



Children Experiencing Homelessness Served by Part C Infant and Toddler Intervention – State Fiscal Year 2021

Report to the Legislature

As required by Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.125

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As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1000 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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Legislative Charge

Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.125, requires the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to annually report on the number of children experiencing homelessness served by the Part C Infant and Toddler Intervention system. The current report covers the 2020-21 school year. Data for this report came from the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) data system.

Introduction

The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program is authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.) (McKinney-Vento Act). The McKinney-Vento Act was originally authorized in 1987 and most recently re-authorized in December 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). There is an increased focus on services for preschool-aged children experiencing homelessness as evidenced by the explicit inclusion of preschools in the definition of “school of origin.” Data show preschool children comprise a major share of the overall homeless population.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires state and local educational agencies to build awareness of the needs of children and youth who are experiencing homelessness. Public schools, including charter schools, must provide services that remove barriers to enrollment, attendance and educational success of these children. Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Act defines “homeless children and youths” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and includes:

- i. Children and youth who are:
 - a. sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (sometimes referred to as “doubled-up”);
 - b. living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
 - c. living in emergency or transitional shelters; or,
 - d. abandoned in hospitals.
- ii. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
- iii. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
- iv. Migratory children (as such term is defined in [section 6399 of title 20](#)) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described above.

The federal Individuals with Dis/abilities Education Act (IDEA) supports systems and services for students with dis/abilities. Part C of IDEA requires states to locate, identify, and serve infants and toddlers with dis/abilities and their families. Part C child find and service provision requirements include all infants and toddlers with dis/abilities who are experiencing homelessness. Staff of homeless family shelters are considered primary referral sources in the Part C system and must refer a child to Minnesota’s early intervention system if they have concerns about a child’s development. Another important aspect of Part C of IDEA is that each state must adopt

policies and practices to ensure that traditionally underserved groups, including families experiencing homelessness, are meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation of the Part C system.

