

HOMELESSNESS IN RCSD UP 46% SINCE 2011; KINDERGARTEN KIDS BEHIND INCREASE

MASSIVE UPTICK

Homeless

JUSTIN MURPHY @CITIZENMURPHY

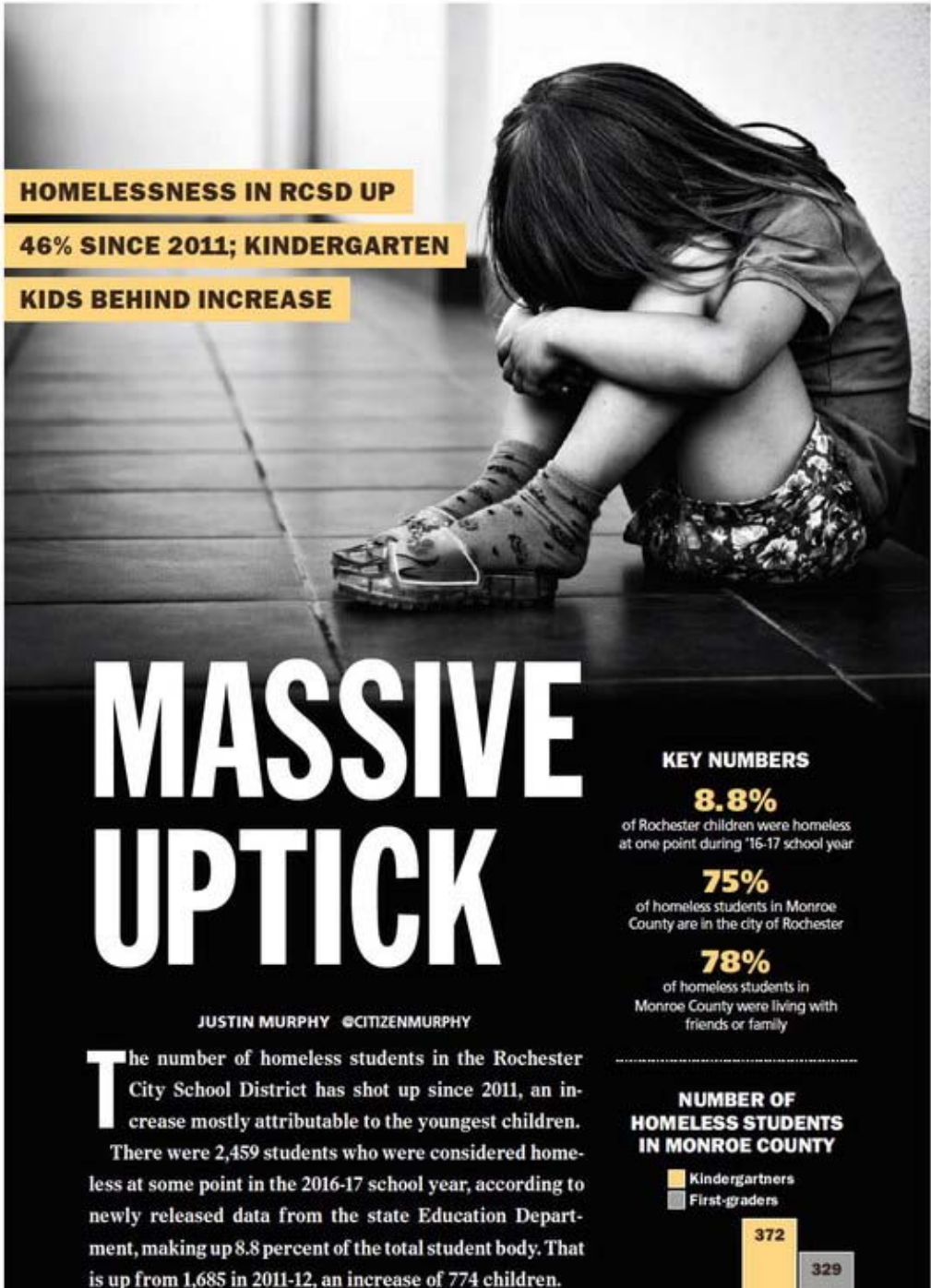
The number of homeless students in the Rochester City School District has shot up since 2011, an increase mostly attributable to the youngest children.

There were 2,459 students who were considered homeless at some point in the 2016-17 school year, according to newly released data from the state Education Department, making up 8.8 percent of the total student body. That is up from 1,685 in 2011-12, an increase of 774 children.

Another 139 charter school students are homeless, up from fewer than 10 in 2011-12. That is largely the result of the great increase in charter school enrollment generally.

Kindergarten is the level with the most homeless students, followed by first and second grades. Kindergarten and prekindergarten are the levels which have seen the greatest increase in homelessness since 2011.

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KEY NUMBERS

8.8%

of Rochester children were homeless at one point during '16-17 school year

75%

of homeless students in Monroe County are in the city of Rochester

78%

of homeless students in Monroe County were living with friends or family

NUMBER OF HOMELESS STUDENTS IN MONROE COUNTY

Kindergartners
First-graders

372

329

USA TODAY NETWORK ILLUSTRATION/GETTY IMAGES

MASSIVE UPTICK

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Some of that increase is likely due to the expansion of prekindergarten; hundreds of 3- and 4-year-olds who are now counted as students would not have been five years ago.

Nonetheless, Eamonn Scanlon, education policy analyst for the Children's Agenda, said the data probably understates the problem. "It's not something we've properly tracked in the past," he said. "There's a huge need in the community for housing, and schools can't do a lot about that." Homelessness is also up significantly in the Monroe County suburbs: 837 children in 2016-17, compared to 732 in 2011-12. Most of the increase is attributable to East Irondequoit, where the homeless count has nearly tripled. Greece, on the other hand, has seen its homeless child population fall from 232 to 145.

Compared to the total population of Monroe County homeless students, the proportion enrolled in RCSD schools has grown, from 69.7 percent in 2011-12 to 74.6 percent in 2016-17.

The trend is even worse statewide: an increase of 52 percent, up to 148,000 homeless children in New York schools. Two-thirds of them are in New York City, where one student in 10 was homeless at some point during the most recent school year.

Under federal law, a student is considered homeless if she lacks "a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence." In Monroe County, 78 percent of those students were "doubled up," or living with friends or family. Another 18 percent were in homeless shelters. Besides New York City, Syracuse and Hempstead, on Long Island, also have more homeless students than Rochester despite lower overall enrollments. Buffalo has more students overall, but only 5.4 percent of them are homeless. The numbers are sure to rise in the short term as Puerto Ricans leave the island to join friends and family in New York. To the extent they settle into other people's houses at the beginning, they'll be considered homeless.

There is an increasing recognition that poverty, homelessness and their attendant ills have catastrophic and long-term physiological impacts on young children, priming their brains for stress and making it more difficult for them to concentrate at school, or later in life at work.

A 2006 report on New York City schools showed that math and reading proficiency for homeless children was half that of those with stable housing.

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