

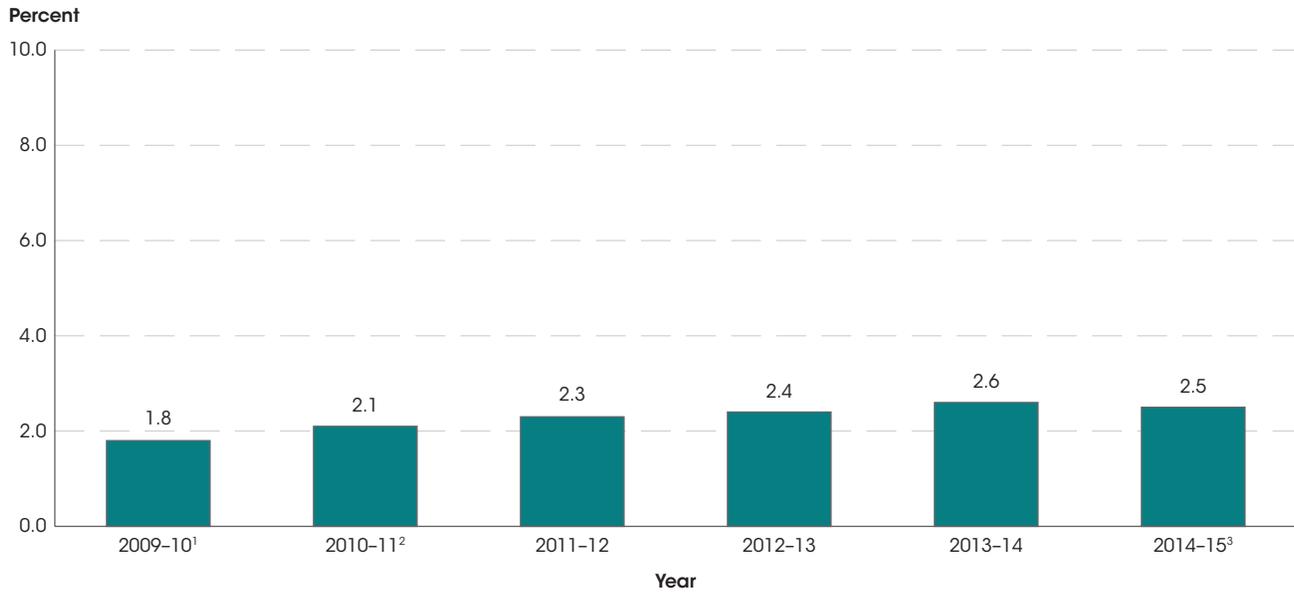
Homeless Children and Youth in Public Schools

In 2014–15, some 2.5 percent of students in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools were reported as homeless children or youth (1.3 million students). This percentage varied from 2.0 percent in suburban school districts to 2.4 percent in rural districts, 2.6 percent in town districts, and 3.7 percent in city districts. The largest numbers of homeless students were enrolled in city (578,000 students) and suburban districts (422,000 students), compared to rural (149,000 students) and town districts (139,000 students).

Research has shown that children experiencing homelessness face a range of challenges related to their health, emotional well-being, and safety.¹ Unstable housing situations may lead to increased rates of transfer among public schools, resulting in further disruptions to the education of homeless students.² The U.S. Department of Education collects data on homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. This authority was recently renewed under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. The McKinney-Vento Act requires that school districts identify students who are experiencing homelessness and guarantees their right to enroll in public schools and access educational and transportation services. Under this law, states report data to the Department of Education on the number of homeless students enrolled in public schools, as well as the characteristics of these students. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students are identified as homeless if they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.³

Students experiencing homelessness may be temporarily doubled up with other families or sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or other reasons (such as domestic violence); living in hotels or motels; living in shelters or other forms of temporary housing; or living in unsheltered situations (e.g., living in cars, parks, campgrounds, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers, or abandoned buildings).

