100,000 plus children in state live below poverty line

59.7 percent of students in USD 413 qualify for free and reduced lunches

GREG LOWER
greg@chanute.com

Latest figures show 105,000 Kansas children live below the poverty line, including thousands in Neosho County.

The share of Kansas kids living in poverty was 14.8 percent in 2017, compared with 14.1 percent in 2016, figures released by a US Census Bureau report. The group Kansas Action for Children, a Topeka-based non-profit, said the figures suggest efforts to move the needle have stalled, and a lengthy economic recovery and low unemployment aren’t benefitting a substantial number of children and families.

According to the USD 413 school district in Chanute, about 59.7 percent of students qualified for free and reduced lunches this school year.

Unaudited enrollment figures for 2018-19 show 950 students eligible for free lunches this year and 195 qualified for reduced prices, out of a total enrollment of 1,918 students.

Those numbers are an improvement from 2017-18 and 2016-17, as both the number of students needing aid has declined and total enrollment has grown.

Interim Superintendent Steve Parsons said he was surprised by the figures.

“Our numbers have dropped a little bit,” he said, noting that the figures likely reflect the community’s economic improvements.

Students qualifying for free lunches dropped from 961 in 2016-17, although the number of students qualifying for reduced prices increased from 172 from last year. In 2016-17, students qualifying for free and reduced lunches were 63.5 percent.

The Neosho County Health Department reported that about 4,000 children up to age 5 were clients of the Women, Infants and Children program. For August, 230 children took part.

Administrator Theresa Starr said they are glad they have the ability to meet the need. She said WIC days at the office are busy, and one of the reasons staff have worked to expand.

“Sometimes, it’s standing room only,” she said.

Starr said more grandparents are raising children and a lot of fathers bring in children.

“We see a wide variety of clients,” she said.

Starr said the health department is a resource to direct people to other resources.

The Neosho County Health Department can be contacted at (620) 431-5770 in Chanute, and the Chanute school district administration is available at (620) 432-2500.