

The Majority of Public School Students in the Southern United States are Poor

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In 17 U.S. states, the majority of public school students are low-income. But the poverty isn't distributed evenly across the country, according to a [new report](#) from Southern Education Foundation. Thirteen of the states are in the South, and the other four are in the West.

The situation is dire.

Researchers measure the landscape by the numbers of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, a rough proxy for gauging poverty. Students are eligible for free or reduced meals if their family household income is 185 percent beneath the poverty threshold.

In 2011, a student from a single-parent home with an annual income of \$26,956 or less would qualify for free or reduced lunch. In Mississippi, 71 percent of public school students qualify for free and reduced lunch. In New Mexico it's 68 percent; in California 54; in Texas it's 50 percent.



Percentages of low-income students in U.S. states Illustration: Southern Education Foundation

The recession that began in 2008 certainly exacerbated trends, but childhood poverty is a problem much older than the recession. Between 2001 and 2011, the numbers of children in public schools who classified as low-income grew 32 percent, or by some 5.7 million kids. As a result, by 2011 low-income students made up nearly half of all public school students.

While 30 percent of white students attend schools where the majority of students are low-income, 68 percent of Latino students attend schools classified as such. And 72 percent of black public school students go to schools where the majority of students are low-income.

The situation has serious implications for the educational futures of the nation's youth, especially as budget-crisis-stricken cities and states are cutting first and deepest from their public schools.

Read the report in full [here](#). Southern Education Foundation (SEF) report:

[A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South and the Nation](#), finds that low income children are a majority of students in the public schools of 17 states across the nation – and 13 of those states are in the South. Without fundamental improvements in how the South and the nation educate low income students, the trends that this report documents will ricochet across all aspects of American society for generations to come.

[Click to see percent of low income students by location within states](#)

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