Over time, the capacity of school systems to identify students experiencing homelessness, collect information, and report data to the Department of Education has improved.⁴ Some of the change over time in the rates of homelessness among public school students may be attributable to improved reporting practices.⁵ In addition, some of the variation across jurisdictions in the rates of homelessness and the characteristics of homeless students may be related to variation in reporting practices.

Figure 1. Percentage of public school students who were identified as homeless: School years 2009–10 through 2014–15

¹ Data for 2009–10 exclude Maine and Oklahoma.

² Data for 2010–11 exclude Oklahoma.

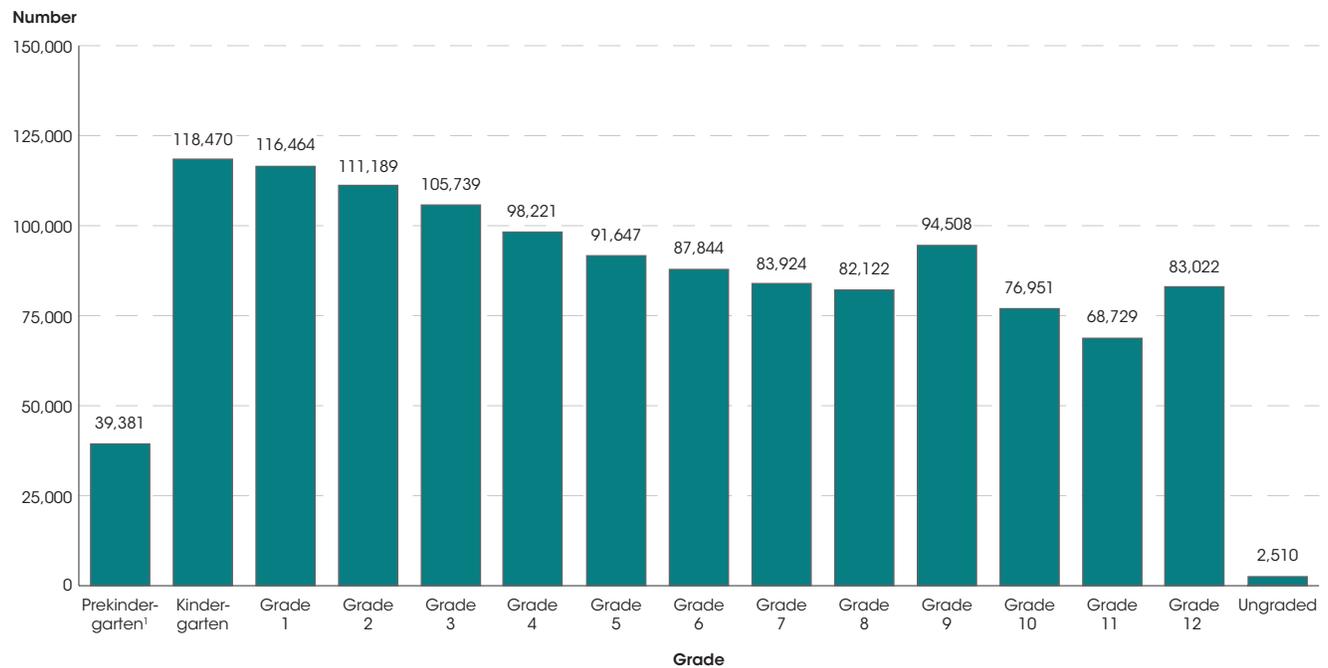
³ The decrease in homeless students in 2014–15 was caused in part by changes to California's data collection systems. For more information, see section 1.9 of California's 2014–15 Consolidated State Performance Report (<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/sy14-15part1/ca.pdf>).

NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see "C118–Homeless Students Enrolled" at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. Data exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. This figure is based on state-level data. Percentage is based on sum of counts by grade, including prekindergarten.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, EDData file 118, Data Group 655, extracted October 14, 2016, from the EDData Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source); and Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2009–10 through 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75a.

The number of U.S. public elementary and secondary students reported as homeless increased from 910,000 in 2009–10 to 1.3 million in 2014–15.⁶ During this

time, the percentage of public school students who were reported as homeless increased from 1.8 percent in 2009–10 to 2.5 percent in 2014–15.

