

Homeless Children and Youth

DEFINITION

This indicator reports the percentage of public school students in each county who are homeless. The U.S. Department of Education defines homeless children and youth as “lacking fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.” These data focus specifically on the student population including homeless students who are living with another family, staying in hotels and motels, staying in shelters or transitional housing, and students who are unsheltered, staying in cars, parks or temporary trailers and the like. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 requires all U.S. school districts to identify and report homeless students enrolled in schools (U.S. Department of Education 2010).

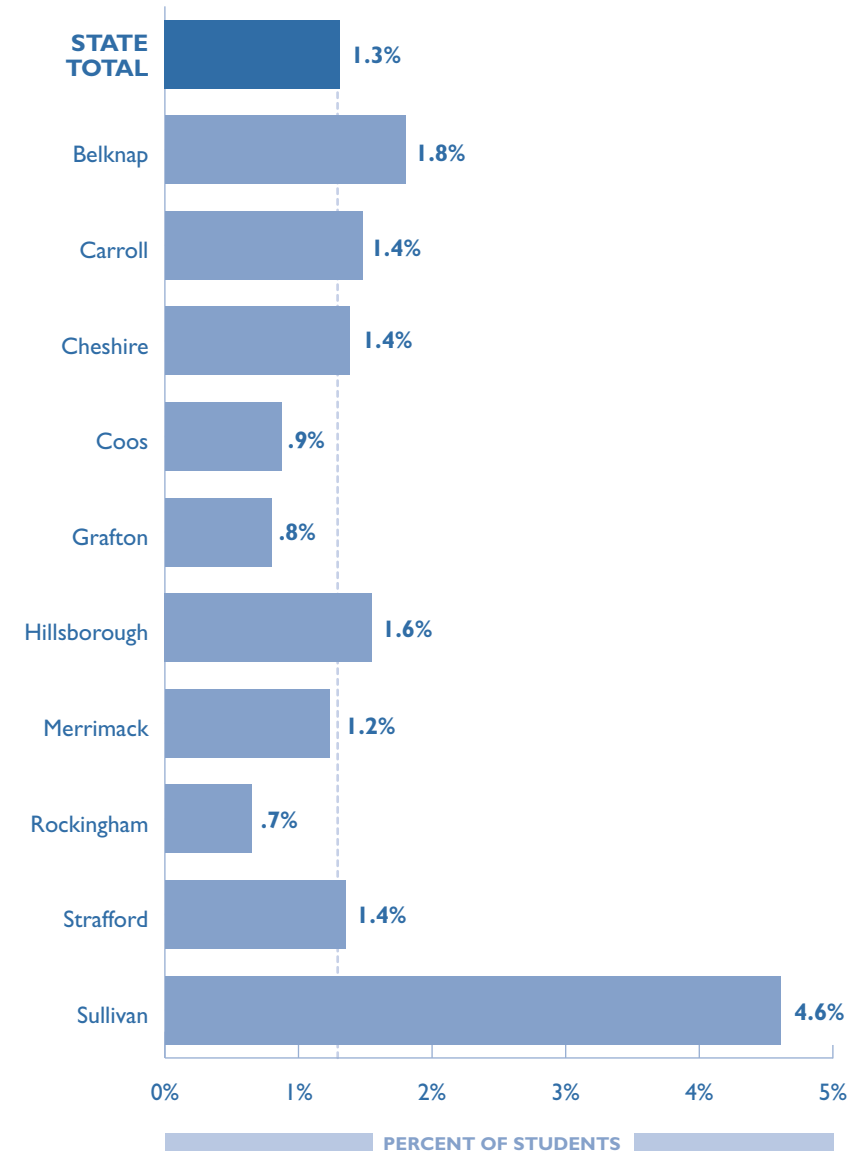
CONTEXT

Homelessness and poverty are closely related. Homeless and low-income children are more likely to have health problems, be malnourished and hungry, live in foster care, and under perform in school. Children without stable housing are more likely to miss school, move from school to school and have poor study environments outside of school, all factors that may contribute to lower test scores and behavioral problems among homeless children and youth (Cunningham 2010).

The New Hampshire’s Emergency Shelter and Homeless Coordination Commission reports the number of homeless families in New Hampshire is on the rise and links growth in the state’s homeless population to “persistent shortage of affordable housing” as well as current economic challenges. In 2009 state-funded emergency and transition shelters provided beds to nearly 5,000 people, of whom 17 percent were children under the age of 18 (NH DHHS 2009).

Homeless Students

By County, 2009-2010



NEW HAMPSHIRE FINDINGS

In 2009-2010, New Hampshire school districts identified and reported 2,573 homeless students, 1.3 percent of total enrollment (NH DOE). This estimate rose nearly 21 percent (441 students) from the 2008-2009 count (Wauchope 2010).

Rates of homelessness among public school students vary widely by county from a low of 0.65 percent in Rockingham County to a high of 4.61 percent in Sullivan County. The rate of homelessness among public school students in Sullivan County is more than 2.5 times the rate of any other county. Three quarters of homeless students in the county come from the Claremont school district where 9.7 percent of enrolled students are homeless (NH DOE 2010). In 2009, Southwestern Community Service (SCS) operated three shelters in the City of Claremont that served families with children (NH DHHS 2009). (see chart on previous page)

Most New Hampshire students who were homeless in the 2009-2010 school year (77 percent) “doubled up” with a non-related family while another 12 percent stayed in shelters. Available data do not indicate how many homeless students are in homeless families and how many are older children who have left home (NH DOE 2010). Among New Hampshire counties, only Carroll County did not have a state-funded emergency shelter. Coos, Grafton, Belknap, Strafford and Rockingham counties each have one homeless shelter. Cheshire, Sullivan and Merrimack counties have three shelters and Hillsborough County has four state-funded emergency shelters (NH DHHS 2009). Nine percent of homeless students in New Hampshire stayed in hotels or motels, and just 2 percent of New Hampshire homeless students lived unsheltered, staying in cars, parks, campgrounds, etc. (NH DOE 2010).

These statistics likely underestimate the extent of homelessness among New Hampshire children. Several factors contribute to undercounting by school districts: families and students may not report homelessness out of fear or embarrassment, staff resources and funding may be inadequate to ensure identification and reporting of all homeless children in a district, and lack of service agencies and shelters can make identification more difficult in rural districts (Cunningham et. al. 2010). In 2010, one estimate put the total number of homeless children in New Hampshire between 3,000 and 4,000 (Kuenning 2010).

SOURCE OF DATA FOR ILLUSTRATION/METHODOLOGY

The New Hampshire Department of Education reports the number of enrolled students who are homeless by school district. The following methodology was used to estimate homeless enrollment by county. First, we identified which county each school district with homeless students lay in. For districts that crossed county borders, special estimates were computed (see methodology in appendix). Then district homeless enrollment or estimated district homeless enrollment figures were added together to derive each county's total homeless enrollment.

New Hampshire Department of Education (NH DOE). 2010.

REFERENCES

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