

Student Homelessness in Utah:

Trends, Disparities, and Opportunities for Action

A research brief from the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

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Introduction

9,622

students identified as experiencing homelessness in Utah,
school year (SY) 2025–26

1.47%

of total statewide enrollment

–12%

decline from SY 2024–25

83%

of Utah students experiencing homelessness in SY 2022–23
were doubled up.

Source: Utah State Board of Education (USBE); SchoolHouse Connection (2026).

Student homelessness in Utah remains persistent and is likely under-identified. Although student homelessness in Utah decreased last year, levels remain steady.

Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, homelessness includes students without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence: those staying in shelters, motels, cars, campgrounds, doubled-up housing, or temporary couch-surfing situations.

Utah lacks a standardized statewide housing questionnaire, potentially leading to under-identification of students experiencing homelessness. Local education agencies use their own identification procedures, which can contribute to differences in identification across districts.

Introduction

Geographic and Regional Disparities

- Student homelessness varies sharply across Utah counties. In SY 2022–23, San Juan County had a 17.8% student homelessness rate—more than nine times the statewide rate of 1.9%. Among students experiencing homelessness in San Juan County, 90.7% were Native American.
- Salt Lake County enrolled the largest number of students experiencing homelessness (6,936), with 85.1% of students doubled up.

Drivers of Youth Homelessness

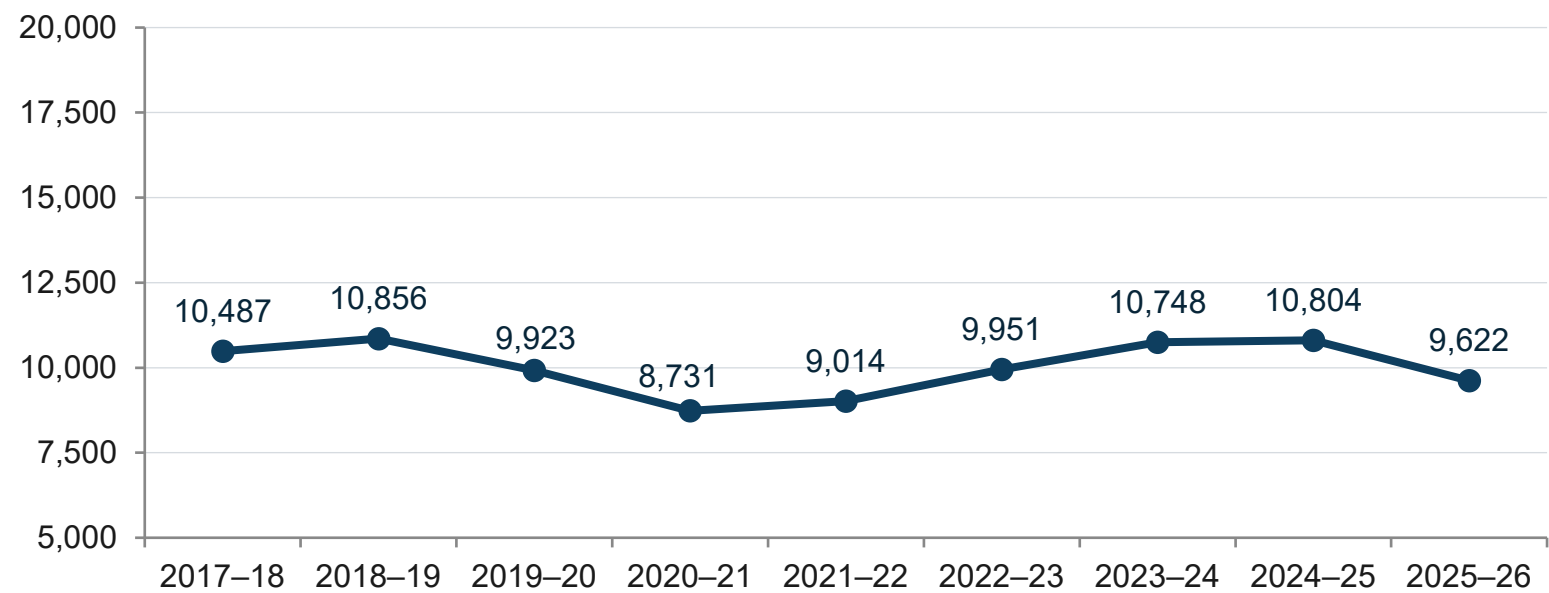
- Rising housing costs and limited affordable housing are key structural drivers of student homelessness in Utah. A worker needs \$29.29/hour to afford a modest two-bedroom rental, compared with \$20.52/hour for the average renter. Among extremely low-income renters, 79% spend more than half of their income on housing.

Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC, 2025, 2026); SchoolHouse Connection (2026); Utah Office of Homeless Services (2023). According to the NLIHC (2026), “low-income renters” are defined as households with incomes at or below the federal poverty guideline or 30% of the area median income, whichever is higher. Extremely low-income renters often include seniors and people with disabilities, working adults with low wages, single parents and caregivers, and students and families with unstable incomes.

Finding 1. Student homelessness counts declined in SY 2025–26.

In SY 2025–26, Utah identified 9,622 students experiencing homelessness, nearly 12% fewer than the prior year. Student homelessness peaked in SY 2018–19 and SY 2024–25, nearing pre-pandemic levels.

Number of Utah Students Experiencing Homelessness



10,856

peak count in SY 2018–19, the highest in the series

–12%

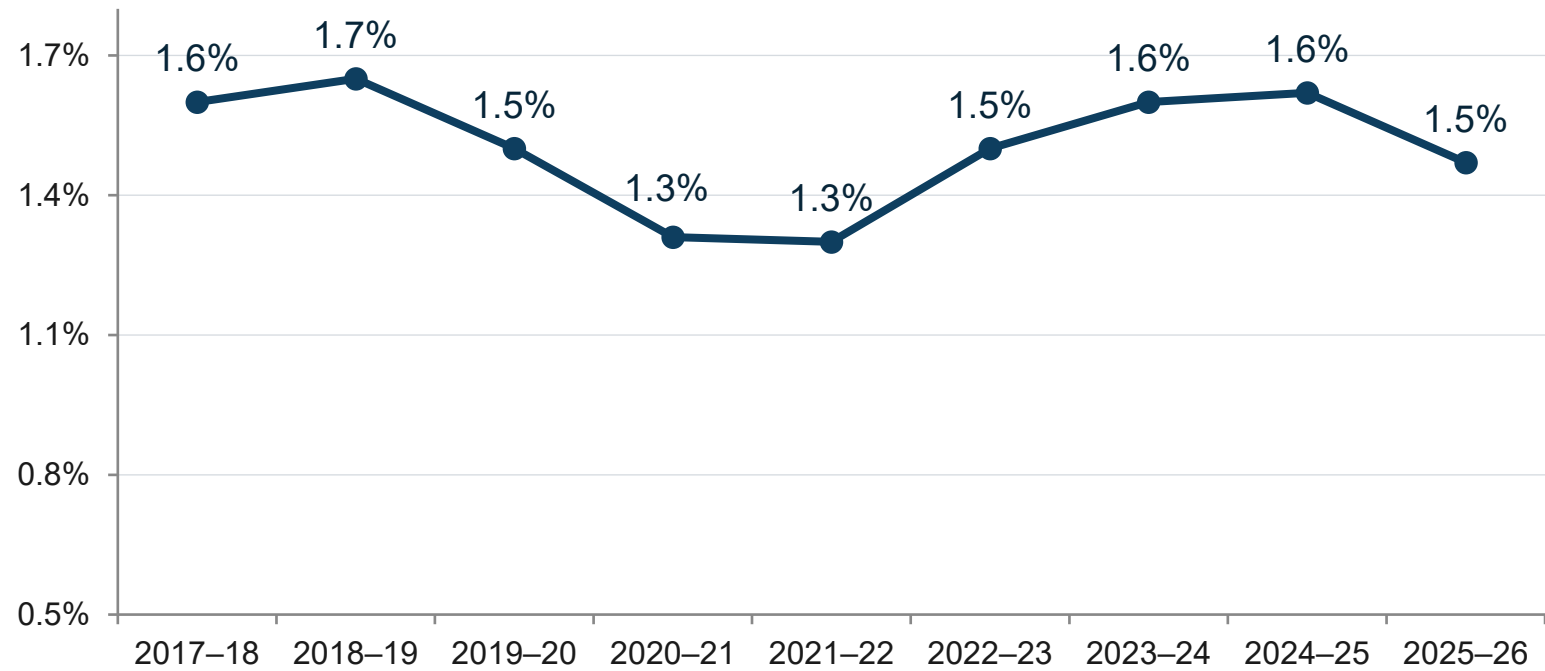
year-over-year decline from SY 2024–25 to SY 2025–26

Note. Data from USBE enrollment files, SY 2017–18 through SY 2025–26.

Finding 1. Student homelessness counts declined in SY 2025–26.

Utah’s student homelessness rate declined from 1.6% in SY 2024–25 to 1.5% in SY 2025–26, remaining within the historical range of 1.3%–1.7%.