Figure 2. Number of public school students who were identified as homeless, by grade: School year 2014–15

¹ Includes all 3- to 5-year-old homeless children who are not in kindergarten.

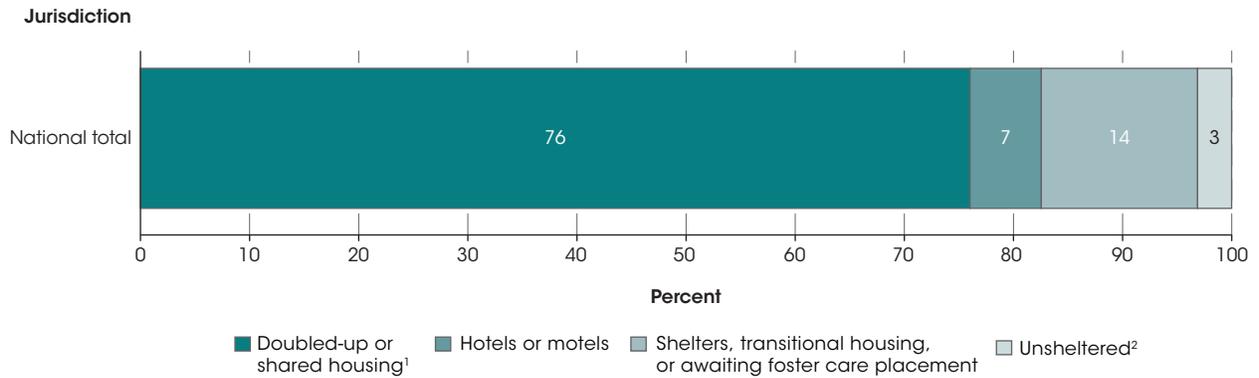
NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see "C118-Homeless Students Enrolled" at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. Data exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. This figure is based on state-level data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 118, Data Group 655, extracted October 14, 2016, from the ED*Facts* Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75a.

In 2014–15, larger numbers of homeless students were enrolled in early elementary grades (excluding preschool) than in later grades. Over 100,000 students were reported

as homeless at each grade level from kindergarten to 3rd grade. In contrast, 68,700 students in 11th grade and 83,000 students in 12th grade were reported as homeless.

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of public school students who were identified as homeless, by primary nighttime residence: School year 2014–15



¹ Refers to temporarily sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or other reasons (such as domestic violence).

² Includes living in cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailers—including Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers—or abandoned buildings.

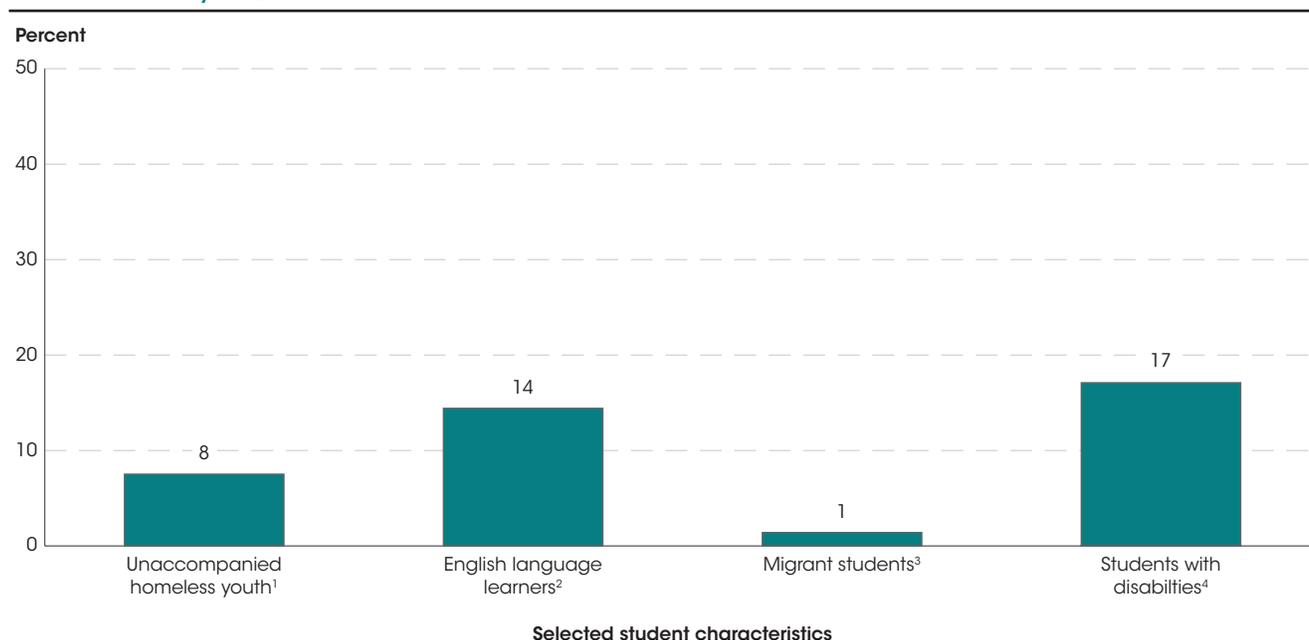
NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see “C118—Homeless Students Enrolled” at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. Data exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. This figure is based on state-level data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 118, Data Group 655, extracted October 14, 2016, from the ED*Facts* Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75a.