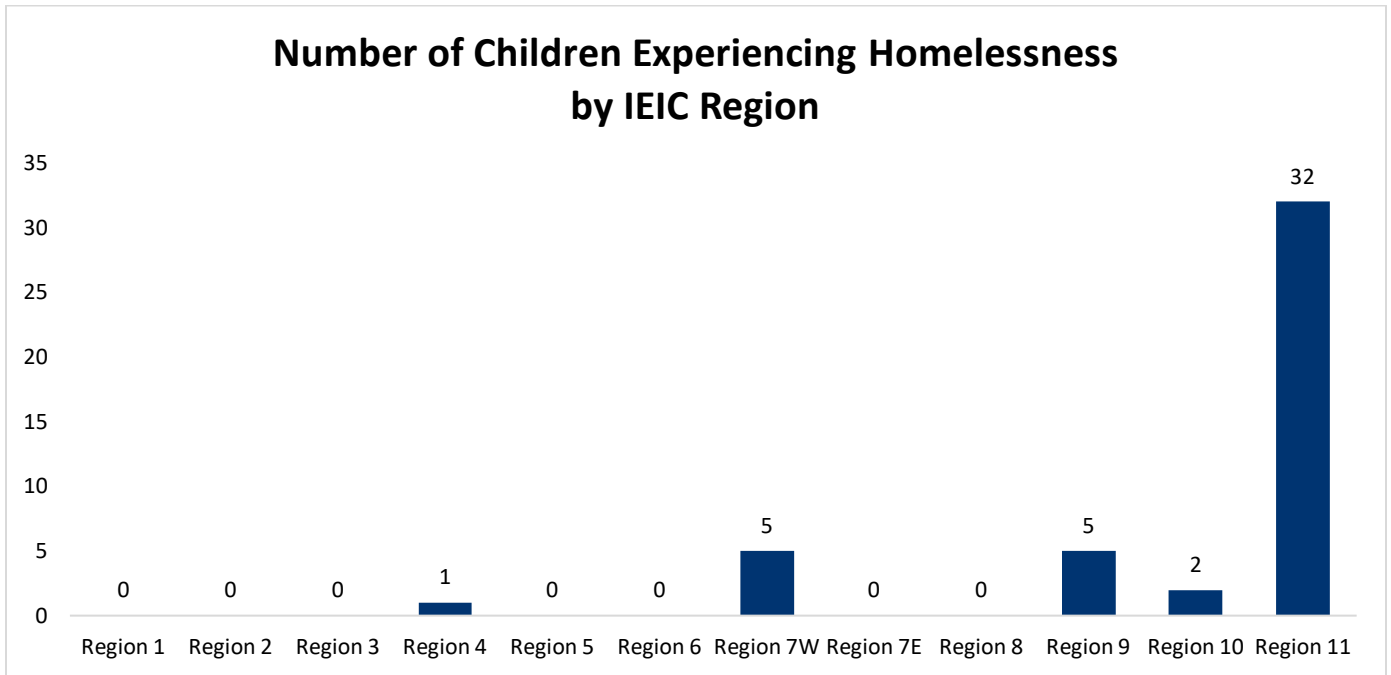
Analysis

There was a total of 21,395 infants and toddlers connected (“referred”) to Early Childhood Special Education through Minnesota’s Help Me Grow system during the 2020-21 school year. Of these connections, 4890 received services. As reported through MARSS, a total of 45 infants and toddlers found to be eligible for services with dis/abilities experienced homelessness during the 2020-21 school year as compared to 79 in 2019-20. Due to system-created transience of families experiencing homelessness, it is likely some children were not counted accurately or at all, particularly during the timeframe of the continued COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Help Me Grow referrals do not account for local referrals directly to school districts, of which we see more frequently in rural areas and smaller communities across Minnesota and Tribal Nations.

Of the 45 children who were reported experiencing homelessness in 2020-21, 41 qualified for their primary dis/ability category under Developmental Delay, two children qualified under Autism Spectrum Disorder, one child qualified under Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing, and one child qualified under Speech-Language Impaired. Note that for children under the age of three, Developmental Delay is most common due to the different avenues a child can be found eligible under Part C in Minnesota. Home language for most children was English (40 children) followed by Hmong and Other (two children each), and Spanish (one child). Of the total Part C children experiencing homelessness in 2020-21, one was identified as American Indian/Alaska Native; four children were identified as Asian; 10 children were identified as Black/African American; three children were identified as Hispanic/Latino; no children were identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; seven children were identified as Two or More Identified; and 20 children were identified as White. Forty-three children reported as experiencing homelessness were served in the home setting, as is most typical for children served through required natural settings in Part C. Two children were served in other settings, one each in a setting designed for typically developing children and a setting designed for children with developmental delays. Due to the continued COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning (tele-practice) continues as a service delivery method within families’ natural environment locations as determined by individual local programs and families.

