



Children Experiencing Homelessness Served by Part C Infant and Toddler Intervention – State Fiscal Year 2024

Report to the Legislature

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

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As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1000.00 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. This report was written by Minnesota's Part C Coordinator as part of their duties through an Interagency Agreement between MDE and DCYF. The Part C Coordinator transitioned from MDE to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) in June 2024. The current report covers the 2023-24 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 Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) supports systems and services for students with disabilities. Part C of IDEA requires states to locate, identify, and serve infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Services and provisions for Part C must also be available for infants and toddlers with disabilities

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.

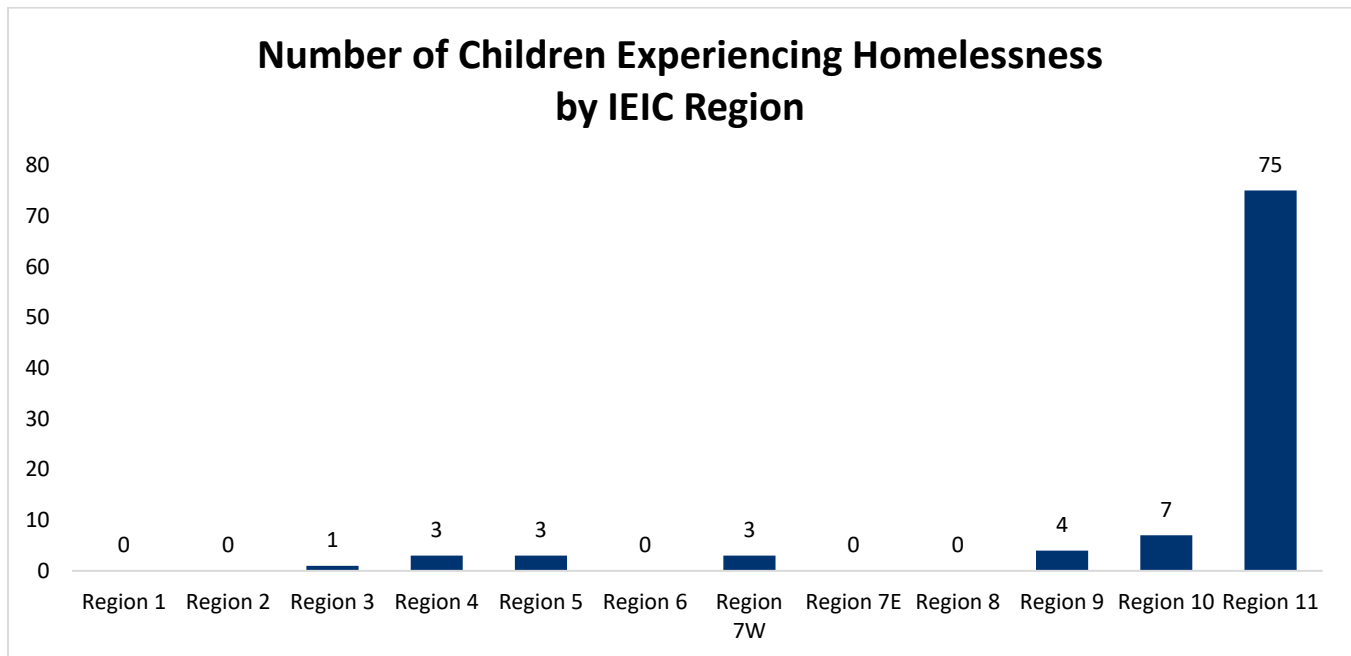
Analysis

There was a total of 28,390 infants and toddlers connected ("referred") to Early Childhood Special Education through Minnesota's Help Me Grow system during the 2023-24 school year. Of the total infants and toddlers with disabilities who were eligible for early intervention services and assigned a MARSS number during the 2023-24 school year, a total of 96 infants and toddlers were also experiencing homelessness. In the 2022-23 school year, 86 eligible infants and toddlers were experiencing homelessness. Due to system-created transience of families experiencing homelessness, it is likely some children were not counted accurately or at all, something we hope to work on as we continue buildout of the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families state agency. In addition, Help Me Grow Minnesota connections do not account for local connections made directly to school districts, of which we see more frequently in rural areas and smaller communities across Minnesota and Tribal Nations.

