

**Report on Homeless Children Served**

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**Fiscal Year 2014**

**Report**

**To the**

**Legislature**

**As required by**

**Minnesota Statutes,**

**section 125A.125**

**COMMISSIONER:**

**Brenda Cassellius, Ed. D.**

**Report on Homeless Children Served**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

**Kara Tempel**

**Early Learning Services**

**651-582-8495**

**Kara.Tempel@state.mn.us**

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## **Cost of Report Preparation**

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately \$ 200.00. Most of these costs involved staff time in analyzing data from surveys and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying, and other office supplies.

Estimated costs are provided in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2011, section 3.197, which requires that at the beginning of a report to the Legislature, the cost of preparing the report must be provided.

Minnesota Statutes Section 125A.125 requires the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to annually report on the number of homeless children served by the Part C Infant and Toddler Intervention system (Part C). The current report covers the 2012-2013 school year. Data for this report were obtained from the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) data system.

## **Background Information**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires state and local education agencies to build awareness of the needs of children and youth who are homeless. Public schools, including charter schools, must provide services that remove barriers to enrollment, attendance and educational success of these children.

According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act, the term “homeless children and youth” –

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and

(B) includes –

- i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- ii. children and youth 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; and
- iv. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Each state must adopt policies that ensure appropriate early intervention services are available to all infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in the state, including those who are homeless. CFR 34 §303.101(a)(1)(ii).

Similarly, each state is required to ensure that policies and practices have been adopted to ensure that traditionally underserved groups, including homeless families, are meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation of all the Part C system. CFR 34 §303.227 (a).

Each state must also have a comprehensive child find system that identifies, locates and evaluates all infants and toddlers with disabilities in the state, including infants and toddlers with disabilities who are homeless. CFR 34 §303.302 (b)(1)(ii).

Homeless family shelters are considered a primary referral source in the Part C system. CFR 34 §303.303(c)(10). When shelter staff suspects that a child has a developmental delay or disability, they are federally required to refer a child for early intervention services. CFR 34 §303.303(a).

## **Data**

As reported within MARSS, a total of eight infants and toddlers were identified as homeless for the 2012-2013 school year. Of these eight children, five qualified for services under the developmental delay category and three were eligible under the speech and language category. Only one child spoke English as their primary language. One child was identified as black and one as Asian; the remaining children were identified as white. Six of the children resided within the twin cities metro area and two in greater Minnesota.

When looking at levels of service provision to those children who were identified as homeless and receiving Part C services, collectively those children received very little service. Only two of the eight children received 10 or more total hours of service during the school year, which would be considered a minimal level of service within early intervention.

It is significant to note that the 2012-2013 data was reported prior to the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) team from MDE emphasizing with local school district leaders the importance of understanding the definition of homelessness and reporting children as homeless. Therefore, it is highly likely that this is an underrepresentation of the actual number of homeless infants and toddlers who received Part C services during that school year and reported numbers will increase as a result of our statewide efforts. So not only are infants and toddlers who are homeless probably under-identified through child find efforts (i.e., effective outreach is difficult), these children are also likely to be under-reported as homeless within the MARSS system.

Children under the age of three who are eligible for ECSE services typically receive their services within the home or child care environment or in other community locations where other infants and toddlers and their families frequent. Homeless families are also highly mobile. These factors likely contribute to the difficulty identifying and providing early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities who are also homeless.

## **How MDE is Addressing the Issue**

In March 2012, the Minnesota Children's Defense Fund shared a research summary on homeless young children with Minnesota's Great Start steering committee. Their data showed that these children have a higher probability of developmental delays due to a number of exacerbating factors, and their rate of participation in available early childhood programming is low. This summary shined the spotlight on the fact that our early intervention system needs to be more proficient at finding and appropriately serving infants and toddlers who are homeless and also experiencing developmental delays.

Efforts of the ECSE team to communicate the urgency of homelessness began in the summer of 2013 with the annual retreat of the Governor's Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC). The focus of this retreat was underserved populations within the early intervention system. Roberto Reyes, MDE's Homeless and Neglected/Delinquent Programs state coordinator, presented the

issue of and rules on serving homeless children, including infants and toddlers, within the education system. The presentation and discussion that followed revealed an obvious gap and lack of understanding among the various stakeholder groups represented by the ICC members related to homeless infants and toddlers and the relationship with the Part C system. As a result, a new member was appointed to the ICC, effective May 2014, to specifically represent homelessness issues within the early intervention system.

The issue of identifying and serving infants and toddlers with disabilities who are homeless is now discussed regularly with program leaders and special education directors at annual forums and workshops. ECSE leaders participate in monthly technical assistance phone calls with ECSE staff and homelessness issues continue to be a topic of discussion.

The homeless population is a federally mandated focus of the regional Interagency Early Intervention Committees (IEICs) through their child find, public awareness and outreach efforts. CFR 34 §303.302 (b)(1)(ii). MDE holds an annual workshop day for IEIC members throughout the state and the topic of the 2013 workshop was outreach to infants and toddlers and their families who are homelessness. Minnesota Statute 125A.30 requires that each IEIC includes a committee member to represent issues related to homelessness within the early intervention system. Like the ECSE leaders, the IEIC chairs and co-chairs participate in monthly technical assistance calls where information on issues related to homelessness is shared.

## **Summary**

Minnesota is aware of the issues related to identifying and serving infants and toddlers with disabilities who are homeless and is taking the necessary action to address the need within the system. Addressing the issues related to homelessness throughout all levels of the Part C service system, including in the broader community, we hope to see all infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families who are homeless identified for early intervention services in a timely manner and receiving the appropriate level and intensity of services to maximize their developmental outcomes.