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Number of Ore. homeless students trickles upward

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PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — After several years of sharp increases, the number of homeless students in Oregon stayed relatively flat last school year.

The state Department of Education reported Wednesday that 15,859 of Oregon's 566,067 students were homeless at some point during the past school year, an increase of 342 students from 2006-07. The population of homeless students had jumped by more than 2,300 the year before.

Students classified as homeless are not all living on the streets or in a shelter. They are defined as lacking fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.

Most of homeless students lived with friends or relatives because their parents had money problems. But almost 2,000 students were "unsheltered," and lived on the streets or in some structure not meant for human habitation. Another 1,800 lived in a shelter as their primary residence.

"Thousands of children in Oregon continue to attend school despite unstable living conditions," state schools Superintendent Susan Castillo said in a news release.

"Homeless students face huge challenges before they even get to the classroom door. Schools have an important part to play in helping these students, along with many other public and private organizations."

The Portland School District had the most homeless students, but other districts had higher percentages.

Portland, for example, had 1,232 homeless students within an enrollment of roughly 50,000 kids. The Medford district, with its enrollment of 12,408, had 1,094 homeless students.

Almost half the state's homeless students were in elementary schools.