



OCPS Encourages Eligible Families to Apply for Homeless Education Program

That trust fund is an annual target of lawmakers who divert --- or “sweep” --- money to help pay for programs not related to affordable housing.

By Eric Mock | Orange County | March 25, 2021

ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. — Orange County Public Schools officials say they’ve seen a drop in the number of families reporting being homeless.

But that doesn’t mean there’s fewer of them.

When you drive down Orange Blossom Trail in Orange County, you’ll see a lot of hotels and motels who cater to those who can’t afford stable housing.

You wouldn’t know it, but many of these rooms are occupied by students.

“Many of our students live 6 to 7 people in less than 400 square feet ... sometimes there aren’t enough beds for everyone who’s living in the room, so some of our students live on the floor,” said Walker Middle School Principal Becky Watson.

She and her staff try to visit families in unstable housing at least once a week.

She says parents losing their jobs thanks to the pandemic has worsened Central Florida’s affordable housing crisis.

“We recently had a family that had to move four times in one week, because they couldn’t afford the nightly rent,” she said.

Christine Cleveland with Orange County Public Schools, says these are the families the district is trying to reach.

“It’s really gonna be more than likely that they qualify for our program because they’re gonna probably have multiple people living in that house,” Cleveland said.

She says they’ve only had about 3,200 families report a need for their McKinney Vento homeless education program this year.

Which concerns her because they typically see closer to 6,000.

“They’re not identifying as a McKinney Vento family when they could be getting the supports through our program,” Cleveland said.

That support allows students to stay enrolled at the same school even when they move.

And provides free transportation from their new address.



Watson says these children desperately need that kind of consistency.

“The best thing that can happen for their student is to remain in their school...so that they can have that part of their life remain stable,” Watson said.

That's why Orange County Public Schools is encouraging any family who might fit this description to sign up.

But if you don't have stable internet access you can call this number: (407) 317-3485

Or you can go to your child's school in person and they can help you sign up.

Article last accessed [here](#) on March 29, 2021.