide that experienced homelessness rose by 14% from the previous year to the highest level seen in the past decade (Figure 1). While COVID-19 disruptions in the 2020–21 school year resulted in a temporary decline in the number of students experiencing homelessness, these numbers have steadily risen in subsequent school years as districts continued to enroll an increasing number of students experiencing homelessness.

Figure 1: Change in the Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness

School Year	Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness
2014–15	33,642
2015–16	37,661
2016–17	39,189
2017–18	40,085
2018–19	39,888
2019–20	36,996
2020–21	32,335
2021–22	37,337
2022–23	42,375
2023–24	48,504

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

In the 2023-24 school year, the number of students experiencing homelessness accounted for 4.2% of the total student population in Washington state (Figure 2). Students who identified as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander were the most likely to experience homelessness compared to their peers (13.1%), followed by Black/African American students (8.3%) and American Indian/Alaskan Native students (7.3%). Students who identified as Asian were the least likely to experience homelessness compared to their peers (1.1%). Most students who were identified as being unaccompanied youth also experienced homelessness (86.9%; Figure 2).

Figure 2 also shows students experiencing homelessness occupied a greater proportion of all students involved in the Learning Assistance Program (5.8%) compared to programs focused on accelerated learning, such as the Highly Capable Program (0.6%) or Running Start (1.2%). This may be an area of opportunity for districts and schools to review if their processes that identify students for accelerated learning opportunities account for the

unique conditions that students experiencing homelessness face.

Figure 2: Student Enrollment by Student Group, SY 2023–24

Student Group	Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness*	Total Student Population	Percent of State Population that is Experiencing Homelessness
Statewide (All Students)	48,504	1,149,142	4.2%
Gender			
Female	24,482	593,812	4.1%
Male	23,558	550,057	4.3%
Gender X	464	5,273	8.8%
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	1,012	13,788	7.3%
Asian	1,158	101,917	1.1%
Black/African American	4,721	56,573	8.3%
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	18,953	302,567	6.3%
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	2,256	17,252	13.1%
Two or More Races	5,095	106,158	4.8%
White	15,299	550,712	2.8%
Student Group			
Unaccompanied Youth	6,431	7,398	86.9%
Students with Disabilities	9,775	181,384	5.4%
English Language Learners	15,015	170,282	8.8%
Students from Low-income Families	46,415	582,299	8.0%
Students in the Learning Assistance Program	9,901	171,121	5.8%

Student Group	Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness*	Total Student Population	Percent of State Population that is Experiencing Homelessness
Students who are Migrant	2,650	24,765	10.7%
Students with 504 plans	1,711	62,395	2.7%
Students in the Highly Capable Program	511	83,740	0.6%
Students Participating in Running Start	326	27,648	1.2%

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

**Count of students enrolled at any point in the school year.*

The proportion of students experiencing homelessness was consistent across all grade levels at around 4% (Figure 3). The grade level with the smallest percentage of students experiencing homelessness was Pre-Kindergarten, which may indicate that students experiencing homelessness do not have the same access to Pre-K instruction as their housed peers. The most students experiencing homelessness in the 2023–24 school year were in the twelfth grade.

Figure 3: Student Enrollment by Grade Level, SY 2023–24

Grade Level	State Enrollment	Homeless Enrollment*	Percent of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Each Grade Level
Pre-K	36,383	1,376	3.8%
Kindergarten	80,519	3,573	4.5%
1st	80,531	3,718	4.6%
2nd	84,425	3,859	4.6%
3rd	80,720	3,455	4.3%
4th	83,577	3,550	4.3%
5th	83,722	3,465	4.1%
6th	83,102	3,334	4.0%
7th	83,942	3,289	3.9%
8th	84,396	3,304	3.9%
9th	89,657	3,612	4.0%

Grade Level	State Enrollment	Homeless Enrollment*	Percent of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Each Grade Level
10th	90,951	3,662	4.0%
11th	92,101	3,738	4.1%
12th	95,116	4,569	4.8%

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

*Count of students enrolled at any point in the school year.