Of the 96 children who were reported experiencing homelessness in 2023-24, 92 qualified for their primary disability category under Developmental Delay and four children qualified under Autism Spectrum Disorder. 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 (77 children) followed by Spanish (10 children), Other (six children), Somali (two children), and Hmong (one child). Of the total Part C children experiencing homelessness in 2022-23, one child was identified as American Indian/Alaska Native; four children were identified as Asian; 25 children were identified as Black/African American; 20 children were identified as Hispanic/Latino; no children were identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; nine children were identified as Two or More Identified; and 37 children were identified as white. Eighty-six 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. Three children were served in "other settings," five children were served in a setting designed for typically developing children, one child was served in a setting for children with developmental delays, and one child was 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.

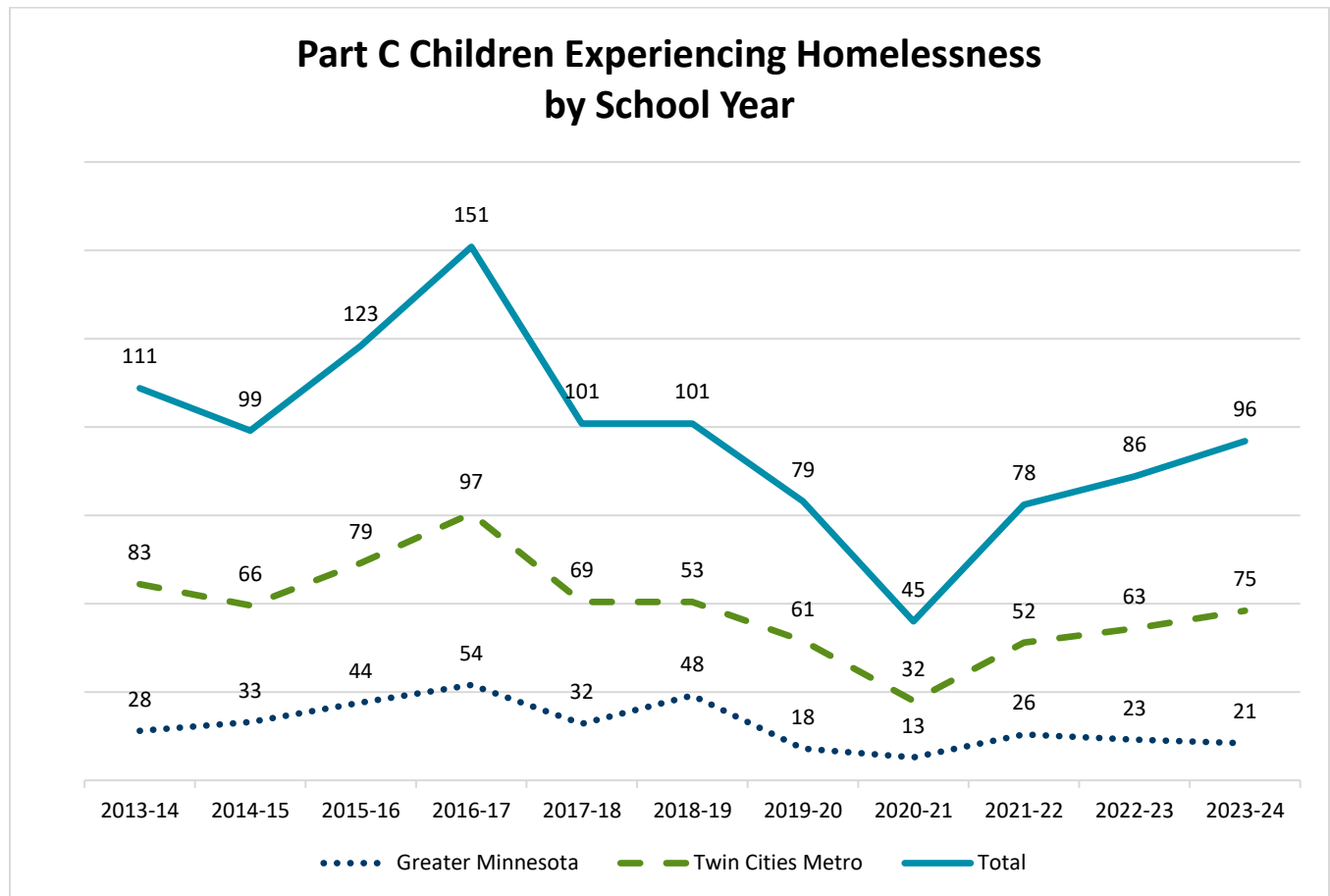
Member districts located within seven of the 12 [Interagency Early Intervention Committees \(IEICs\)](#), the regional teams statutorily responsible for public awareness and outreach in Minnesota for Part C, reported serving infants or toddlers experiencing homelessness during the 2023-24 school year. 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 3 demonstrates the number of children experiencing homelessness by regional spread. The highest number of children experiencing homelessness served was in Region 11 (75), with Region 9 and 10 the next highest (four and seven respectively). Regions 4, 5, and 7W each served three children experiencing homelessness. Region 3 served one child experiencing homelessness. There were no Part C children experiencing homelessness reported as being served in Regions 1, 2, 6, 7E, and 8.