Percentage of Utah Students Experiencing Homelessness



1.7%

peak share of enrollment in SY 2018–19

-0.2%

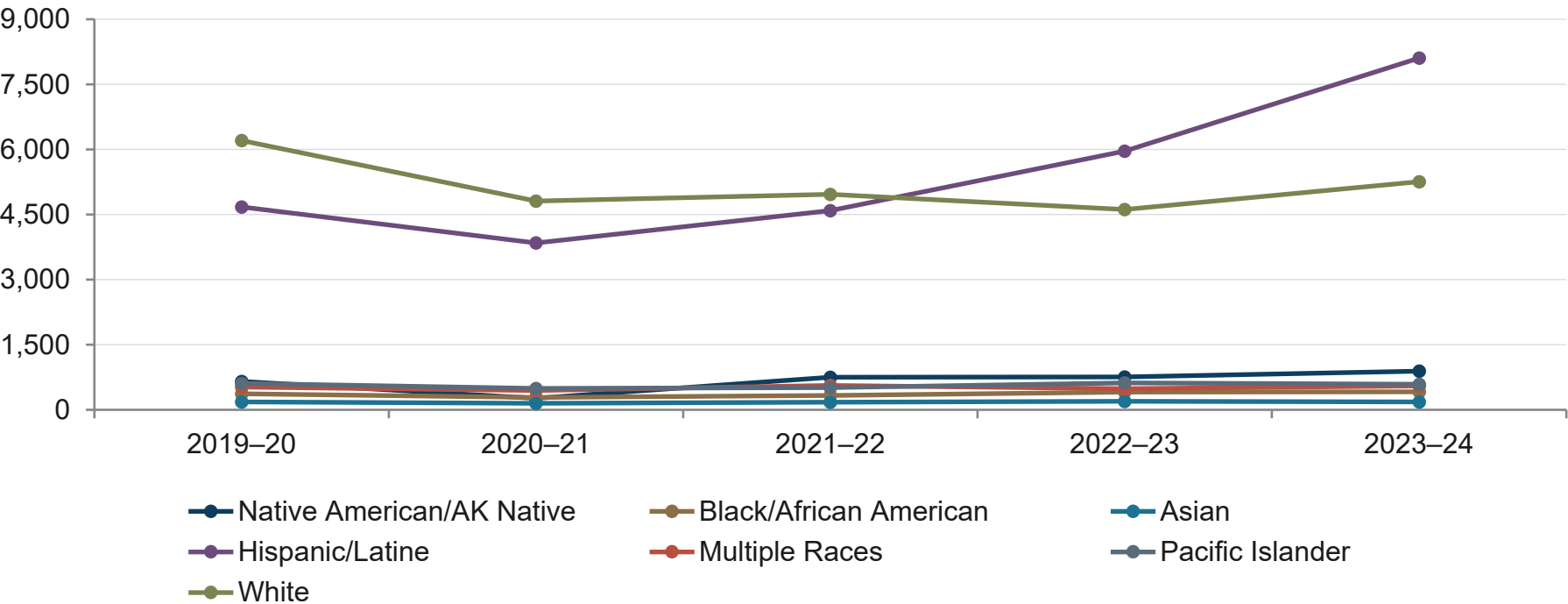
year-over-year decline from SY 2024–25 to SY 2025–26

Note. Data from USBE enrollment files, SY 2017–18 through SY 2025–26.

Finding 2a. Hispanic/Latine students make up the largest share of students experiencing homelessness.

Hispanic/Latine students represented the largest group of students experiencing homelessness, increasing from 4,678 in SY 2019–20 to 8,106 in SY 2023–24.