During the 2023–2024 school year, the most common nighttime residence type was “Doubled-Up,” with 76% of students experiencing homelessness sharing housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons (Figure 4). The next most common nighttime residence type was “Shelters” that provided temporary living accommodations (9.8% of students experiencing homelessness).

Figure 4: Student Enrollment by Nighttime Residence Type, School Year 2023–24

Nighttime Residence	Description	Number of Homeless Students	Percent of Students Experiencing Homelessness
Doubled-Up	Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason.	25,756	76.0%
Hotels/Motels	Living in hotels/motels due to lack of alternate adequate accommodations.	2,023	6%
Shelters	Supervised publicly or privately operated facilities designed to provide temporary living accommodations. (This category included children and youth who were “awaiting foster care” during the data collection period. As of December 10, 2016, the term “awaiting foster care” was removed from the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless.)	3,312	9.8%

Unsheltered	Includes living situations such as cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailers, abandoned buildings, and substandard housing.	2,824	8.3%
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Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

Student Outcomes

Graduation data for students experiencing homelessness (and for all students) are lagged by one year due to data availability, so the following graduation rates are for the class of 2023. In the 2022–2023 school year, 63.2% of students experiencing homelessness graduated with their adjusted four-year cohort, which was about 20 percentage points lower than the state graduation rate (83.6%; Figure 5). Of the students experiencing homelessness who did not graduate, 12.2% continued to be enrolled in school while 29.1% left school. Students identifying as Asian and Black/African American had the highest 4-year graduation rates of students experiencing homelessness (80.3% and 72.1%, respectively). Students identifying as American Indian/Alaskan Native had the lowest adjusted 4-year cohort graduation rate (55.9%); however, this student group was also the most likely to continue being enrolled in school (15% continuation rate) compared to other student groups experiencing homelessness as well as all students statewide (6.4% continuation rate).

Figure 5: Adjusted Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate for Students Experiencing Homelessness, Class of 2023

Student Group	Adjusted 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	Continuing Rate	Rate of Students who Left School without Graduating
Students Experiencing Homelessness	63.2%	12.2%	29.1%
Gender			
Female	67.5%	11.1%	21.3%
Male	59.4%	13.4%	27.2%
Gender X	48.6%	10.0%	41.4%
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/Alaska Native	55.9%	15.0%	29.1%
Asian	80.3%	12.1%	7.5%
Black/African American	72.1%	10.3%	17.6%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	62.5%	13.2%	24.3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	67.2%	11.9%	21.0%
Two or More Races	63.0%	12.4%	24.7%
White	60.7%	11.7%	27.6%

Student Group	Adjusted 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	Continuing Rate	Rate of Students who Left School without Graduating
Student Groups			
Students with Disabilities	54.0%	19.5%	19.5%
English Learners	60.3%	14.7%	25.1%
Students from Low-income Families	63.4%	12.4%	24.3%
Students who are Migrant	68.8%	11.3%	19.9%
Students with 504 Plans	59.2%	13.5%	27.3%

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

In the adjusted five-year cohort for the Class of 2022, 65.6% of students experiencing homelessness graduated (Figure 6), which was an almost 5% increase in the graduation rate over the previous year (not shown). Female students experiencing homelessness had an adjusted five-year cohort graduation rate that was nine percentage points higher than male students, (70.1% and 61.4%, respectively). Male students were also more likely to leave school without graduating compared to female students (33.7% and 25.7%, respectively), though they had similar rates of continuing for a 6th year of school.

Figure 6: Adjusted 5-Year Cohort Graduation Rate for Students Experiencing Homelessness, Class of 2022

Student Group	Adjusted 5-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	Continuing Rate	Rate of Students who Left School without Graduating
Students Experiencing Homelessness	65.6%	4.6%	29.9%
Gender			
Female	70.1%	4.2%	25.7%
Male	61.4%	4.9%	33.7%
Gender X	46.6%	4.3%	49.1%
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/Alaska Native	52.3%	4.5%	43.2%
Asian	78.6%	3.4%	17.9%
Black/African American	72.8%	5.3%	21.9%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	64.8%	4.9%	30.3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	73.2%	0.9%	25.8%
Two or More Races	67.0%	3.6%	29.3%

