



Children Experiencing Homelessness Served by Part C Infant and Toddler Intervention – State Fiscal Year 2023

Report to the Legislature

As required by Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 125A.125

For more information:

Cat Tamminga Flores, Part C Coordinator
Early Learning Services/Early Childhood Special Education
Minnesota Department of Education
400 NE Stinson Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55413
651-582-8746
Cat.Tamminga@state.mn.us
education.mn.gov

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 2023, 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 2022-23 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 population experiencing homelessness.

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 shelters who serve families experiencing homelessness 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

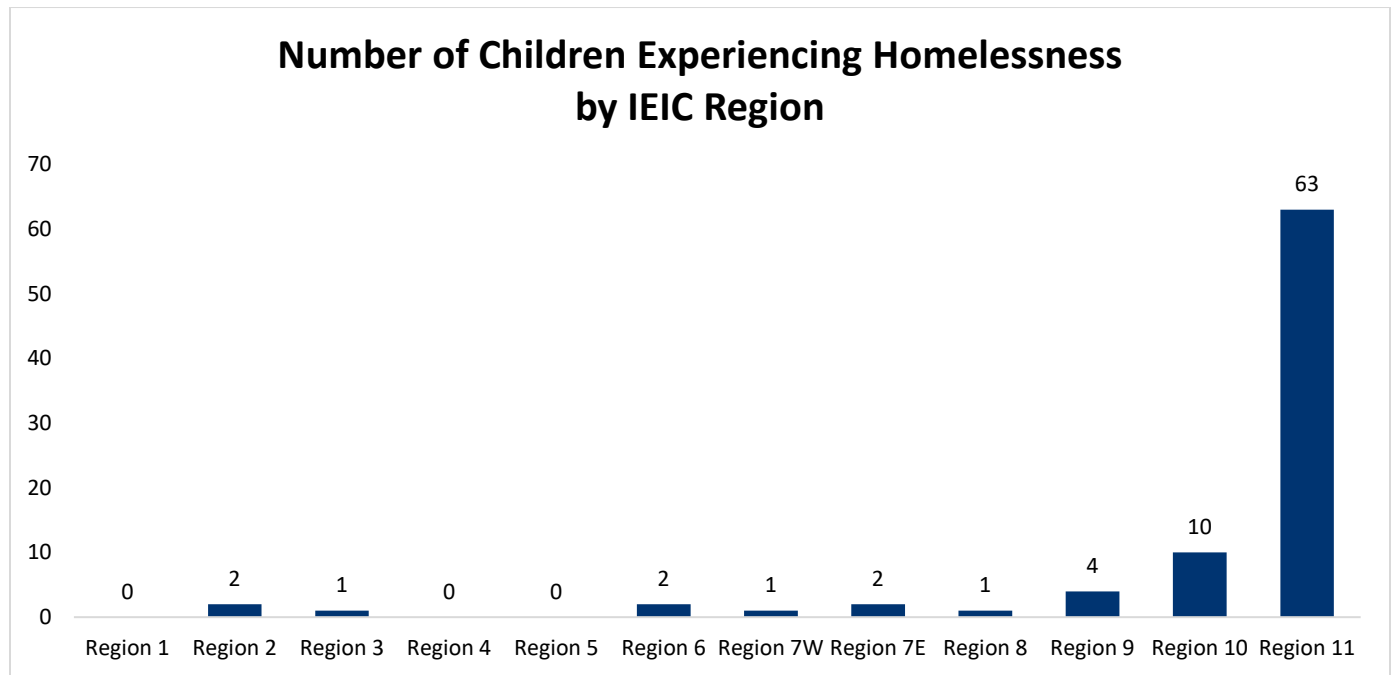
There was a total of 27,380 infants and toddlers connected (“referred”) to Early Childhood Special Education through Minnesota’s Help Me Grow system during the 2022-23 school year. As reported through MARSS, a total of 86 infants and toddlers found to be eligible for services with dis/abilities experienced homelessness during the 2022-23 school year as compared to 78 in 2021-22. 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 recovery. In addition, Help Me Grow connections do not account for local connections directly to school districts, of which we see more frequently in rural areas and smaller communities across Minnesota and Tribal Nations.