The Department of Education also collects data on the primary nighttime residences of students reported as homeless. In 2014–15, some 76 percent of homeless students reported that they were doubled up with another family due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or

other reasons (such as domestic violence). An additional 14 percent were housed in shelters or transitional housing, or were awaiting foster care placement. Seven percent resided in hotels or motels and 3 percent were unsheltered.

Figure 4. Percentage of public school students who were identified as homeless, by selected student characteristics: School year 2014–15



¹ Youth who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Includes youth living on their own and youth living with a caregiver who is not their legal guardian.

² Students who met the definition of limited English proficient students as outlined in the ED*Facts* workbook. For more information, see <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/eden-workbook.html>.

³ Students who met the definition of eligible migrant children as outlined in the ED*Facts* workbook. Such students are either migratory workers or the children or spouses of migratory workers and have moved within the preceding 36 months in order to obtain, or to accompany parents or spouses who moved in order to obtain, temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work. For more information, see <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/eden-workbook.html>. Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Rhode Island, and West Virginia did not operate a migrant education program during the 2014–15 school year and therefore had no data to provide on migrant homeless students.

⁴ Includes only students with disabilities who were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

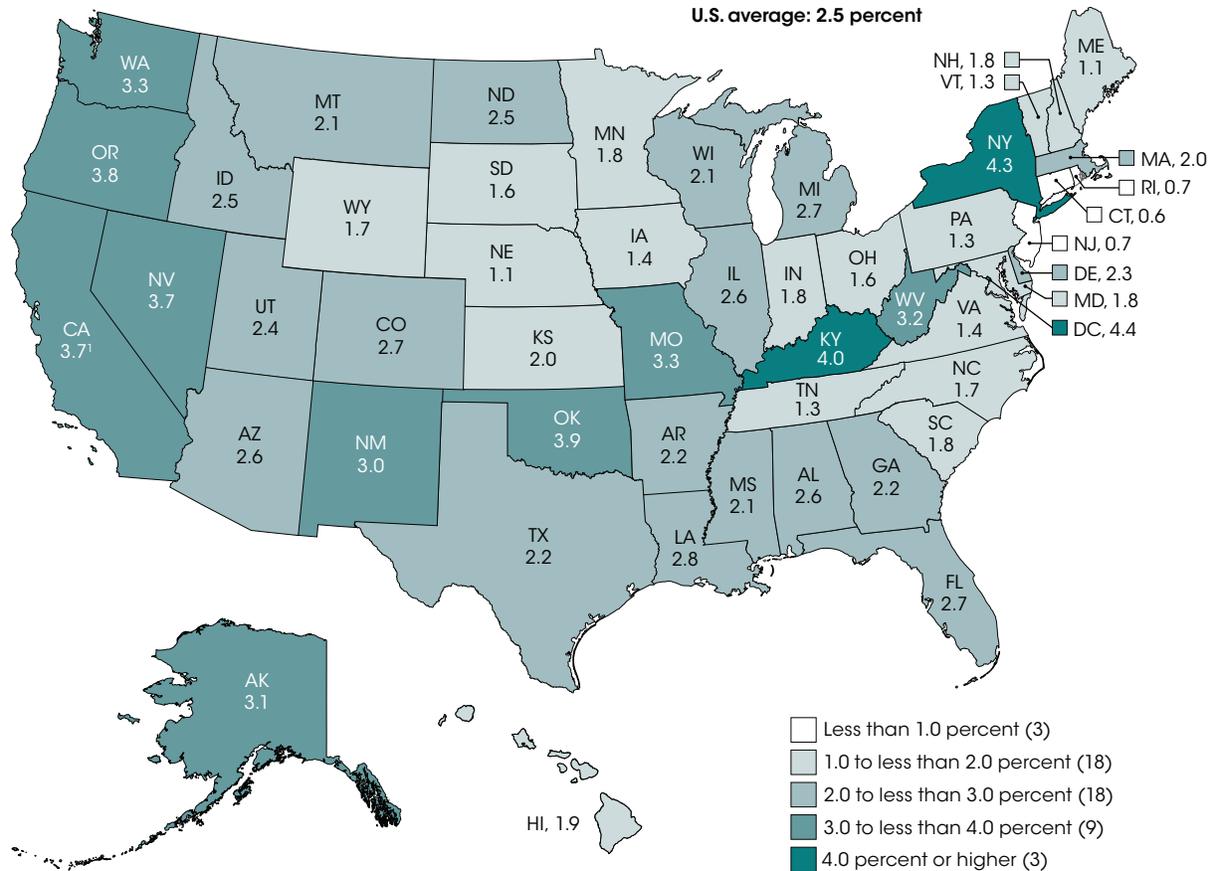
NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see “C118 - Homeless Students Enrolled” at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. Data exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. This figure is based on state-level data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 118, Data Group 655, extracted October 14, 2016, from the ED*Facts* Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75a.

While most homeless students experience homelessness together with their family unit, 8 percent of homeless students in 2014–15 (94,800 students) were not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. This group of students, known as unaccompanied homeless youth, includes individuals experiencing a range of personal circumstances, including runaway youth and youth who have been separated from their family due to conflict or loss of contact. The group also includes youth living with a caregiver who is not their legal guardian.

In addition, 14 percent of homeless students in 2014–15 were identified as English language learners, compared to 9 percent of all public school students (see indicator [English Language Learners in Public Schools](#)).⁷ Seventeen percent of homeless students were identified as students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), compared to 13 percent of all public school students (see indicator [Children and Youth With Disabilities](#)).⁸ Around 1 percent of homeless students were identified as migrant students.⁹

Figure 5. Percentage of public school students who were identified as homeless, by state: School year 2014–15



¹ California’s 2014–15 homeless count decreased from previous years in part because of changes to the state’s data collection systems. For more information, see section 1.9 of California’s 2014–15 Consolidated State Performance Report (<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/sy14-15part1/ca.pdf>).

NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see “C118–Homeless Students Enrolled” at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. Data exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. Categorizations are based on unrounded percentages.