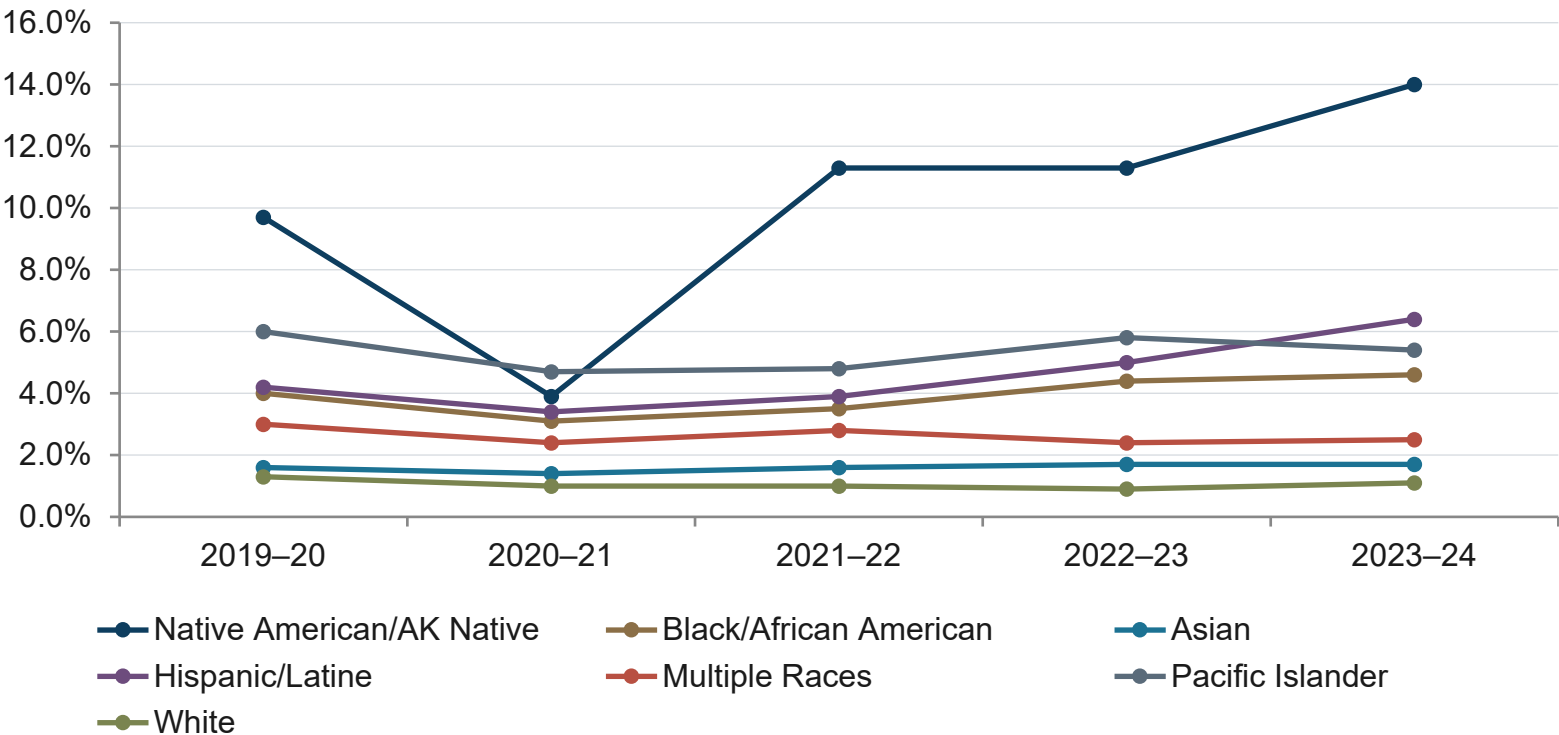
Count of Utah Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race



Note. Federal race/ethnicity data are available for SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24.

Finding 2b. Native American/Alaska Native students experience the highest rates of homelessness.

Percentage of Utah Students Experiencing Homelessness, by Race



14.0%

Native American/Alaska Native student homelessness rate in SY 2023–24

~9x statewide rate

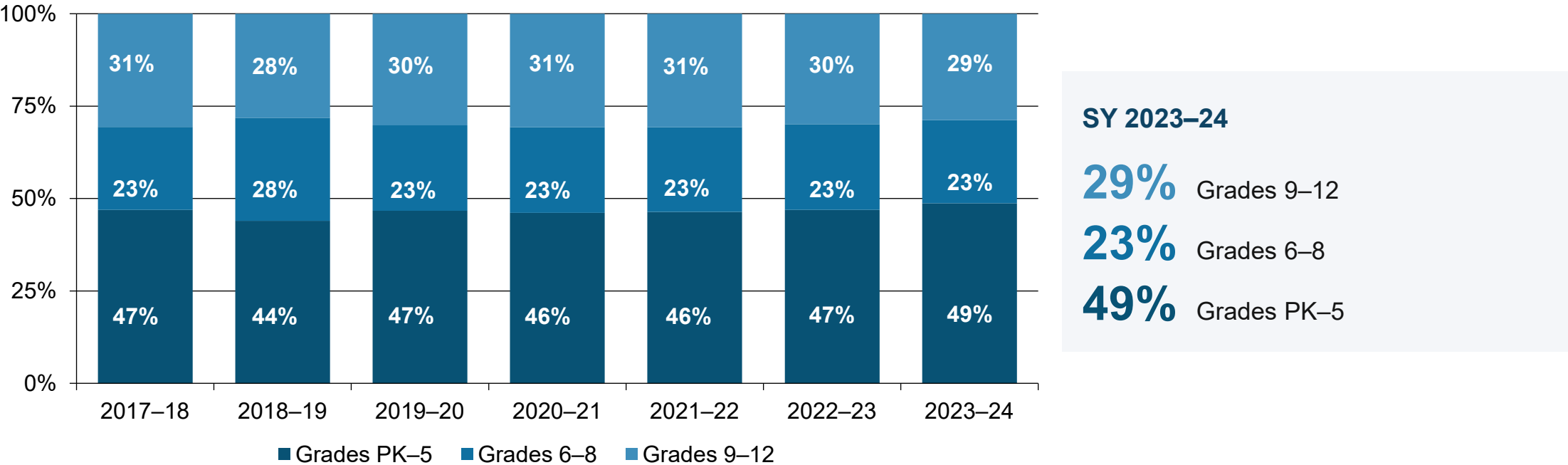
Native American/Alaska Native rate compared with Utah statewide rate (1.6%) in SY 2023–24

Note. Federal race/ethnicity data are available for SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24.