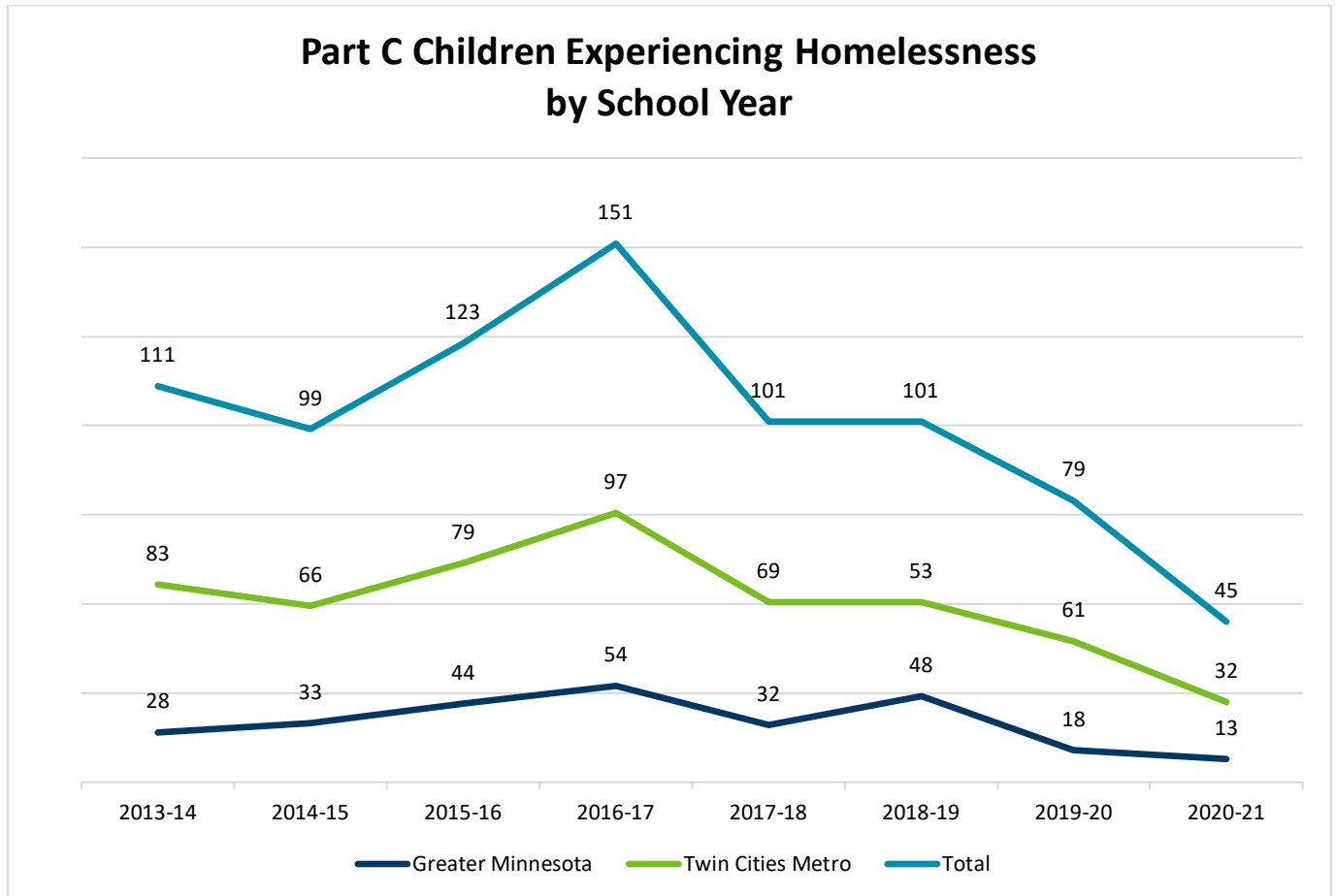
Member districts located within five of the 12 [Interagency Early Intervention Committees \(IEICs\)](#), the regional teams statutorily responsible for public awareness and outreach in Minnesota for Part C, reported serving infants or toddlers experiencing homelessness during the 2020-21 school year. Note that not all IEICs currently have access to this data from the districts in their regions, so this may be another factor affecting total numbers state-and-Tribal-Nation-wide. Figure 1 on Page 6 demonstrates the number of children experiencing homelessness by regional spread. The highest number of children experiencing homelessness served was in Region 11 (32), with Region 9 and 7W the next highest (five each). There were no children experiencing homelessness reported being served in Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7E and 8.

Figure 1: Number of Children Experiencing Homelessness by IEIC Region



Of the 45 children experiencing homelessness reported across all districts in 2020-21, 32 were from the Twin Cities metro region and 13 were from Greater Minnesota. Figure 2 on Page 7 shows the number of children receiving Part C services who were reported to be experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities metro region compared to Greater Minnesota over the past eight school years. During this time, MDE has worked to enhance technical assistance to school districts to improve the accuracy and completeness of data reporting, as well as fine-tuning data systems and reports available to individual districts. These efforts continue.