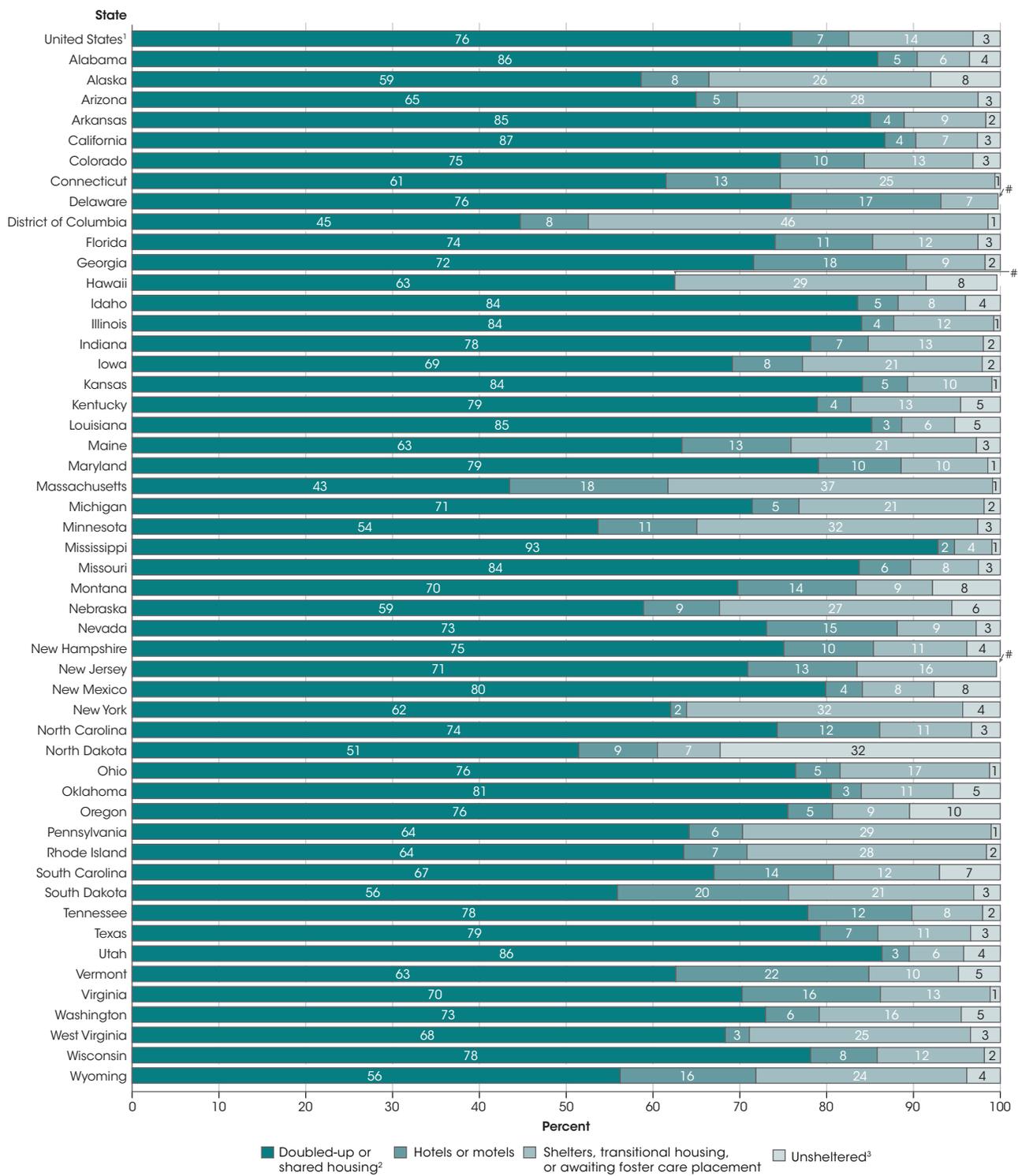
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 118, Data Group 655, extracted October 14, 2016, from the ED*Facts* Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source); Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education,” 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75c.

At the state level, the percentage of public school students who were reported as homeless in 2014–15 ranged from less than 1 percent in Connecticut (0.6 percent), Rhode Island (0.7 percent), and New Jersey (0.7 percent) to 4 percent or more in Kentucky (4.0 percent), New York (4.3 percent), and the District of Columbia (4.4 percent).

In 2014–15, the number of homeless students enrolled in public schools was higher than in 2009–10 in 44 states and the District of Columbia. The increases during this

time period ranged from 1 percent in Rhode Island to 84 percent in Michigan, 94 percent in Nevada, 98 percent in Missouri, 99 percent in West Virginia, 113 percent in Montana, and 267 percent in North Dakota. In contrast, the number of homeless students enrolled in public schools was lower in 2014–15 than in 2009–10 in four states: Louisiana (19 percent lower), Arizona (6 percent lower), Delaware (4 percent lower), and Utah (1 percent lower).¹⁰

Figure 6. Percentage distribution of public school students who were identified as homeless, by state and primary nighttime residence: School year 2014-15



Rounds to zero.