Of the 86 children who were reported experiencing homelessness in 2022-23, 80 qualified for their primary dis/ability category under Developmental Delay, three children qualified under Autism Spectrum Disorder, one child qualified under Traumatic Brain Injury, 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 (72 children) followed by Other (eight children), Spanish (three children), Hmong (one child), American Sign Language (one child), and Somali (one child). Of the total Part C children experiencing homelessness in 2022-23, four children were identified as American Indian/Alaska Native; three children were identified as Asian; 18 children were identified as Black/African American; 12 children were identified as Hispanic/Latino; no children were identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 11 children were identified as Two or More Identified; and 38 children were identified as white. Seventy-eight children reported as experiencing homelessness were served in a home setting, as is most typical for children served through required natural settings in Part C. No children were served in “other settings,” three children were served in a setting designed for typically developing children, three children were served in a setting for children with developmental delays, and two children were served in a service provider location. 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 nine 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 2022-23 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-Nations-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 (63), with Region 9 and 10 the next highest (four and ten respectively). Regions 2, 6, and 7E each served two children experiencing homelessness. Regions 3, 7W, and 8 each served one child experiencing

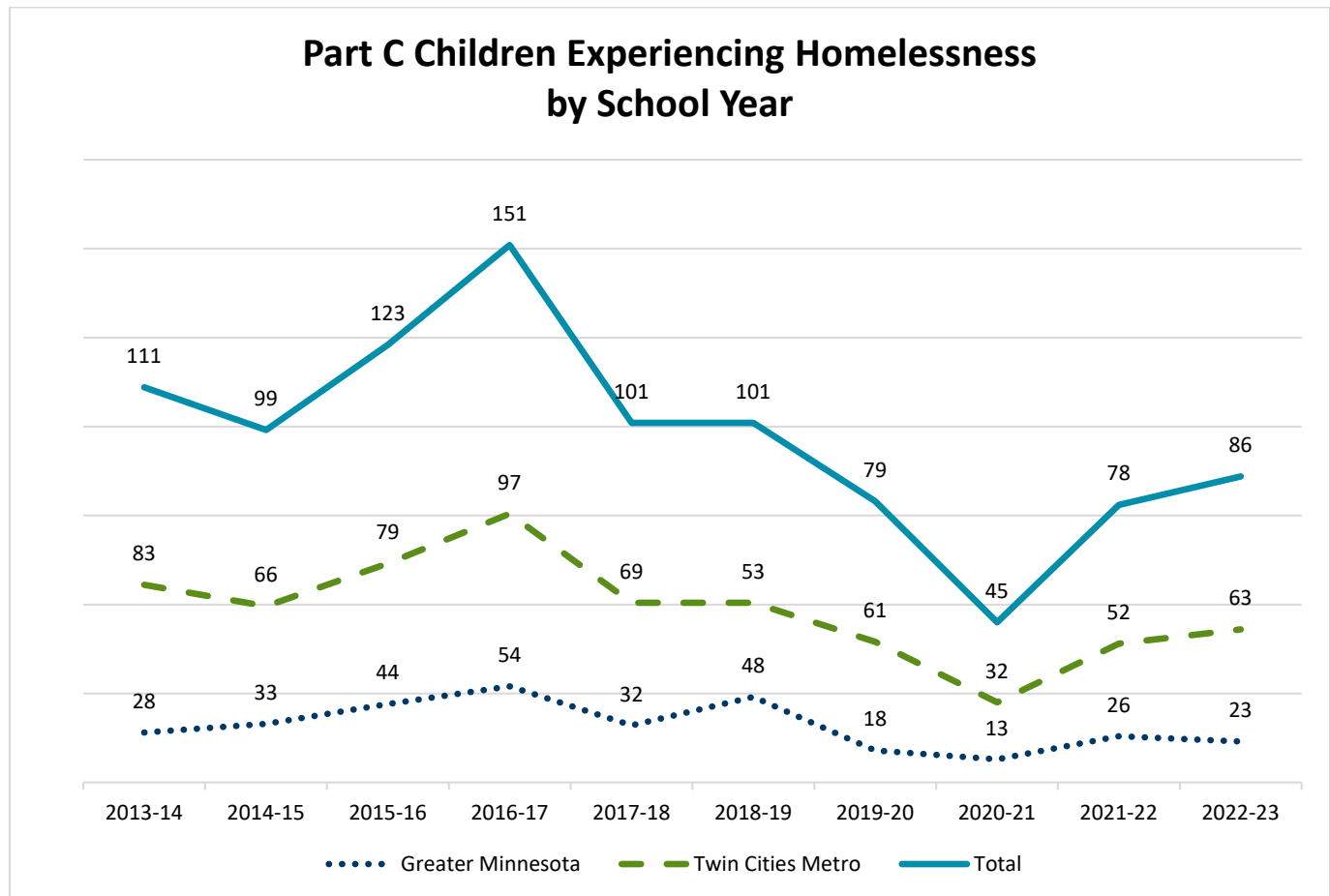
homelessness. There were no Part C children experiencing homelessness reported as being served in Regions 1, 4, and 5.