Figure 1: Number of Children Experiencing Homelessness by IEIC Region



Of the 96 children experiencing homelessness reported across all districts in 2023-24, 75 were from the Twin Cities metro region and 21 were from Greater Minnesota. Figure 2 on page 4 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 11 years. During this time, MDE and now DCYF have 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. In addition, data is available through the [Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System](#). 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, especially as Minnesota works to better do this work both horizontally and vertically across DCYF and MDE. Note that the number of children experiencing homelessness has climbed again since 2020-21 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be reflective of the total numbers of children being connected to and served in Part C still rising since 2020-21. This is something MDE and DCYF will continue to watch and report.

Figure 2: Part C Children Experiencing Homelessness by School Year



It is suspected that infants and toddlers with disabilities 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. Part C MARSS data for 2023-24 shows that 17 children identified as experiencing homelessness were under the age of 1 year, 33 children were between the ages of 1 and 2 years, and 44 children were between the ages of 2 and 3 years with two children having turned 3 during the 2023-24 school year.

How MDE and DCYF Continue to Address this Issue

Efforts of MDE’s Early Education and DCYF’s Early Learning Services teams 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 more than a decade ago. The ICC assists and advises MDE and DCYF as the lead co-agencies for ECSE services by supporting development and implementation of comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary interagency programs of early intervention services for children with disabilities 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 State Coordinator for Homeless Education. In addition, a current priority of ECSE as determined through intensive engagement with the field, families, Tribal partners, and community partners is addressing 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 families furthest from resources including how these intersect for children experiencing homelessness in Minnesota and 11 Tribal Nations who share land with us. Development of additional ways children and their families experiencing homelessness in Part C will be better supported is happening through new partnerships and collaborations within interagency workgroups that combine staff from MDE, DCYF, DHS, and additional agencies as needed. Partners attend national webinars together, and there is a new group formed that will begin educating groups that support families with children birth-through-youth about various services including Part C.

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. For State Fiscal Years 2019-21 through 2023-24, a number of IEICs included a specific goal in their work plans for action and evaluation of their public awareness and outreach efforts for families experiencing homelessness as part of their intentional foci.

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; Children, Youth, and Families; 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 and can help families experiencing homelessness find needed resources and support connections. We continue increasing culturally supportive and community-based resources as led in part by family-and-community feedback. These efforts continue thriving as we continue staying in the work for better systems for families including those experiencing homelessness.

MDE's and DCYF's Early Education and Early Learning Services teams continue increasing statewide capacity to serve children and their families made to be highly vulnerable by the systems through expanded inter-and-intragency work. The IEICs and the ICC also continue intentional focus on children and families furthest from resources, including infants and toddlers with disabilities and suspected of having disabilities and their families experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

The Minnesota Departments of Education and Children, Youth, and Families continue acting to address the issues related to identifying, reporting about, and serving infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families experiencing homelessness. By partnering to address the systems that support families experiencing homelessness throughout all levels of families' lives, MDE and DCYF hope to see each and every infant and toddler with disabilities 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.