Figure 2: Part C Children Experiencing Homelessness by School Year



It is suspected that infants and toddlers with dis/abilities who are experiencing homelessness continue to be under-identified through location efforts (e.g., effective outreach is difficult; transience can affect enrollment into school-based Part C programming and thus entrance into the MARSS system; COVID-19 has affected child find and families’ resources statewide). Part C MARSS data for 2020-21 shows that 12 children identified as experiencing homelessness were under the age of 1 year, 17 children were between the ages of 1 and 2 years, and 16 children were between the ages of 2 and 3 years with one of these 16 children having turned 3 during the 2020-21 school year.

How MDE Continues to Address this Issue

Efforts of MDE’s Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) team to communicate the importance of identifying developmental concerns among young children experiencing homelessness builds upon work of the Governor’s Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Childhood Intervention (ICC) beginning in 2013. The ICC assists and advises MDE as the lead agency for ECSE services in all work. A 2013 ICC retreat focused on underserved populations within the early intervention system, including a priority for children experiencing homelessness and their families. The ICC continues to fill the required position of a “homeless coordinator of education of

homeless children and youth” (Minn. Stat. § 125A.28), through MDE’s Homeless and Neglected/Delinquent Programs state coordinator, Roberto Reyes. The Part C Coordinator and ECSE Supervisor are also involved in a number of interagency and grant projects supporting infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness and their families to ensure the unique needs of infants and toddlers with dis/abilities or suspected of dis/abilities are represented in systems-level decisions and development. In addition, a current priority of ECSE as determined through intensive engagement with the field, families, Tribal partners, and community partners is addressing inequity gaps for families experiencing Part C supports and services. This includes intensive family in-reach to determine what families know they want and need for their children, and an intentional focus on racial and wealth disparities including how these intersect for children experiencing homelessness in Minnesota and Tribal Nations.

Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.30, requires that each Interagency Early Intervention Committee (IEIC) include a committee member to represent issues related to homelessness within the early intervention system. Currently, at least half of the IEICs have a member on their committee with a focus on homelessness. For State Fiscal Years 2019-21, a number of IEICs included a specific goal in their work plans for action and evaluation of their public awareness and outreach efforts for this population. It is expected that connecting children experiencing homelessness were impacted directly by COVID-19 during state fiscal year 2021, given that total referrals for Part C were down significantly as well.

In addition to the above efforts, Minnesota launched Help Me Connect on May 19, 2021. Help Me Connect is an expansion of Minnesota’s current Help Me Grow system, combined with core components of the National Help Me Grow model developed by the Connecticut Children’s Hospital. Help Me Connect is an interagency collaboration and partnership of the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, as well as the Minnesota’s Children’s Cabinet. Implementation of Help Me Connect will lead to increased ECSE connections, public awareness and outreach efforts, information and assistance to families and professionals concerned about a child’s development, data collection and implementation, and linkages to a wider range of existing community-based services – including services that may directly support children and families who are experiencing homelessness. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Help Me Connect also added a specific section for Peacetime Emergencies. We increased culturally supportive resources following the murder of George Floyd, which put a spotlight on Minnesota’s racial inequities and disproportionalities in our systems.

MDE’s ECSE team continues to increase statewide capacity to serve these children and their families made to be highly vulnerable by the systems. One example of this increased capacity work is through intentional collaboration with other MDE divisions, the Minnesota Department of Health through interagency agreements, and other Minnesota state agencies. The IEICs and the ICC also continue intentional focus on children and families historically and currently made to be most marginalized by the systems, including infants and toddlers with dis/abilities and suspected of having dis/abilities and their families experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

Minnesota Department of Education continues taking action to address the issues related to identifying, reporting about and serving infants and toddlers with dis/abilities and their families experiencing homelessness.

By partnering to address the systems that support families experiencing homelessness throughout all levels of families' lives, MDE hopes to see each and every infant and toddler with dis/abilities and their families who are experiencing homelessness also receive self-determined early intervention services when desired in a timely manner through Part C. Families know their children best. When families receive supports they know they want and need, and when families have access to whole-family stability, their children are better supported to reach developmental outcomes within their familial, cultural, and community structures. This takes every part of the early childhood system working together, and Part C continues to be an active and necessary partner in this work for change for children and families experiencing homelessness.