

Florida Children Experiencing Homelessness: Landscape Analysis and Recommendations

Overview

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to identify and remove barriers to the enrollment and participation of children experiencing homelessness. Head Start programs are also required to utilize the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition of homelessness - “lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.. This definition includes children and families who are staying in a shelter, unsheltered, living in a motel/hotel, or staying with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason(“doubled-up”). In addition to reinforcing this definition, the Head Start Program Performance Standards outline requirements for grantees to identify and report data on the number of children and families experiencing homelessness, prioritize children experiencing homelessness for enrollment (or on waitlists when no slots are available), and give grantees the ability to reserve up to 3% of their slots for children experiencing homelessness.

SchoolHouse Connection (SHC) prepared a landscape analysis for the Florida Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) to explore how children experiencing homelessness are being served across programs, better understand the nature of partnerships with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), and provide recommendations to Florida HSCO for improving those partnerships, ultimately leading to increased identification and enrollment.

Child and Family Homelessness in Florida

	<u>Census (children under age 6)</u>	Children under 6 experiencing homelessness ¹	<u>Homeless Early Head Start Enrollment</u>	<u>Homeless Head Start Enrollment</u>	McKinney- Vento Data (LEA Enrollment)
2021-2022	1,339,066	43,348	749	1543	1,894
2022-2023	1,360,411	54,491	736	1787	2,359

The number of children experiencing homelessness under age six is a conservative estimate, and is based on the percentage of first graders identified as homeless. Recent data from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) indicates that homelessness among families with children has increased by 34% in 2024, following a 16% increase in 2023. This significant rise in homelessness among families with children indicates a more urgent need to ensure young children in particular are connected to developmentally-appropriate services and supports.

¹Data from SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan, to be published April, 2025.



Survey findings

In partnership with the Florida HSCO, SHC created and launched a survey of Head Start grantees and early childhood providers across the state for the purpose of gathering information about strategies currently in place to identify and enroll children experiencing homelessness, as well as if and how these programs are partnering with their LEAs, which is a critical partnership for finding and serving families experiencing homelessness.

The 22 unique Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care agencies who responded to the survey (Appendix A) serve 15,427 children across their programs, of which 978 (6.34%) are experiencing homelessness. The programs reported serving 1,263 children experiencing homelessness in their last Program Information Report (PIR).

The participating programs are associated with 49 unique local educational agencies (Appendix B). Respondents were asked a series of questions about current enrollment, strategies for identifying families and children experiencing homelessness, and partnerships with LEAs. Key themes from responses include:

1

74% of respondents indicated taking advantage of the Head Start Program Performance standard of reserving up to 3% of their slots for children experiencing homelessness. Four respondents indicated their program did not reserve slots and two respondents identified they were not sure if their program reserved slots.

2

All respondents indicated enrollment interviews and discussions with families as a source of identification, followed by community outreach efforts (utilized by 78% of respondents). Housing questionnaires are the least utilized strategy. Additional strategies that respondents wrote in include referrals from other partner agencies and attending school events.

3

Most respondents (70%) indicated they partner with local shelters to identify children experiencing homelessness, followed closely by partnering with local school districts (65%). 52% of respondents indicated partnering with local homeless Continuums of Care to identify children and families experiencing homelessness and 39% of respondents indicated partnering with faith-based organizations. Additional partners identified by respondents include community agencies that support children and families experiencing homelessness.

4

When asked to describe their program's process for identifying children experiencing homelessness, key responses included:

- a. "During the eligibility meeting, trained staff ask questions and discuss with families their current living situation, to identify families experiencing homelessness."

- b. “Our program works with community based agencies to identify homeless families. Our ongoing working relationships with community providers is the foundation for our success.”
- c. “Recruitment and interviewing and collaborating with local McKinney-Vento liaisons and training staff to recognize and identify signs of homelessness. Ensure staff understand the definition of homelessness and know how to ask appropriate questions during the application process to identify eligible families accurately.”

5

When asked how their program’s community needs assessment reflects families experiencing homelessness, key responses included:

- a. “Our number of families reflect similarities in the local population. Some families experiencing homelessness do not want services, we try to refer them to other programs that can help them.”
- b. “Our community assessment does not necessarily accurately reflect the numbers as many of our families live in unconventional living situations that are not depicted in the community assessment or in other community wide available data.”

6

When asked how their program is coordinating efforts with local school district(s) to identify and serve families experiencing homelessness, key responses included:

- a. “We work very closely with the School District liaisons, providing information about the program; attend collaboration meetings.”
- b. “Currently, we do not have a partnership with the school district.”
- c. “I met with my local homeless liaison to establish a partnership agreement.”
- d. “The Local Education Agency (LEA) refers families to our program.”
- e. “ECS met with Clay County School District in the fall 2024, sent flyers and referral forms. ECS already has a referral system set up with Citrus County Schools via SchoolHouse Connection. Some of our other counties are rural and staff have relationships with those contacts, visit schools regularly, and ensure our flyers and referral forms are made available.”