¹ Excludes Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education.

² Refers to temporarily sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or other reasons (such as domestic violence).

³ Includes living in cars, parks, campgrounds, temporary trailers—including Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers—or abandoned buildings.

NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see “C118—Homeless Students Enrolled” at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. This figure is based on state-level data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

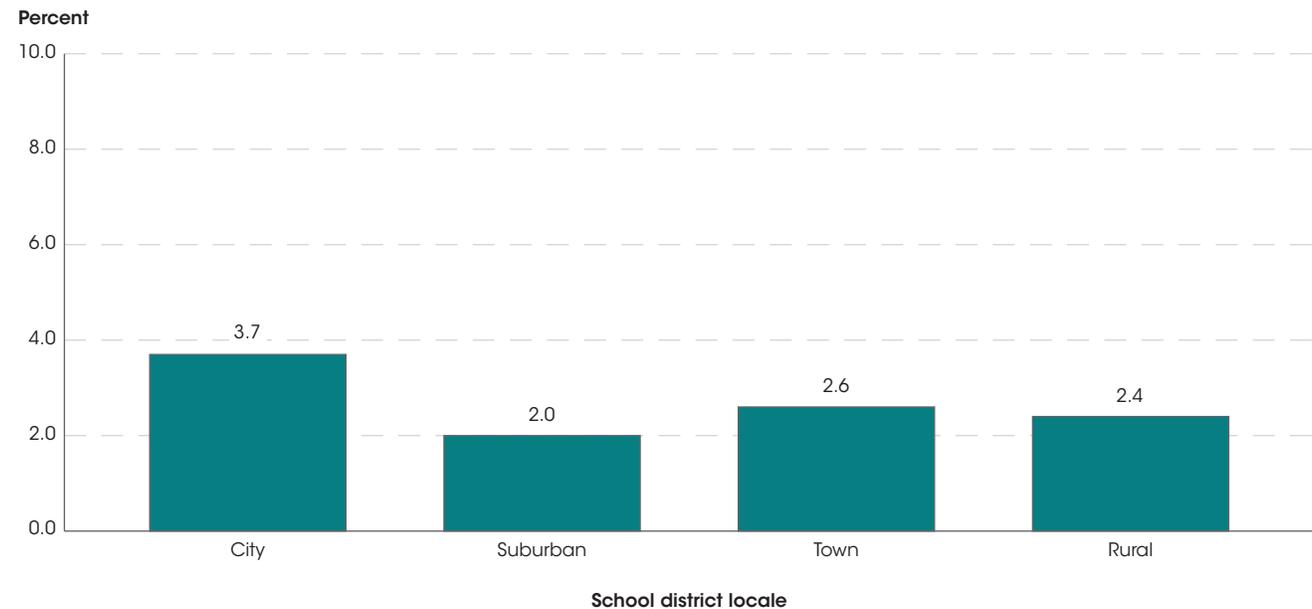
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED Facts file 118, Data Group 655, extracted October 14, 2016, from the ED Facts Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75d.

The percentages of homeless students in each primary nighttime residence category varied across states in 2014–15, although in all 50 states the largest share were doubled up with other families. The percentage of homeless students living doubled up with other families ranged from 43 percent in Massachusetts to 93 percent in Mississippi. In the District of Columbia, however, a slightly larger share were in shelters (46 percent) than doubled up (45 percent). In addition to the District of Columbia, the percentage of homeless students in shelters was greater than 30 percent in New York (32 percent), Minnesota (32 percent), and Massachusetts (37 percent). The percentage of homeless students in hotels and motels

ranged from less than 1 percent in Hawaii to 22 percent in Vermont, and the percentage of homeless students who were unsheltered ranged from less than one half of 1 percent in New Jersey and Delaware to 32 percent in North Dakota.

