

Homeless Youth Are Suffering an Education Crisis

Homeless students are less likely to graduate from Washington State high schools than students with permanent homes

By Susan D. Baird-Joshi; Calibera LLC; September 26, 2019

Introduction

Homelessness is negatively impacting education outcomes for children in Washington State. But government and non-profit groups are heeding the call to action and offering concrete solutions to the homeless crisis.

The Education Crisis for Homeless Children

Homeless children are far less likely to graduate from high school and far more likely to drop out of high school than children who have permanent homes. According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) for the state of Washington, for the high school graduation class of 2018, children who were homeless for half of one school year during their 4-year high school career, grades 9-12, were substantially less likely to graduate from high school with their classmates. The OSPI chart below compares the graduation rate of children in seven program categories. “Homeless” students were far less likely to graduate than “Non-Homeless” students—55.5% graduating compared to 82.9%.

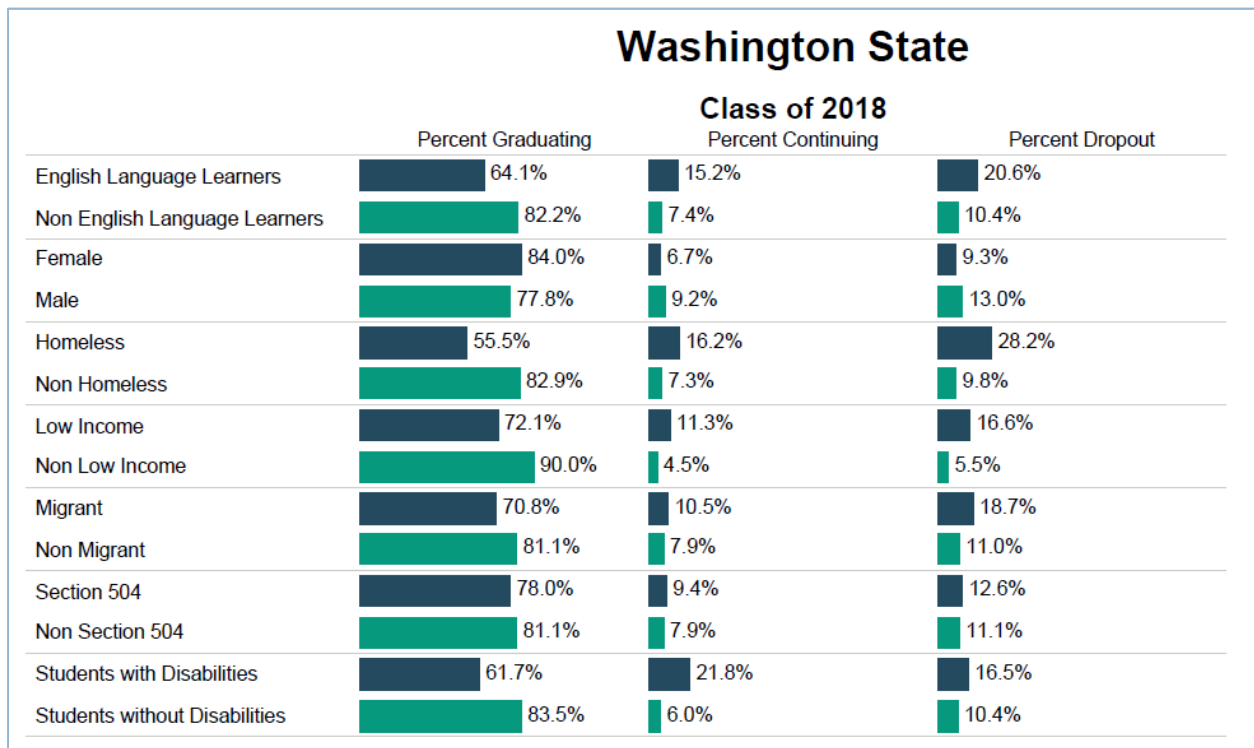


Figure 1: OSPI Chart of 2018 High School Graduation Rates. (OSPI, “Report Card.”)

The OSPI chart (Fig. 1) included the percent of homeless and non-homeless students that continued their education beyond four school years and the percent that dropped out of school. Children were classified as homeless if they were “homeless” for more than one-half of one school year during the four years they attended high school (grades 9-12).

OSPI received money from the federal government to assist in educating homeless children. “The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”” (OSPI, “Homeless Education”) For example, children can live in hotels, cars, or night-time shelters. The definition also includes migratory youth.

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OSPI, the state agency responsible for allocating state monies for basic education, tracked education outcomes according to demographic and student program categories. OSPI maintained graduation statistics for demographic characteristics of students and student programs. Out of the seven student program categories in Figure 1, “Homeless” children fared the worst when it came to the percentage who graduated (55.5%) and the percentage who dropped out of school (28.2%).

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This low graduation trend began as early as 2013. For graduation years 2013-2018, the average four-year high school graduation rate for “Homeless” children was almost 30 percentage points lower than that of children who had homes (“Non-Homeless”). The chart below illustrates the gap using the average of each year’s average graduation rate. (Fig. 2) Children who were “Non-Homeless,” or had permanent housing, were far more likely to graduate than children who were “Homeless.”