Finding 3. Nearly half of Utah students experiencing homelessness are in elementary school.

Students in Grades PK–5 consistently represented the largest share of identified students experiencing homelessness, reaching 49% in SY 2023–24. Middle school accounted for 23%, and high school for 29%.

Grade Distribution Among Students Experiencing Homelessness in Utah

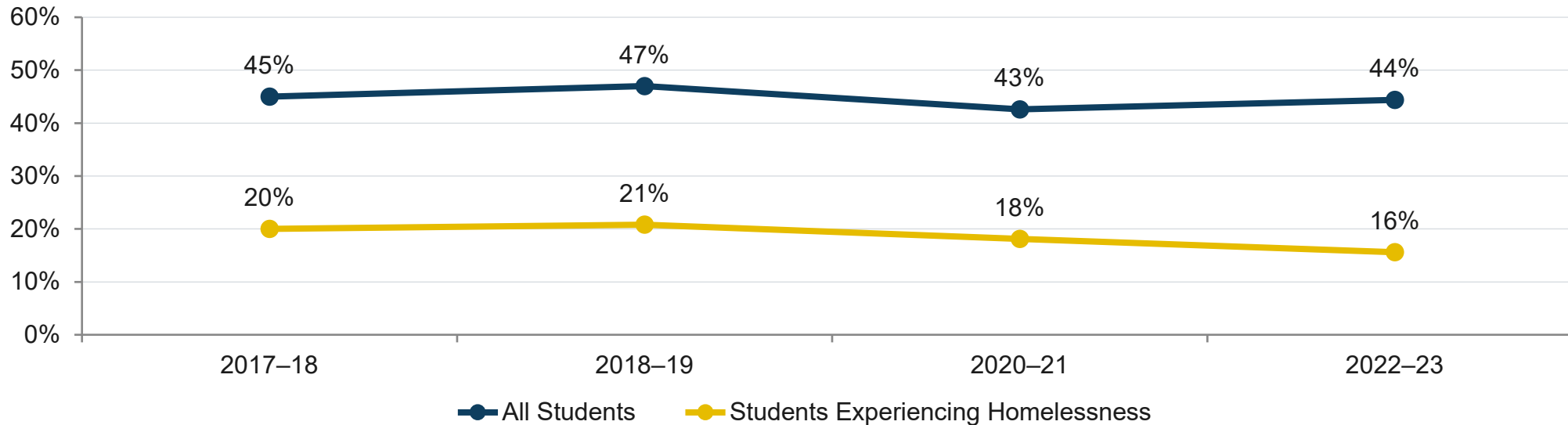


Note. Bars sum to 100% within each school year. Data from U.S. Department of Education, SY 2017–18 through SY 2023–24.

Finding 4a. There is a persistent and widening achievement gap in meeting or exceeding ELA standards between students experiencing homelessness and all students statewide.

In SY 2022–23, 16% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in English language arts (ELA), compared with 44% statewide, a 28-point gap.

*Percentages of Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students Meeting or Exceeding **ELA** Standards in Utah*

