



LEXINGTON'S HOMELESS SCHOOL CHILDREN

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[Abstract](#)

Wide differences exist in the incidence of homelessness in elementary schools in Fayette County

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In August 2015, the Lexington Herald Leader published an investigative story about homeless school children in Kentucky. Major highlights from this article are summarized in Appendix A. In brief, the report noted that Kentucky has the highest rate (nearly 5%) of homeless school children of any state in the United States. The report also noted that the problem is increasing, funding for solutions is scarce, and family homelessness has profound negative impacts on children’s educational achievement.

In the fall of 2015, Fayette County Public Schools released its final tabulation of homeless school children (for school year 2014-15) along with a number of other

data points comparing each school in the district as part of its School Report Card program.

In an effort to better understand homelessness in our schools, the *Lexington Fair Housing Council* has undertaken an analysis of this most recent data in Fayette County schools. As indicated in the following table, homelessness among students in Fayette County has been increasing dramatically. For all grades in aggregate, the increase over this three-year period was 94%, nearly doubling since 2013. Although school officials indicate that some of this increase resulted from improved efforts to ascertain homeless status among children in school, there is no doubt that numbers have increased significantly.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF HOMELESS STUDENTS REPORTED IN FAYETTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS

<u>Fayette County</u>	<u>2012-13</u>	<u>2013-14</u>	<u>2014-15</u>	<u>Percent Increase</u>
Age 3-5	0	50	56	n/a
Kindergarten	62	72	77	24%
Grade 01	34	50	71	109%
Grade 02	40	55	78	95%
Grade 03	45	52	57	27%
Grade 04	35	43	64	83%
Grade 05	32	41	56	75%
Grade 06	34	40	53	56%
Grade 07	22	52	48	118%
Grade 08	30	47	50	67%
Grade 09	35	47	76	117%
Grade 10	17	40	45	165%
Grade 11	15	34	37	147%
Grade 12	9	21	27	200%
Aggregate Total	410	644	795	94%

Source: Kentucky Department of Education

A detailed comparison of each elementary school in the district is listed in Table 2. There are wide differences in these schools' data. Homeless rates vary from 0% to as high as 11.52%. There is also significant variation in other data

points, including state percentile rankings, eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program, the percentage of minority students as well as the spending levels per pupil.

TABLE 2: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DATA IN FAYETTE COUNTY

School	Total Students 2014-15	FINAL Homeless Report 2014-15	Percent Homeless	% Free & Reduced May 2015	Percent Non-White	School State Percentile Rank 2014-15	School Average Years of Teaching Experience	Spending Per Pupil 2014-15
Arlington Elementary School	392	5	1.28%	95.3%	70.7%	39	8.2	\$ 12,213
Ashland Elementary School	416	6	1.44%	47.4%	38.5%	94	9.7	\$ 10,167
Athens-Chilesburg Elem.	755	5	0.66%	21.3%	24.2%	95	10.5	\$ 8,233
Booker T Washington	281	8	2.85%	89.0%	91.8%	22	10.6	\$ 12,132
Booker T Washington Primary	338	19	5.62%	91.1%	90.5%		7.7	\$ 12,078
Cardinal Valley Elementary	622	24	3.86%	96.3%	83.0%	21	6.5	\$ 10,344
Cassidy Elementary	701	6	0.86%	32.5%	27.5%	96	11.6	\$ 8,633
Clays Mill Elementary	555	2	0.36%	35.7%	16.9%	90	13.7	\$ 10,454
Deep Springs Elementary	545	48	8.81%	79.8%	58.5%	17	5.4	\$ 9,588
Dixie Elementary Magnet	551	11	2.00%	59.7%	44.1%	91	9.4	\$ 9,676
Garden Springs Elementary	538	4	0.74%	48.3%	29.7%	87	14.6	\$ 10,007
Glendover Elementary	644	5	0.78%	51.9%	41.0%	98	11.2	\$ 8,889
Harrison Elementary	366	42	11.48%	95.1%	71.6%	63	7.4	\$ 12,337
James Lane Allen Elem.	551	18	3.27%	83.0%	69.0%	59	12.1	\$ 10,560
Julius Marks Elementary	635	6	0.94%	69.0%	49.8%	66	12.3	\$ 9,240
Lansdowne Elementary	717	13	1.81%	66.4%	43.8%	70	10.7	\$ 8,956
Liberty Elementary	810	3	0.37%	44.4%	43.7%	88	12.2	\$ 8,433
Madeline M Breckinridge Elem	684	8	1.17%	82.7%	72.5%	68	6.4	\$ 9,394
Mary Todd Elementary School	479	30	6.26%	91.8%	74.1%	9	11.0	\$ 11,526
Maxwell Spanish Immersion	518	0	0.00%	26.6%	47.5%	94	12.1	\$ 8,661
Meadowthorpe Elementary	582	5	0.86%	51.1%	44.7%	73	10.2	\$ 8,897
Millcreek Elementary	465	35	7.53%	80.1%	58.9%	33	7.3	\$ 11,578
Northern Elementary School	501	8	1.60%	87.0%	71.3%	20	10.0	\$ 11,447
Picadome Elementary	507	17	3.35%	44.5%	28.2%	99	10.8	\$ 10,624
Rosa Parks Elementary	727	1	0.14%	9.5%	34.1%	99	18.1	\$ 8,736
Russell Cave Elementary	298	2	0.67%	95.0%	88.3%	32	5.9	\$ 13,010
Sandersville Elementary	745	1	0.13%	45.0%	49.0%	96	9.9	\$ 8,518
Scapa At Bluegrass	276	0	0.00%	10.5%	20.3%	99	13.2	\$ 12,348
Southern Elementary	609	8	1.31%	72.1%	49.6%	69	10.2	\$ 9,964
Squires Elementary	554	8	1.44%	64.1%	39.0%	78	10.9	\$ 9,889
Stonewall Elementary	670	0	0.00%	25.2%	19.4%	93	14.8	\$ 8,709
Tates Creek Elementary	609	12	1.97%	71.7%	50.9%	45	13.0	\$ 10,365
Veterans Park Elementary	625	0	0.00%	17.0%	15.2%	99	15.6	\$ 9,358
Wellington Elementary	624	2	0.32%	38.4%	28.4%	99	8.1	\$ 9,071
William Wells Brown Elem.	356	41	11.52%	96.6%	83.7%	20	7.5	\$ 12,090
Yates Elementary School	537	42	7.82%	74.5%	58.7%	32	9.5	\$ 10,363
	19,783	445	2.25%	60.8%	50.8%	67	10.51	\$ 10,180

Sources: Kentucky Department of Education and Fayette County Public Schools

Similar tables for middle schools and high schools in the district are included in Appendix B.

An analysis of the data on elementary schools reveals that there is wide disparity between schools in Lexington on a number of ranking criteria. Perhaps most surprising is the relative disparity in the incidence of homelessness among school children. In fact, two elementary schools in Lexington have rates of homeless children exceeding 11%, far

surpassing the state's high level of 5%. In stark contrast, there are three Lexington elementary schools with no homeless children at all (a rate of 0%).

In an effort to provide some meaningful comparison of all this information it was decided to compare the data on elementary schools by grouping the schools most impacted by homelessness against the data on the schools least impacted. That comparison is included in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS LEAST AND MOST IMPACTED BY HOMELESSNESS

School	Total Students 2014-15	Number Homeless 2014-15	Percent Homeless	Percent Free & Reduced Lunch May 2015	Percent Non-White	School State Percentile Rank 2014-15	School Average Teacher Years of Experience	Spending Per Pupil 2014-15
FIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH THE HIGHEST HOMELESS PERCENTAGE								
William Wells Brown Elem.	356	41	11.52%	96.6%	83.7%	20	7.5	\$ 12,090
Harrison Elementary	366	42	11.48%	95.1%	71.6%	63	7.4	\$ 12,337
Deep Springs Elementary	545	48	8.81%	79.8%	58.5%	17	5.4	\$ 9,588
Yates Elementary School	537	42	7.82%	74.5%	58.7%	32	9.5	\$ 10,363
Millcreek Elementary	465	35	7.53%	80.1%	58.9%	33	7.3	\$ 11,578
	2269	208	9.17%	85.2%	66.3%	33.0	7.4	\$ 11,191
FIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH THE LOWEST HOMELESS PERCENTAGE								
Rosa Parks Elementary	727	1	0.14%	9.5%	34.1%	99	18.1	\$ 8,736
Sandersville Elementary	745	1	0.13%	45.0%	49.0%	96	9.9	\$ 8,518
Maxwell Spanish Immersion	518	0	0.00%	26.6%	47.5%	94	12.1	\$ 8,661
Stonewall Elementary	670	0	0.00%	25.2%	19.4%	93	14.8	\$ 8,709
Veterans Park Elementary	625	0	0.00%	17.0%	15.2%	99	15.6	\$ 9,358
	3285	2	0.06%	24.7%	33.0%	96.2	14.1	\$ 8,796

Sources: Kentucky Department of Education and Fayette County Public Schools

It should be noted that disparities between local schools are more prominently noticeable at the elementary school level because the attendance zones at the elementary level are so much smaller than at the middle or high school level. Larger attendance zones tend to hide differences among neighborhoods as multiple areas are captured.

In comparing the elementary schools in Table 3 there are notable differences. While homelessness is essentially non-existent (.06%) at the five least impacted schools, the homeless rate at the five most impacted schools *averages* 9.17%.

Other data points illustrate that minority students are disproportionately affected as the most impacted schools have twice

the rate of minority student enrollment (66%) as do the least impacted schools (33%).

Economic differences within school systems are often highlighted when comparing eligibility for the free and reduced lunch program. Since eligibility for this program is determined based on household income it is a useful proxy for economic differences. As is indicated in Table 3, schools with a majority of students from lower income families have much higher rates of homelessness than those of the least impacted schools. The percentage of students eligible for the free and reduced lunch program is nearly three-and-half times higher (85.2%) at the most impacted schools than it is at the least impacted schools (25.2%).

Each school in Kentucky is allocated a percentile ranking by the state based on its overall academic performance. In Table 3 the least impacted schools have much higher percentile rankings than those most impacted by homelessness. The five most impacted schools have an average percentile ranking of 33.0 while the least impacted schools score nearly three times higher at an average of 96.2.

Another significant difference in these schools is the average years of experience of their teaching staff. As the table indicates, at the five schools least impacted by homelessness, the average years of experience of the teaching staff is 14.1 years, while the average years of experience at the five schools most impacted is about half that (at 7.4 years).

Interestingly, the spending per pupil at the schools most impacted by homelessness is greater on average than that of those least impacted. Some of this greater expense is related to higher costs associated with providing the free and reduced meals as well as added social services targeted to at-risk students but the vast majority of the per pupil variance derives from economies of scale. The State Department of Education stated that the added cost per eligible pupil for the free and reduced lunch program is approximately \$661 per year. However, since the years of experience of the teaching staff is so much greater in the least impacted schools it is likely that salary costs are also greater and more than likely will offset any added costs associated with meals provided free or at reduced cost. As noted in Table 3 the average difference in spending per pupil between these two groups of schools is \$2,395.

Since the average size of the least impacted schools is 657 pupils while the average size of the most impacted schools is 454 pupils, the calculation of spending on a per pupil basis is significantly impacted by the number of students with which all costs are divided. More static costs like administration are spread over more students at larger schools.

Authorities at the State Department of Education noted that the spending per pupil category has only recently been added to the School Report Card (this is only the second year it has been included). There are wide variations in how districts calculate these costs. Over

time it is hoped that greater levels of standardization will enable meaningful comparisons of these numbers between districts but, for the present, individual districts are the only source for data on how their expenses are calculated.

What conclusions can be made from this analysis? Much like the proverbial “canary in a coal mine,” higher rates of homelessness are an indicator of increased neighborhood challenges. Schools located in poorer neighborhoods are likely to have higher numbers of students determined to be homeless. Often these neighborhoods are over represented by people of color, as are the students classified as homeless.

These schools are also much more likely to score low on state percentile rankings, in most cases significantly lower. As noted earlier, student homelessness negatively impacts educational achievement. Although this presents a greater challenge to each student, it is not likely a significant factor in a school’s overall ranking. Ultimately this involves an assessment of cause and effect. Although homelessness may contribute to lower school percentile rankings as a minor contributing factor it clearly is more illustrative of the other neighborhood challenges that impact all the students at the school. A student from a family that has slipped into homelessness is not a cause but an effect of the challenges of the local community.

The disparity in teaching experience in this comparison is a real concern. An obvious conclusion from this analysis is

that some schools face significantly greater challenges in educating their students than other schools. If we are committed to providing all our students with an excellent education, it is vital that schools with greater challenges be accorded greater attention and resources. The huge difference in teaching experience between these two groups of schools highlights the fact that the schools that need the most attention seem to be garnering the least.

Recommendations

1. This analysis highlights the need for the district to focus greater attention and resources toward schools with the greatest challenges. Low performing schools should be accorded a “preferential option” when allocating resources and teaching expertise.
2. Specific attention should be accorded to seeking additional outside funding to address homelessness among students in the district. It is important that such funding be targeted specifically to those schools most impacted by homelessness rather than adopting district-wide programs to address the issue. Special attention should be devoted at the elementary school level where the challenges seem to be the greatest.
3. Homelessness is highest in schools that are located in neighborhoods with multiple challenges. Efforts to improve schooling in these neighborhoods are much more likely to succeed if such efforts involve the whole neighborhood and adopt

comprehensive approaches that seek the commitment of all stakeholders in the neighborhood. Education thrives best with multiple opportunities for reinforcement and support beyond the classroom.

4. Collaborative efforts to improve struggling neighborhoods should also be a focus for city government as well. City funding should be targeted to areas of greatest need by supporting

joint efforts among all departments within the city as well as the broadest possible inclusion of neighborhood stakeholders.

Appendix A

Highlights from *Lexington Herald Leader* article (Aug 29, 2015)

- There are more than 30,000 homeless students in Kentucky, which has the [highest rate of student homelessness in the nation](#), according to a Herald-Leader analysis of federal education data.
- [Nearly 5 percent of Kentucky's 685,167 students were classified as homeless in the 2012-13 school year](#), the latest year that homeless student totals are available for all 50 states. Kentucky's rate of homeless students was more than double that of all surrounding states but West Virginia (2.94 percent) and Missouri (2.89 percent). In five Eastern Kentucky counties, more than 1 in 5 students are considered homeless by school districts.
- The number of homeless kids in Kentucky schools has nearly doubled in less than six years.
- Federal funding for homeless students in Kentucky has remained flat for the past five years at about \$1 million, data from the state Department of Education shows. School systems apply for the funding — called a McKinney-Vento grant — through a competitive grant process.
- **Fayette County** received just \$52,000 in federal McKinney-Vento grants during each of the past three years. It will receive \$49,000 each of the next three years. In addition, Fayette County and other school districts use Title 1 funding — a federal program to help educate poor students — to augment the McKinney-Vento money.
- **NEGATIVE IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT:** On Kentucky's year-end test, the percentage of homeless students scoring proficient or distinguished in math and reading was 15 to 18 points lower than the student population as a whole in 2013-14.
- In **Lexington**, *the achievement gap is even wider*. No student identified as homeless scored distinguished — the highest category — in reading at the elementary school level, and **65 percent** of homeless elementary students scored novice. In comparison, only **23 percent** of non-homeless elementary students in Lexington scored novice in reading, and **25 percent scored distinguished**. Of the homeless students in Fayette County who received letter grades during the 2013-14 school year, 50 percent had at least one "D" and 43 percent had at least one "F."
- According to a 2014 report from America's Promise Alliance, homeless students are 87 percent more likely than their peers to drop out of school before graduation.
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development conducts the nation's official count of homeless people, but HUD's definition of homeless does not include children who are "couch surfing" with friends and family because their parents can't keep stable housing. Education officials do. That means the "official" homeless count leaves most of these kids out.

Appendix B

Middle School and High School Data Charts

TABLE 4: MIDDLE SCHOOL DATA

School	Total Students 2014-15	FINAL Homeless Report 2014-15	Percent Homeless	% Free & Reduced May 2015	Percent Non- White	School State Percentile Rank 2014-15	School Average Years of Teaching Experience	Spending Per Pupil 2014-15
Beaumont Middle School	1136	14	1.23%	36.1%	33.4%	96	16.5	\$ 8,247
Bryan Station Middle School	618	12	1.94%	62.3%	53.1%	22	12.2	\$ 10,191
Crawford Middle School	450	9	2.00%	79.6%	63.3%	21	12.4	\$ 12,307
Edythe Jones Hayes Middle	1102	6	0.54%	41.0%	38.0%	85	10.4	\$ 8,080
Jessie M Clark Middle	935	5	0.53%	36.6%	21.3%	92	13.6	\$ 8,704
Leestown Middle School	759	20	2.64%	82.5%	73.5%	35	9.3	\$ 9,647
Lexington Trad. Magnet	559	13	2.33%	61.9%	59.0%	35	12.2	\$ 10,036
Morton Middle School	749	16	2.14%	49.0%	37.4%	88	12.6	\$ 8,931
Southern Middle School	629	10	1.59%	59.6%	40.2%	60	12.4	\$ 9,846
Tates Creek Middle School	972	13	1.34%	54.2%	39.8%	50	12.1	\$ 8,629
Winburn Middle School	589	10	1.70%	68.8%	65.0%	34	12.8	\$ 10,600
	8,498	128	1.51%	57.4%	47.6%	56	12.41	\$ 9,565

Sources: Kentucky Department of Education and Fayette County Public Schools

TABLE 5: HIGH SCHOOL DATA

School	Total Students 2014-15	FINAL Homeless Report 2014-15	Percent Homeless	% Free & Reduced May 2015	Percent Non- White	School State Percentile Rank 2014-15	School Average Years of Teaching Experience	Spending Per Pupil 2014-15
Bryan Station High School	1694	40	2.36%	61.3%	59.0%	43	12.2	\$ 8,417
Henry Clay High School	2303	29	1.26%	39.7%	37.2%	94	12.3	\$ 7,315
Lafayette High School	1991	33	1.66%	36.6%	27.2%	94	12.9	\$ 7,609
Paul Laurence Dunbar HS	2116	17	0.80%	42.0%	42.6%	87	14.4	\$ 7,563
Tates Creek High School	1754	26	1.48%	48.7%	36.5%	84	13.0	\$ 7,932
	9,858	145	1.47%	45.7%	40.5%	80	13.0	\$ 7,767

Sources: Kentucky Department of Education and Fayette County Public Schools