Figure 1: Number of Children Experiencing Homelessness by IEIC Region



Of the 86 children experiencing homelessness reported across all districts in 2022-23, 63 were from the Twin Cities metro region and 23 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 decade. 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, as well as efforts to collaborate with additional early childhood programs across the state and Tribal Nations who share land with us. Note that the number of children experiencing homelessness has been climbing again since 2020-21 during the height of the pandemic. This does not necessarily mean more children in Part C as a whole are experiencing more homelessness. It may be more directly due to the total numbers of children being connected to and served in Part C rising again since 2020-21. More data analyzation is warranted if the trend continues or the pattern no longer aligns with total numbers.

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 continues to affect child find and families' resources statewide). Part C MARSS data for 2022-23 shows that 17 children identified as experiencing homelessness were under the age of 1 year, 21 children were between the ages of 1 and 2 years, and 41 children were between the ages of 2 and 3 years with seven children having turned 3 during the 2022-23 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, now a decade ago. The ICC assists and advises MDE as the lead agency for ECSE services by supporting development and implementation of comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary interagency programs of early intervention services for children with dis/abilities and their families. 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 [2023]), through MDE’s Homeless and Neglected/Delinquent Programs state coordinator. 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 11 Tribal Nations who share land with us. Four year-long Family Engagement grants through the Part C American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds were completed in Fall 2023 and are helping to identify needs to address in better serving each and every child across Minnesota and 11 Tribal Nations who share land with us. Additional ways children and their families experiencing homelessness in Part C will be better supported is through yet-unknown collaborations and work developing in the coming year(s) as Minnesota’s Part C program shifts its authority under the new Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) in July 2024 through a co-lead model with the Minnesota Department of Education as outlined in a new interagency agreement.

Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 125A.30, requires that each Interagency Early Intervention Committee (IEIC) include a committee member to represent issues related to experiencing 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 through 2022-23, a number of IEICs included a specific goal in their work plans for action and evaluation of their public awareness and outreach efforts for these families. It is expected that connecting children experiencing homelessness continues to be impacted directly by COVID-19 recovery, as well as continued marginalization of specific groups during state fiscal year 2023.

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, which currently remains on the navigator site. The newest addition to Help Me Connect is a pre-natal section. We continue increasing culturally supportive and community resources following the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, which put a spotlight on Minnesota’s racial inequities and disproportionalities in our systems. These efforts continue thriving as we continue staying in the work for better change for families including those experiencing homelessness.

MDE’s ECSE team continues to increase statewide capacity to serve 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 acting 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 and supports from their direct communities, 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.