

Christine Minnehan
 Director of Legislative Advocacy
 Jessica Bartholow
 Legislative Advocate
 Michael E. Herald
 Legislative Advocate
 Elizabeth A. Landsberg
 Legislative Advocate
 Michael Moynagh
 Legislative Advocate

Western Center on Law & Poverty

1107 9th Street Suite 801, Sacramento CA 95814 • V: 916.442.0753 • F: 916.442.7966

60,000 More Homeless School Children than Last Year 94% Increase Over Five Years, 160% Increase in Unsheltered Children

New data from California public schools shows that the number of homeless school children has risen again, for the fifth consecutive year. According to the California Department of Education, 288,233 school children were homeless in 2008-9.¹ This represents a 28.5 percent increase in one year and comes on top of a 27 percent increase in 2007-08.²

Over the past five years there has been a steady increase in the number of homeless school children that have been counted by California school districts.³ Children who are homeless and low income suffer in performance at their schools in measures of intelligence, language proficiency and academic achievement. They are also more likely to fail classes, be placed in special education and drop out of school.⁴

The data also shows where children reside when they don't have a permanent home. Each category has increased over the past five years but there is a disturbing trend in the data. The rate of families using shelters is growing slower than the overall rate of homelessness among children while the number of children without any shelter at all has increased by 160 percent. This suggests that the capacity of the shelter system to absorb children is quickly being reached and thus more children than ever have no residence to sleep in at night.

In addition, the Governor's CalWORKs proposals will further increase school age homelessness. About 540,000 families would lose the cash aid they rely on to keep their children sheltered and with the basic necessities. More than 1 million children would lose all cash aid from CalWORKs.

The chart below shows, by grade level, the number of homeless children for each of the past five years. Most disturbingly is that more than 60 percent of homeless children are in grades six and below.

Five Year Trend on Homeless School Children by Grade Level

	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	% increase
Pre-K			4,754	6,552	7,705	62.0%
K	15,022	17,583	15,131	19,383	23,275	54.9%
1	15,139	17,054	16,526	19,285	24,438	61.4%
2	15,040	16,137	16,202	20,462	24,967	66.0%
3	14,482	15,970	15,799	19,856	24,810	71.3%
4	14,139	15,699	14,681	19,382	24,902	76.1%
5	13,793	15,331	14,979	18,295	23,449	70.3%
6	12,775	13,899	13,930	17,548	22,877	79.0%
7	11,161	12,653	12,572	14,759	20,946	87.6%
8	10,300	11,440	12,242	14,679	18,914	83.6%

9	9,428	11,390	12,760	16,606	21,066	123.4%
10	7,301	9,375	10,937	13,504	18,026	146.8%
11	5,704	7,327	8,949	11,745	16,027	180.9%
12	4,159	5,864	8,380	10,240	14,571	250.3%
No Grade			172	1,953	1,780	
Total	148,443	169,722	178,014	224,249	288,243	94.1

Sharp Rise in Unsheltered School Children

The data also shows where children reside when they don't have a permanent home. Each category has increased over the past five years but there is a disturbing trend in the data. The rate of families using shelters is growing slower than the overall rate of homelessness among children while the number of children without any shelter at all has increased by 160 percent. This suggests that the capacity of the shelter system to absorb children is quickly being reached and thus more children than ever have no residence to sleep in at night.

Children with "No Shelter" Increased by 160%

Primary Residence	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	% Increase
Shelter	19,471	18,521	24,819	29,990	33,267	70.8
Double-up	83,148	99,889	125,366	162,632	219,105	163.5
No shelter	5,460	5,418	11,982	12,401	14,183	159.7
Hotel-Motel	10,692	12,004	15,847	19,226	21,678	102.7
Unknown	26,982	34,070				NA
Total	148,443	169,722	178,014	224,249	288,233	94%

Governor's CalWORKs Proposals Will Increase School Age Homelessness

Despite the rising need for public assistance programs by children in California, the Governor is proposing to either eliminate the CalWORKs program or reduce the grant levels by 15.7 percent. If either proposal is adopted by the Legislature it would significantly increase the number of children in poverty and leave more families unable to provide basic shelter for their families. Among the outcomes that would result from eliminating CalWORKs are:

- About 540,000 families would lose the cash aid they rely on to keep their children sheltered and with the basic necessities.
- More than 1 million children would lose all cash aid from CalWORKs.
- 130,000 adults would be dropped from welfare to work activities and lose access to child care, education and services.

- County General Assistance costs would increase by \$2.5 billion if all CalWORKs families subsequently applied for and received the average GA “family” grant of \$387 a month.
- The California economy would lose \$3.7 billion in federal TANF funds annually. The state would not be able to divert TANF funds for state programs that used to operate on General Funds causing a GF impact in the tens of millions.

By: Michael Herald, Legislative Advocate mherald@wclp.org

¹ Homeless Education Data, California Department of Education, Title I Accountability and Partnerships Office, 2009.

² This data comes from school districts that receive Title I grants and school districts that receive McKinney-Vento homeless funds. Title I provides supplemental education funding, especially in high-poverty areas, that helps improve low-achieving students meet challenging State academic standards. McKinney Vento homeless funds are provided to ensure that each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education as other children.

³ This increase, however, undercounts the true problem because not every school district reports and because school districts can only report the children they assist.

⁴ See *The Effects of Poverty on Brain Function in Children*, Mark Mishiyama, presented at County Welfare Director’s Association Symposium on Poverty, October 2009.