Similarly, the percentage of unaccompanied youth among homeless students varied widely across states in 2014–15. New Jersey, West Virginia, and Wyoming reported zero unaccompanied homeless youth, while two states reported that more than 20 percent of their homeless students were unaccompanied youth: Alaska (22 percent) and Maine (23 percent).

Figure 7. Percentage of public school students who were identified as homeless, by school district locale: School year 2014–15



NOTE: Homeless students are defined as children/youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For more information, see “C118—Homeless Students Enrolled” at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html>. Data include all homeless students enrolled at any time during the school year. Data exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED*Facts* file 118, Data Group 655, extracted January 23, 2017, from the ED*Facts* Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source). Common Core of Data (CCD), “Local Education Agency Universe Survey,” 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.75b.

In 2014–15, a higher percentage of students in city districts were homeless (3.7 percent) than in town (2.6 percent), rural (2.4 percent), and suburban districts (2.0 percent). Nevertheless, there was a large number of homeless students enrolled in suburban districts (422,000), which was second only to the number in city districts (578,000). Smaller numbers of homeless students were enrolled in rural (149,000) and town (139,000) districts.

“Doubled up” was the most common primary nighttime residence across the four locale categories (city, suburban, town, and rural) in 2014–15. The percentage of homeless students who were doubled up with other families ranged from 70 percent in city districts to 81 percent in rural districts. The percentage of homeless students who were

housed in shelters was higher in city districts (21 percent) than in suburban (11 percent), town (10 percent), and rural districts (9 percent). The percentages of homeless students who were unsheltered or living in hotels and motels varied less widely across locale categories.

Among the 120 largest school districts in the country in 2014–15, Santa Ana Unified (California) and New York City reported the highest percentages of students experiencing homelessness (10.6 and 10.1 percent, respectively). In New York City alone, 100,000 students were reported as homeless. The district with the next largest number of homeless students enrolled in public schools was Chicago, where 19,900 students were reported as homeless.

Endnotes:

¹ Buckner, J.C. (2008). Understanding the Impact of Homelessness on Children: Challenges and Future Research Directions. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(6): 721–736. Retrieved May 2, 2017, from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764207311984>.

² Swick, K.J. (2005). Helping Homeless Families Overcome Barriers to Successful Functioning. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(3): 195–200. Retrieved May 2, 2017, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-005-0044-0>.

³ For more information on the definition of homelessness used in this indicator, see “C118—Homeless Students Enrolled” at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/sy-14-15-nonxml.html> and section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001 at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>.

⁴ John McLaughlin, U.S. Department of Education, personal communication, August 25, 2016.

⁵ For example, in 2014–15 California modified its data collection systems, resulting in a 17 percent decrease in the number of students reported as homeless. This change occurred, in part, because a student’s homeless status no longer rolled over from year to year and instead depended on yearly verification.

⁶ National totals presented in this indicator exclude Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education. Due to missing data,

national totals for 2009–10 exclude Maine and Oklahoma and national totals for 2010–11 exclude Oklahoma. National totals for 2014–15 include imputations to address data quality issues.

⁷ Includes students who met the definition of limited English proficient students as outlined in the *EDFacts* workbook. For more information, see <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/eden-workbook.html>.

⁸ Includes only students with disabilities who were served under IDEA.

⁹ Includes students who met the definition of eligible migrant children as outlined in the *EDFacts* workbook. Such students are either migratory workers or the children or spouses of migratory workers and have moved within the preceding 36 months in order to obtain, or to accompany parents or spouses who moved in order to obtain, temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work. For more information, see <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/eden-workbook.html>. Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Rhode Island, and West Virginia did not operate a migrant education program during the 2014–15 school year and therefore had no data to provide on migrant homeless students. Comparable data on the percentage of all students identified as migrants were unavailable.

¹⁰ 2009–10 data were unavailable for Maine and Oklahoma.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 204.75a, 204.75b, 204.75c, 204.75d, and 204.75e

Related indicators and resources: Elementary and Secondary Enrollment, English Language Learners in Public Schools, Children and Youth With Disabilities

Glossary: Disabilities, children with; English language learner (ELL); Enrollment; Locale codes; Public school or institution