

The National Perspective

Beyond the Mandate

Many States Report Serving Homeless Infants and Toddlers with McKinney-Vento Funds

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In 2013, children under the age of six made up over half (51.2%) of all homeless children in families living in shelter, and one in ten (10.4%) were less than one year old. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act (McKinney-Vento) provides critical protections for children old enough to attend school and authorizes funding to support their academic success. The law directs homeless school liaisons to ensure that young homeless children have access to available public preschool programs but does not specifically mandate services for children under three. Beginning with the 2011–12 school year, however, states were given the option to report the number of children ages 0–2 served with McKinney-Vento subgrants. Analysis of U.S. Department of Education data reveals that over half of states report serving infants and toddlers, indicating that many homeless school liaisons are reaching these young children, exceeding their programmatic requirements.

Compared with housed children, homeless children face a higher risk for poor health and developmental delays; gaps in socio-emotional and cognitive skills have been found to exist between homeless and housed low-income children as early as age three. Homeless infants and toddlers must be connected to health and educational services to overcome these gaps, and homeless school liaisons can support that process.

Local educational agencies (LEAs) may use McKinney-Vento funding to provide a range of services that can improve homeless children's developmental outcomes, including early childhood education; referrals for medical, dental, and mental health care; and assistance with needs that arise due to domestic violence. LEAs that receive funding must report the number of students who are served through program dollars. Homeless children do not have to be enrolled in an LEA to be served; McKinney-Vento-funded referral services, for example, may support not only a homeless student in kindergarten but also a two-year-old sibling.

During the 2011–12 school year, 28 states reported serving a total of 10,591 children under the age of three, with California (4,903), Ohio (1,211), and Alaska (695) serving the greatest number. The following school year, 30 states and the District of Columbia reported serving 11,569 children ages 0–2. Among the 24 states that provided data both years, the percentage of children ages 0–2 served was generally low; in 14 states, children under three comprised 1.5% or less of all homeless children assisted through McKinney-Vento subgrants (Figure 1). However, Alaska, South Dakota, and Ohio served a high percentage (6.9% or more) of homeless children ages 0–2 both years. While the percentage of homeless children served who are ages 0–2 changed little in the majority of states, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, New

Mexico, and Indiana reported much higher rates during the 2012–13 school year than in 2011–12.

Nationwide, far fewer homeless children under three than school-aged homeless children are served with McKinney-Vento subgrants; at 1.2%, the percentage of homeless children ages 0–2 who were served during the 2012–13 school year was one-third that of children ages 3–5 (excluding five-year-old children in kindergarten [Figure 2]). Given that not every state reported data and that homeless school liaisons are required to assist homeless children only in preschool and above, the low rate of homeless infants and toddlers served is not surprising. Because providing the number of children ages 0–2 served is a new reporting option, more young homeless children are likely being served through McKinney-Vento than are documented.

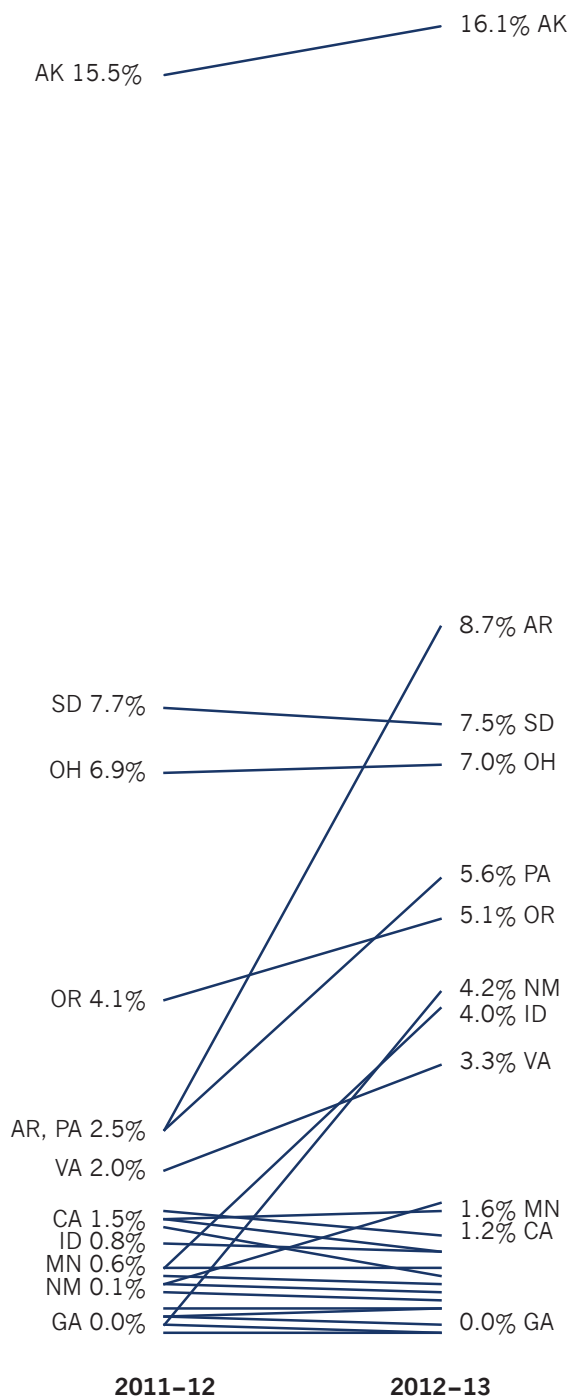
The states that did not report serving any children ages 0–2 may be supporting these vulnerable children in other ways. As an example, Massachusetts did not report either year but prioritizes homeless children for child care subsidies and has used competitive grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education to improve collaboration between the state’s early education system and homeless service agencies. Additionally, young homeless children can be connected to services through other state and local entities. Head Start programs, for example, are directed to identify and prioritize homeless children for enrollment, and states receiving Individuals with Disabilities Education Act grants are required to locate and assess all homeless infants and toddlers with disabilities.