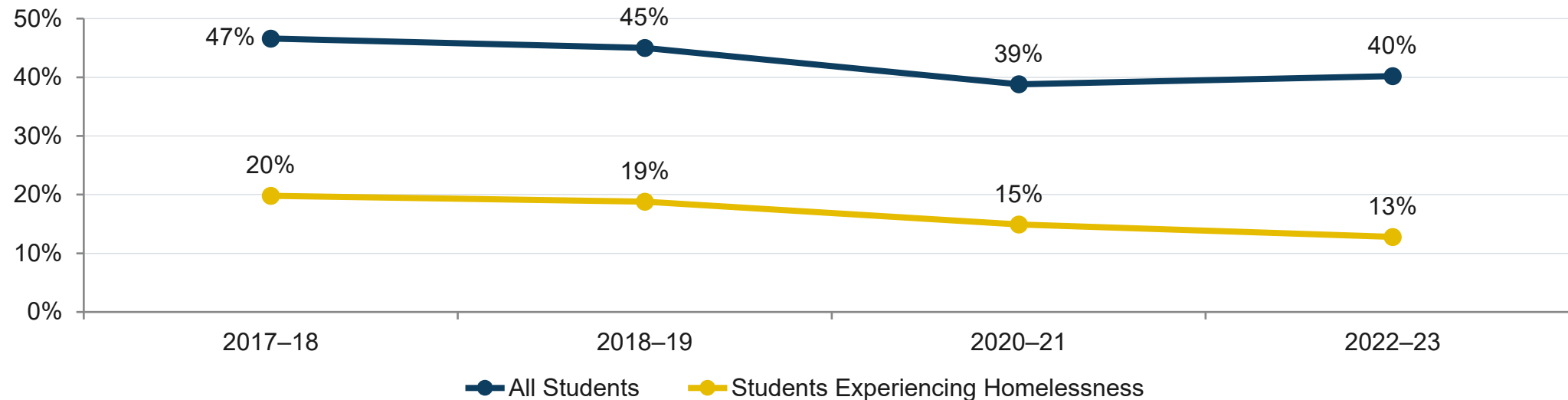


Note. Data unavailable for SY 2019–20; SY 2021–22 suppressed for data quality concerns. Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Finding 4b. There is a persistent and widening achievement gap in meeting or exceeding math standards between students experiencing homelessness and all students statewide.

In SY 2022–23, 13% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in mathematics, compared with 40% statewide, a 27-point gap.

*Percentages of Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students Meeting or Exceeding **Mathematics** Standards in Utah*

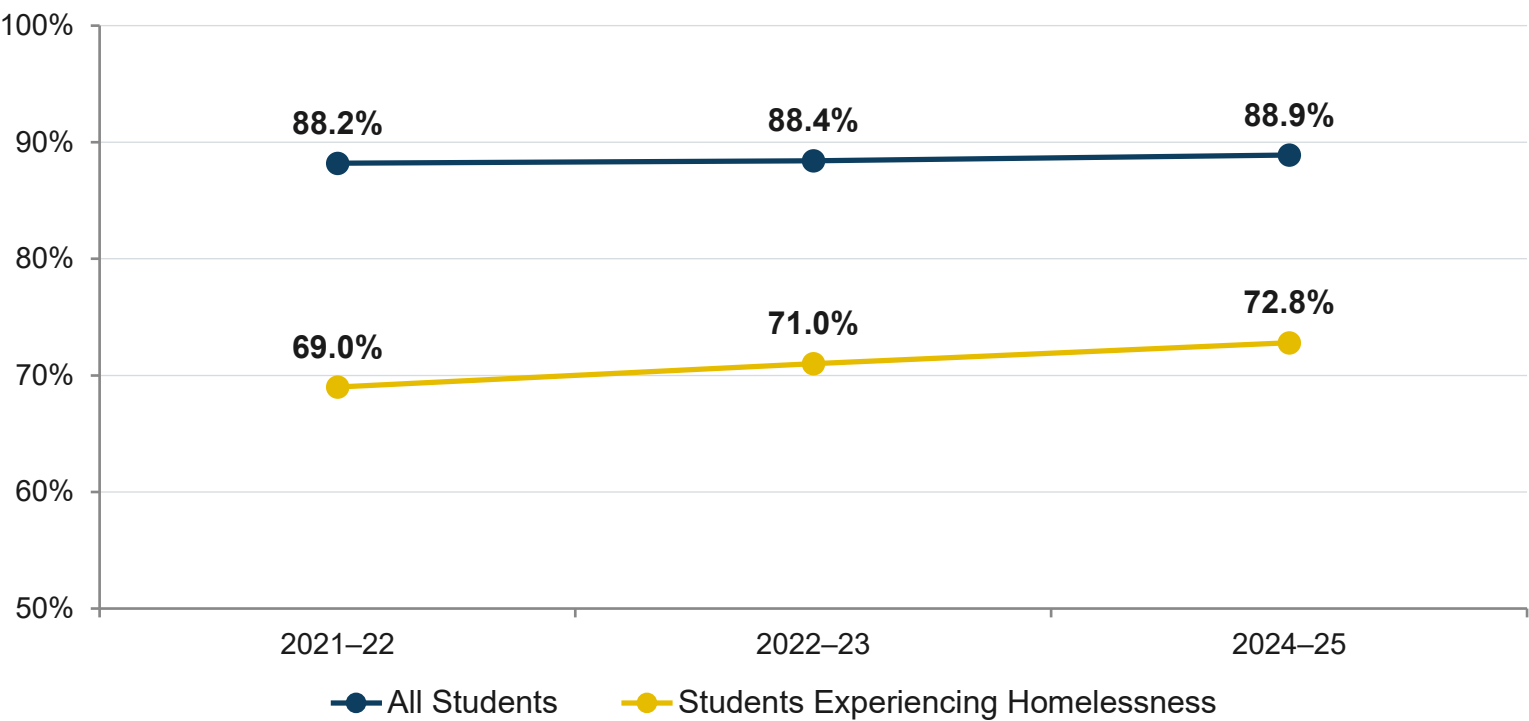


Note. Data unavailable for SY 2019–20; SY 2021–22 suppressed for data quality concerns. Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Finding 5. Graduation rates are improving, but a substantial gap remains.

Graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness improved from 69.0% in SY 2021–22 to 72.8% in SY 2024–25, while the rate for all students remained near 89%.

Graduation Rates for Utah Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students



Source: USBE (2024–25); U.S. Department of Education (2021–22 to 2022–23).

+3.8 pts

gain from SY 2021–22 to SY 2024–25 for students experiencing homelessness

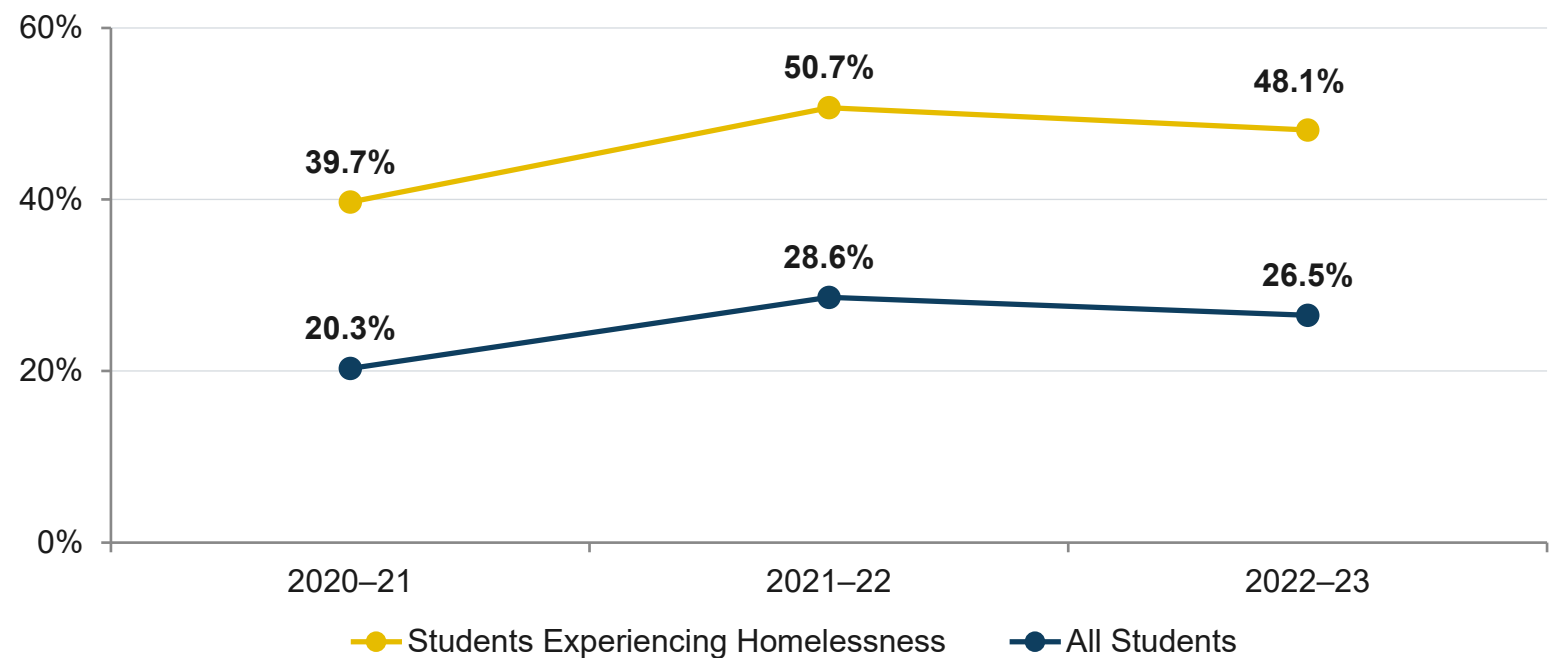
16.1-pt gap

between all students (88.9%) and students experiencing homelessness (72.8%) in SY 2024–25

Finding 6. Chronic absenteeism among students experiencing homelessness is nearly twice as high.

Students experiencing homelessness were nearly twice as likely as all students statewide to be chronically absent across available years.

Chronic Absenteeism Rates for Utah Students Experiencing Homelessness Versus All Students



Source: U.S. Department of Education, SY 2020-21 through SY 2022-23.