Student Group	Adjusted 5-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	Continuing Rate	Rate of Students who Left School without Graduating
White	63.7%	4.6%	31.8%
Student Groups			
Students with Disabilities	58.0%	9.1%	32.9%
English Learners	62.8%	4.8%	32.4%
Students from Low-income Families	66.0%	4.5%	29.5%
Students who are Migrant	69.7%	3.5%	26.7%
Students with 504 Plans	60.8%	5.4%	33.8%

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

In the 2022–2023 school year, 99,965 students were truant, or 8.7% of all the state’s public-school students. By comparison, 11,291 students experiencing homelessness, or 25.7% were reported as truant (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Attendance and Truancy for Students Experiencing Homelessness by Student Group, SY 2022–23

Student Group	Number of Students Regularly Attending*	Percent of Students Regularly Attending	Number of Students Reported as Truant**	Percent of Students Reported as Truant
Students Experiencing Homelessness	18,423	45.9%	11,291	25.7%
Gender				
Female	8,915	45.4%	5,542	25.9%
Male	9,344	46.6%	5,576	25.3%
Gender X	164	38.7%	173	37.2%
Race/Ethnicity				
American Indian/Alaska Native	357	38.6%	335	33.8%
Asian	645	63.2%	195	17.2%
Black/African American	1,548	42.1%	1,408	34.2%
Hispanic/Latino	6,806	47.3%	3,886	24.3%

Student Group	Number of Students Regularly Attending*	Percent of Students Regularly Attending	Number of Students Reported as Truant**	Percent of Students Reported as Truant
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	705	38.6%	705	35.5%
Two or More Races	1,745	39.1%	1,539	32.4%
White	6,613	47.9%	3,223	21.6%
Student Group				
Students with Disabilities	3,388	40.7%	2,488	27.6%
English Learners	5,680	52.2%	2,461	20.6%
Students from Low-income Families	17,522	45.4%	10,968	26.1%
Students who are Migrant	1,123	55.0%	386	17.0%
Students with 504 Plans	614	39.0%	459	28.3%

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

*Students are considered to be regularly attending if they have fewer than two absences per month on average. It does not matter if the absences are excused or unexcused.

**Students are considered truant if they have one of the following: Seven or more unexcused absences in a 30-day period or 15 or more unexcused absences during a school year. Truancy rates are based on reported absences, not if a truancy petition was filed.

In the 2022–2023 school year, students experiencing homelessness faced suspension and expulsion at more than twice the rate of Washington’s entire student population (Figure 8). The student group with the highest rates of suspension and expulsion based on percentage were students experiencing homelessness from low-income families at 11.5%. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students and Black and African American students were the most likely to be suspended or expelled when stratifying by racial and ethnic group, at 15.4% and 14.7% respectively.

Figure 8: Suspensions and Expulsions for Students Experiencing Homelessness by Student Group, SY 2022–23

Student Group	Number of Students that were Suspended or Expelled*	Percent of Students that were Suspended or Expelled
Students Experiencing Homelessness	3,488	8.9%
Gender		
Female	1,281	10.4%
Male	2,192	8.2%
Gender X	25	12.8%
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	82	8.6%

Asian	30	3.2%
Black/African American	515	14.7%
Hispanic/Latino	1,106	8.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	143	15.4%
Two or More Races	484	11.4%
White	1,189	7.3%
Student Groups		
Students with Disabilities	1,145	10.2%
English Learners	589	9.5%
Students from Low-income Families	3,419	11.5%
Students who are Migrant	138	10.7%
Students with 504 Plans	208	7.0%

Source: CEDARS, 11/15/2024

**Students that received one or more of the following: short-term suspension, long-term suspension, or expulsion.*

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

There is growing recognition that schools are often the safest, most stable, and supportive places for students experiencing homelessness and that stability is critical to the academic success of those students. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) provides training, technical assistance, and opportunities for grant funding to local school districts as they work to serve the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

For more information related to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the education of homeless youth, please visit the [OSPI Homeless Children and Youth](#), the [National Center for Homeless Education](#), [SchoolHouse Connection](#), or the [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#) websites.

REFERENCES

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