*Only states that reported serving homeless children ages 0–2 are displayed. Some states reported serving so few children that the results total 0.0% due to rounding.

Note: Twelve states are not labeled on the graph due to spacing. For those states that are not labeled, data for the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years, respectively, are: MD (1.4%, 1.5%), CO (1.4%, 1.0%), MT (1.3%, 0.7%), MI (1.1%, 1.0%), NY (0.8%, 0.8%), NV (0.7%, 0.6%), IL (0.6%, 0.5%), NE (0.5%, 0.4%), DE (0.3%, 0.3%), FL (0.2%, 0.3%), KY (0.2%, 0.1%), and KS (0.1%, 0.0%).

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Consolidated State Performance Reports, School Year 2011–12*; U.S. Department of Education, *Consolidated State Performance Reports, School Year 2012–13*.

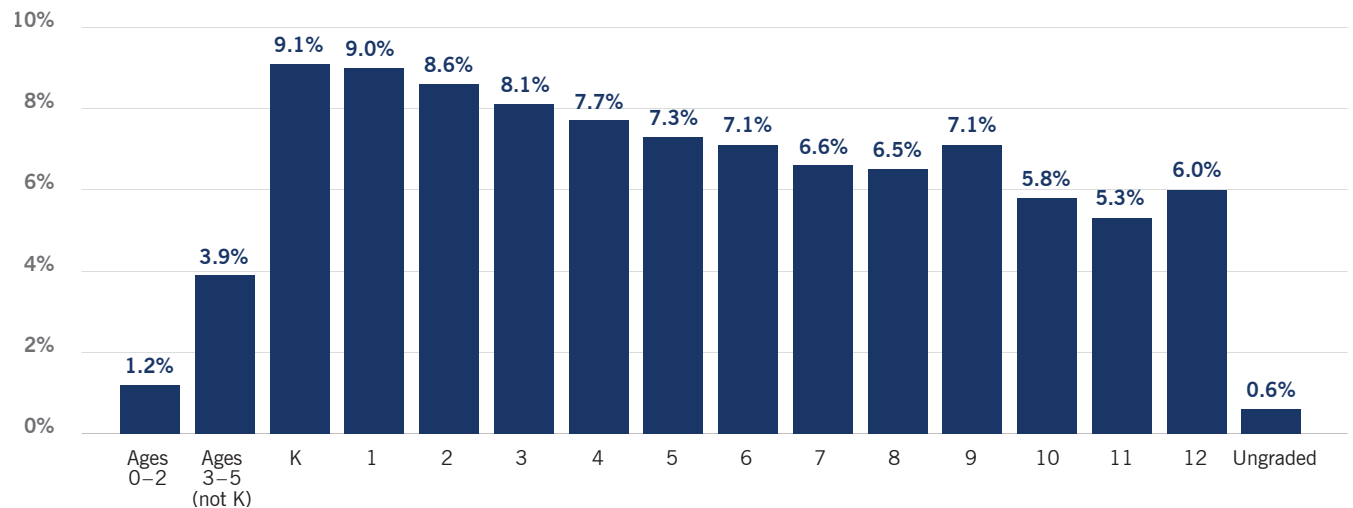
Figure 1
PERCENTAGE OF HOMELESS CHILDREN SERVED BY MCKINNEY-VENTO SUBGRANTS WHO ARE AGES 0–2 (by school year and state*)



That a majority of states report serving children ages 0–2 with McKinney-Vento subgrants indicates that, despite limited resources, many homeless school liaisons are going above and beyond the program’s legislative and regulatory requirements to assist homeless infants and toddlers. If they are not already doing so, all homeless school liaisons should determine if the school-aged homeless children they identify have any young siblings and should consult early childhood and special education providers in the LEA to refer these children to programs such as Early Head Start and early intervention services. Cross-program and -agency collaboration can improve identification of homeless infants and toddlers, expedite the referral process, and ensure that gaps in services are filled.

The capacity of homeless school liaisons to serve homeless children under three, an especially vulnerable but difficult-to-identify group, gives more cause to increase investments in McKinney-Vento. Currently, less than one-quarter (22%) of LEAs receive subgrants; this lack of funding constrains homeless school liaisons’ ability to fulfill even the basic requirements of McKinney-Vento. The Obama administration requested a 10% increase in funding for subgrants in Fiscal Year 2016, which would raise the program’s annual appropriations from \$65.0 million to \$71.5 million. However, more funding is needed to reach all homeless students and to enable more homeless school liaisons to invest the time and resources necessary to make vital connections with their early childhood education colleagues. ■

Figure 2
PERCENTAGE OF HOMELESS CHILDREN SERVED BY MCKINNEY-VENTO SUBGRANTS DURING SCHOOL YEAR 2012–13
(by grade)



Note: Excluded are 198 children ages 0–2 in South Carolina who the state indicated should be omitted. The U.S. Department of Education defines “ungraded” students as those enrolled in a class or program with no standard grade designation. Percentages do not total properly due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Consolidated State Performance Reports, School Year 2012–13*.