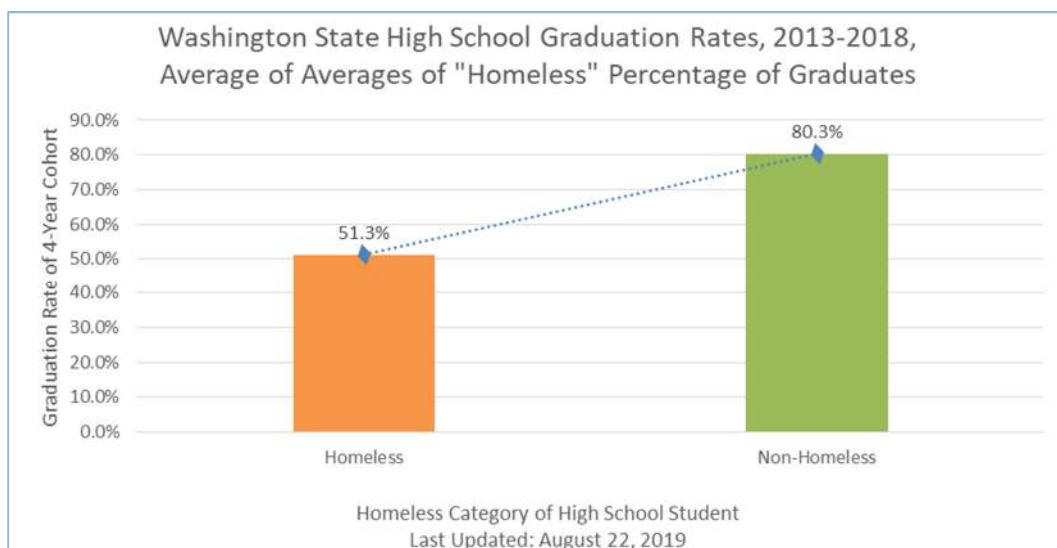


Figure 2: Difference in the average of averages of graduation rates, 2013-2018. Created from OSPI data (OSPI, “Data”; OSPI, “OSPI”). (Ref. 1)

There is room for hope. The difference in graduation percentages between “Homeless” and “Non-Homeless” students narrowed slightly between 2013 and 2018, as shown in the following graph. (Fig. 3)

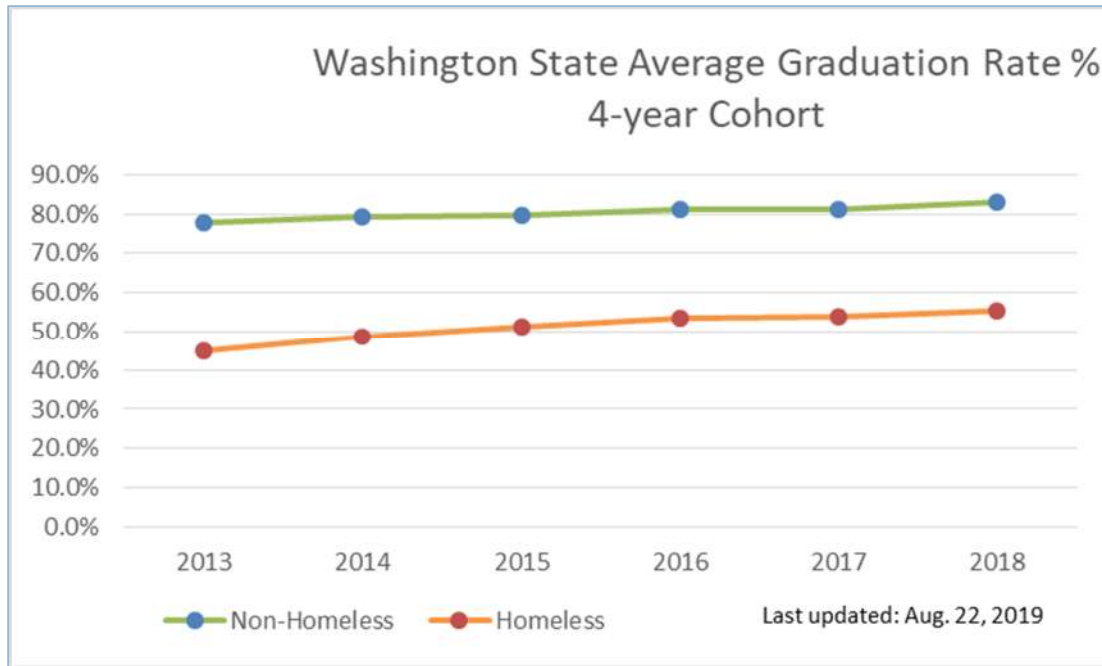


Figure 3: Annual difference in graduation rates, 2013-2018. Created from OSPI data (OSPI, “Data”; OSPI, “OSPI”). (Ref. 1)

As Figure 3 showed, the difference decreased from 2013 to 2018. But in 2018 homeless youth were still more than 27 percentage points more likely to not graduate with their four-year classmates. The data source of Figure 3 is in Table 1.

