



State of Tennessee

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Homelessness: An Issue for Tennessee Schools, Students and Families

The number of homeless students attending public schools in Tennessee has increased substantially since a national economic downturn that began in late 2007, according to a report recently released by the Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability.

Nationwide, the number of homeless students grew from 679,724 to 939,903 from the 2006-2007 academic year to the 2009-2010 academic year – an increase of about 38 percent. In Tennessee, the percentage increase was much higher over the same time span. The number of homeless students in Tennessee grew from 6,565 to 11,458 – a jump of about 74 percent.

There's also evidence to suggest that not all of Tennessee's homeless students were counted. Several surrounding states (including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky and Louisiana) have identified significantly higher numbers of homeless students. And some school districts in areas of Tennessee with high unemployment and/or high foreclosure rates have identified no homeless students at all.

The increase in homeless students may be attributable to job losses and other difficulties related to the economy that have affected families, but they may also be the result of some school districts' improved efforts to identify homeless students.

The federal McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act requires that each school district appoints a local homeless education coordinator, whose responsibilities include ensuring that school personnel identify homeless children and provide access to the same public educational services available to other children. The federal law addresses some of the problems that homeless children have confronted in enrolling, attending and succeeding in school. The law defines homeless children as those who lack fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residences.

The effects of homelessness on children's educational progress are significant. According to research cited by the National Center on Family Homelessness, compared to their housed counterparts, children who are homeless:

- are four times more likely to show delayed development;
- are twice as likely to have learning disabilities; and

- have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems.

Because their families move frequently, homeless children tend to change schools and miss classes more often. Homeless students are more likely to repeat grades, be placed in special education or fail academically, all of which can lead to dropping out. Nationally, fewer than 25 percent of homeless students graduate from high school.

For more information, view the full report online, at:

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/OREA/PublicationDetails.aspx?ReportKey=e930ad6c-6591-4d34-8d56-4ff21da2f928>

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