SY 2022-23

48.1%

students experiencing homelessness

26.5%

all students

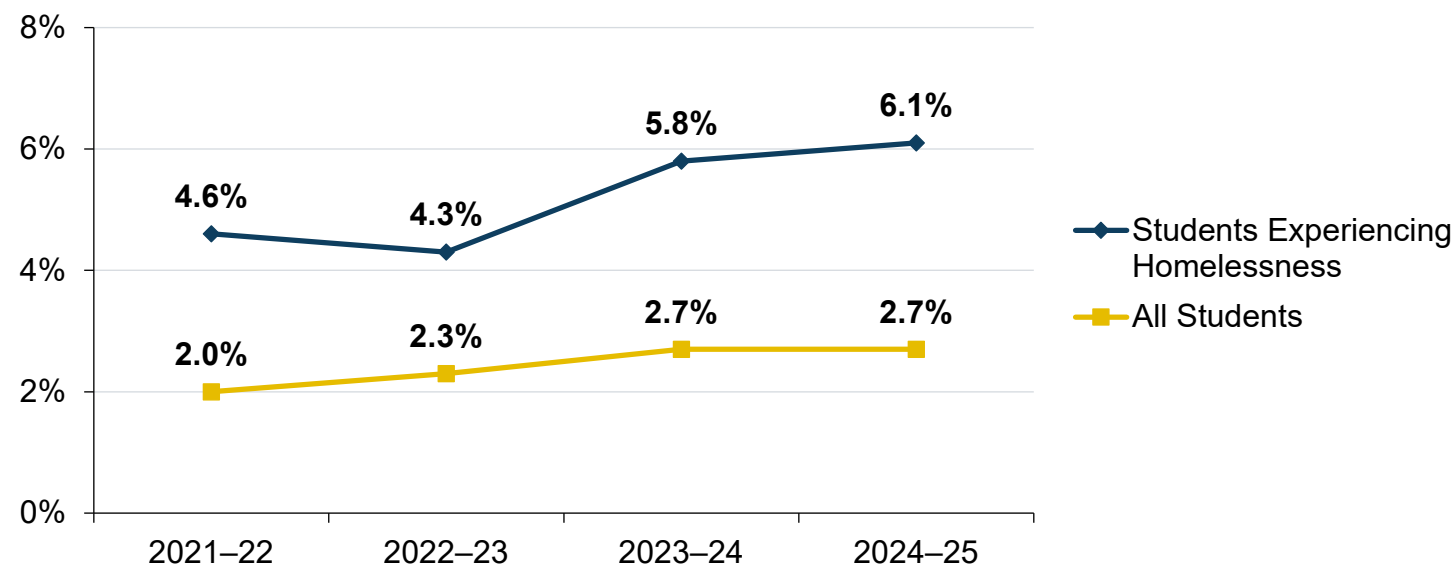
Peak

50.7% of students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent in SY 2021-22.

Finding 7. Suspension and expulsion rates are more than twice as high for students experiencing homelessness.

Discipline rates for students experiencing homelessness increased from 4.6% in SY 2021–22 to 6.1% in SY 2024–25. In 3 of 4 available years, rates were more than twice those of all students statewide.

Discipline (Suspension and Expulsion) Rates for Utah Students



Source: Utah State Board of Education, SY 2021–22 through SY 2024–25.

SY 2024–25

6.1%

students experiencing homelessness

2.7%

all students

2.3x higher

discipline rate of students experiencing homelessness compared with the all-student rate in SY 2024–25

Considerations for policymakers and practitioners

Six priorities emerged from the Utah analysis:

1

Standardize statewide student housing identification practices.

Adopt a standardized housing questionnaire during enrollment and annual registration to improve consistency, equity, and connection to McKinney-Vento supports.

2

Align homeless student counting methodologies with federal and state standards.

Move beyond Utah's October 1 point-in-time snapshot by incorporating cumulative annual McKinney-Vento counts in public reporting.

3

Strengthen data systems and public reporting.

Improve the timeliness, accessibility, and organization of public data on academic outcomes, chronic absenteeism, and discipline.

4

Initiate statewide, cross-sector coordination to address student homelessness.

Connect McKinney-Vento education supports, Continuum of Care programs, and the Utah Office of Homeless Services through a statewide framework for identification, data sharing, and service delivery.

5

Address disproportionate homelessness among Native American/Alaska Native students.

Strengthen culturally responsive identification, Tribal partnerships, and rural service capacity; use disaggregated data and Indigenous-led approaches.

6

Evenly adopt restorative practices across school districts.

Integrate McKinney-Vento needs into PBIS, MTSS, restorative, and trauma-informed approaches with consistent statewide guidance and training.

Note. PBIS is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; MTSS is Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

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Learn more and stay connected.

Read the full brief:

Download the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools factsheet on student homelessness in Utah.

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Citation: Cazares-Minero, M., Kim, G. H. E., & Bishop, J. P. (2026). *Student homelessness in Utah: Trends, disparities, and opportunities for action*. UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools.