

TESTIMONY ON SB 2030
SENATE EDUCATION AND ENERGY APPROPRIATION COMMITTEE
January 21, 2025
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jen Withers, and I serve as an Assistant Director of Educational Improvement & Support with the Department of Public Instruction. I would like to provide data to this committee regarding our North Dakota Pre-Kindergarten – 12th grade students experiencing homelessness.

Over the past four years, students identified as homeless through educational entities have increased 57% (1014 students). As of January 15, 2025 North Dakota homeless liaisons have identified 2030 students experiencing homelessness, compared to 1885 when this number was pulled last year. The official annual count is pulled July 2nd.

North Dakota Pre-K – 12 Grade Students Identified as Experiencing Homelessness by Grade

	Total	Pre-K	K – 5th	6th – 8th	9th – 12th	Unaccompanied
2020 – 2021	1788	10	924	386	468	306
2021 – 2022	2021	14	1079	436	492	255
2022 – 2023	2408	27	1236	497	648	265
2023 – 2024	2802	52	1377	667	706	285
2024 – 2025*	2030	34	1007	431	558	126

***2024-2025 data is July 1, 2024 – January 15, 2025**

All other years are July 1 – June 30. A more comprehensive breakdown of Pre-K – 12 grade data may be found at: [McKinney-Vento](#), under the state data tab.

North Dakota Pre-K – 12 Grade Students Identified as Experiencing Homelessness by Regional Education Association



North Dakota Regional Education Association	Districts Served Who Have Identified Students Experiencing Homelessness	2020 – 2021 (1788)	2021 – 2022 (2021)	2022 – 2023 (2408)	2023 – 2024 (2802)	2024 – 2025* (2030)
Central Regional Education Association	Beulah, Bismarck, Center-Stranton, Fort Yates, Garrison, Hazelton-Moffit-Braddock, Lewis and Clark, Mandan, Max, McClusky, Minot, Nedrose, New Salem-Almont, Sawyer, Selfridge, Solen, Surrey, Underwood, Velva, Wilton, and Wing	551	549	630	767	598
North Central Education Cooperative	Anamoose, Belcourt, Dunseith, MLS-Mohall, and St. John	79	50	98	104	68
Northeast Education Services Cooperative	Devils Lake, Fessenden-Bowdon, Fort Totten, Lakota, Langdon, Minnewauken, North Star, Oberon, Starkweather and Warwick	61	182	148	179	134
Red River Valley Education Cooperative	Central Valley, Emerado, Fordville-Lankin, Grafton, Grand Forks, Hatton Eieson, Hope-Page, Midway, Minto, and North Border	101	98	105	206	130
Roughrider Education Services Program	Beach, Dickinson, Hebron, Kildeer, Mott-Regent, New England, South Heart, and Stanley	64	81	92	132	70
South East Education Cooperative	Carrington, Central Cass, Enderlin Area, Fargo, Jamestown, Kindred, Lidgerwood, Lisbon, Medina, Milnor, New Rockford-Sheyenne, North Sargent, Northern Cass, Valley City, Wahpeton, West Fargo, and Wyndmere	422	589	670	724	452
Western Education Regional Cooperative	Alexander, Burke Central, McKenzie, Nesson, New Town, Parshall, Powers Lake, Tioga, and Williston-Basin	510	472	665	690	578

Data is from districts who identified students experiencing homelessness. This data does not represent all districts in a region.

EDUCATIONAL DEFINITION of HOMELESSNESS

The McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act provides a definition of homeless children and youth to be used by state educational agencies (SEAs [NDDPI]) and local educational agencies (LEAs [school districts]). The Act, first passed in 1987, was reauthorized in 2015 through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It defines homeless children and youth to be those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Under the larger umbrella of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, the law also provides several examples of situations that meet the definition. The examples include children and youth:

- sharing housing due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, natural disasters, or a similar reason;
- living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to a lack of alternative adequate housing;
- living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- abandoned in hospitals;
- living in a public or private place not designated for, or normally used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places;
- living in one of the above circumstances AND who are migratory according to the definition in Section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)].

When considering if a student meets the criteria in the definition provided by the law, it is important to remember that the list provided is only a guide, and more situations exist that meet the criteria than are actually listed.

The law also requires each district to designate a homeless liaison to work with students while they are in transition. The official job description has twelve duties, but in reality, the job requires much more. Of North Dakota's 168 school districts, two employ a FTE homeless liaison. All other school districts attach it to a position as "other duties as assigned". In this case, most often these duties are assigned to the Superintendent, a Principal/Assistant Principal, or a School Counselor.

Every year the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction strives to have liaisons accurately identify and report on youth homelessness. However, as a state, it is clear with the steady increase of data North Dakota under reports students experiencing homelessness. With inconsistencies across districts because of local control, lack of resources, lack of FTE liaison positions, and staff turnover, it is hard for teachers and administrators to focus on their students experiencing homelessness and to understand the impact that being homeless has on a student.

For these students, school is most likely the one safe place in their day-to-day lives, and they appreciate the safety and security of its routine. Students experiencing homelessness are often forced to deal with significant, difficult, and interrelated challenges outside the classroom that inevitably impact their academic performance and participation; and these challenges are beyond their control.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I appreciate your time today. That concludes my testimony, and I will stand for any questions you may have.