Washington State Average Graduation Rate %, 4-year Cohort						
	Graduation Year					
Homeless Status of Students	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Non-Homeless	77.9%	79.1%	79.7%	81.0%	81.2%	82.9%
Homeless	44.9%	48.7%	51.3%	53.4%	53.9%	55.5%
Difference in Percentage Points	33.0	30.4	28.4	27.6	27.3	27.4
Last updated: August 22, 2019						

Table 1: Percentage graduation rates for 2013-2018. Created from OSPI data (OSPI, “Data”; OSPI, “OSPI”). (Ref. 1)

The problem will continue as long as Washington State has homeless children. The number of children who were homeless increased at an alarming rate from the 2013-2014 school year to the 2016-2017 school year. OSPI showed the number of displaced children statewide increased annually from the 2013-14 school year to the 2016-17. The number of students decreased in 2017-18 to 40,365 students. (Fig. 4)

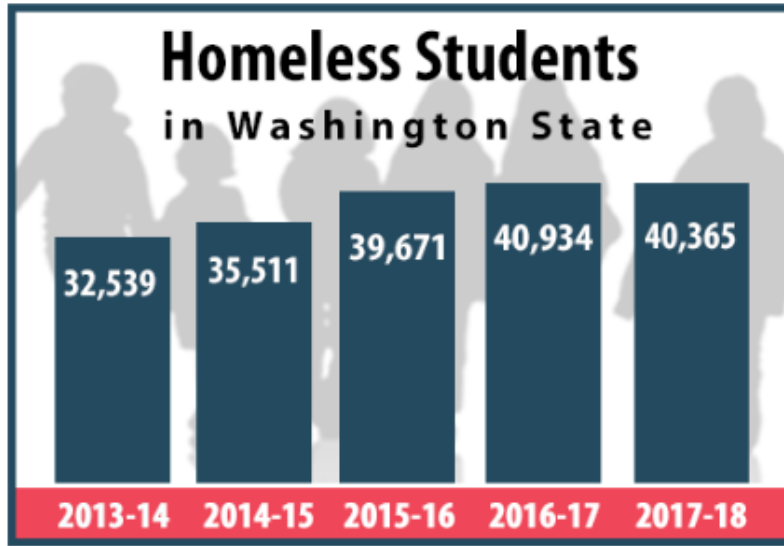


Figure 4: The number of homeless students in Washington State. Data collected by OSPI. (Mueller)

Solutions are on the Rise

In the Puget Sound region of Washington State, governments and non-profit groups are working together to combat homelessness.

Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council (EISCC) (<http://eisc.net/>) and ARCH: A Regional Coalition for Housing (<http://www.archhousing.org/>) are hosting a workshop in at St Luke's Lutheran Church in Bellevue, WA on October 12 to present affordable housing models and give community members the opportunity to interact with government officials. Register to attend.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/teaming-up-affordable-housing-workshop-tickets-71801828201>

In Kirkland, WA, Catholic Community Services and the Lutheran congregation Salt House (<https://www.salthousechurch.org/>), founded by Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, started a family day center for homeless families where they can receive counseling for services and have access to food and laundry facilities. (Krummey) In 2019 the city of Kirkland and Salt House had a ground-breaking ceremony for the women and children homeless residential shelter known as the New Bethlehem Project. Monies to purchase the land from Salt House and build the facility are coming from city, county and state resources in addition to private donors. (Manandic; McNamara; New Bethlehem Project; City of Kirkland, "Groundbreaking") The project falls under the domain of the Human Services Division of the City of Kirkland Parks and Community Services Department. (City of Kirkland, "Human Services")

The City of Seattle worked with churches, government and non-government entities to provide shelters and tiny house villages for homeless people who need to transition to housing. The city worked with the Port of Seattle, Seattle City Light and the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) to use their property for tiny house villages. (City of Seattle) LIHI managed the properties. (Low Income Housing Institute)

Act Now

All government jurisdictions must use more financial and public policy mechanisms to partner with for-profit and non-profit entities to construct housing for families with children. Child development is complex, and they are dependent on a stable family home life, a healthy diet, health care and a comprehensive education system. Children continue to grow in age, size and developmental abilities regardless of what adults do or fail to do. To not fund housing is to short-change our children's future. We must act now!

Contact your government officials at the national, state, county and city levels to allocate financial resources and address zoning requirements to construct temporary transitional housing and affordable permanent housing for homeless families.

Find your U.S. Senators and Representative:

U.S. House of Representatives (<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>)

U.S. Senate (https://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

In Washington State, contact the Washington State Housing Finance Commission (<http://wshfc.org/index.htm>) and the Association of Washington Housing Authorities (<https://www.awha.org/>). To contact your county or city, search for “housing” or “affordable housing.”

Thank you for caring!

Reference and Bibliography

Ref. 1 “This resource was adapted from original materials provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Original materials may be accessed on the OSPI website.”

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