7

Most respondents (74%) indicated they have a current MOU in place with each LEA in their service area. Two respondents indicated they were not sure if an MOU was in place and three respondents indicated they would like assistance in securing MOUs for their program.

Ten respondents indicated they were not sure if their program’s MOU integrated any activities regarding children experiencing homelessness. Four respondents indicated their MOU did integrate activities regarding children experiencing homelessness. An example provided of these activities includes, “HeadStart coordinates with the SIT (Student In Transition) program at each school. We have regular collaboration with the district home liaison. Head Start students have access to all resources from K-12 students provided by the SITS department. Those resources include bus passes, free backpacks, shoes, hotel accommodations, free tutoring, computers, and other “as available” items.”



8

The majority of respondents (58%) indicated either an Excellent or Very Good working relationship across their local K12 school districts, with 37% of respondents indicating a Good working relationship. Only one respondent indicated their relationship with local K12 school districts was Not Good.

9

When asked how their programs partnered with local K12 school districts to identify and support children experiencing homelessness:

- a. 11 respondents indicated their school district shares referrals for age-eligible children experiencing homelessness
- b. 5 respondents indicated that they use shared enrollment form language
- c. 5 respondents indicated that they provide and/or participate in joint training on homelessness with their local school districts

10

When asked how their program formed a relationship with the LEA and how their program connects to community partners, key responses included:

- a. "We are currently rebuilding relationships with our local LEA. Historically we have coordinated services, transitions and local trainings. We have very strong, long-term relationships with other community partners. We coordinate efforts to address local concerns, recruitment, share referrals and meet regularly on programmatic and systemic levels. We have a MOU with our local partners on how we coordinate that is reviewed annually."
- b. "I met with Highlands County School Board to establish an MOU. They said they were able to refer parents to our website or give them information on our available programs, but they were not able to agree to the MOU."
- c. "Needs to improve dramatically. Want more of a partnership and not a division"
- d. "We are the LEA. We connect to outside community partners, such as Brevard Cares, to contract assistance working with our highest needed family, we sit on various boards (ELC, Hippy, Elevation) with our community partners, we invite them in to educate our staff on what they offer to the community. We are members of Community Connect Coalition sponsor through Healthy Start."



11

When asked to share any areas of challenge experienced when working with local school district partners to identify and support children experiencing homelessness, key responses included:

- a. "The school board not being able to sign an MOU"
- b. "No huge challenge, sometimes they are focusing on school students."
- c. "Want to be shared conversations. Not a district vs. Head Start mindset."
- d. "We have an online pre-application that we like families to complete, so if possible, it would be helpful for LEAs to help families with this process. If not, the referral could state that family needs in person appointment with specific instructions for how to contact parent."
- e. 12 respondents answered "None" or "N/A"

12

When asked what (if any) are the barriers their program encounters in maintaining enrollment and service to families experiencing homelessness, key responses included:

- a. "Sometimes we have a homeless family, but we do not have open seats at the schools they have selected at the time they apply. Homeless families usually have difficulty with transportation so it can be a challenge if there are no openings."
- b. "The attendance rates can be a challenge. We partner with local health clinic to assist with well child appointments and Health Department for immunizations. Transportation can be a problem, if they can get to a Trolley stop we can provide passes."
- c. "Transportation."
- d. "Lack of contact information, lack of transportation, stigma and trust, trainings, staff turnover, awareness"
- e. "Fortunately we are holding steady at 95-97% enrollment. Only barrier could be the heavy influx of infants that present ratio challenges"
- f. "Affordable housing is the biggest barrier along with community based resources."
- g. "Transportation to school (SIT helps when they can) and attendance."

13

When asked to share any areas of strength in identifying and supporting children experiencing homelessness, including working with school district partners, key responses included:

- a. "Yearly we meet to provide an overview of our program to school personnel and also a training with homeless families at one big facility or virtual."
- b. "Partnering with a local homeless shelter and having a center at that location."
- c. "Support from local churches. Overall community understanding of the different types of homelessness. Staff trained on McKinney Vento and what to look for Part of our application process and priority criteria"
- d. "It's all about building trust and collaboration so families feel comfortable talking to us."
- e. "Our program's biggest strength is recruitment efforts in Monroe County. We do a "grass roots" recruitment campaign of families in areas where families are living in doubled up living situations and campgrounds in Monroe County."

****All survey short answer responses can be found in Appendix C.***

Recommendations

Based on Florida-specific data on homelessness among young children, as well as survey responses, SHC recommends Florida HSCO take the following actions for improving identification of children experiencing homelessness and strengthening partnerships with the K12 system:

1

Establish a goal of significantly increasing the number of children experiencing homelessness served by Head Start and Early Head Start

SchoolHouse Connection recommends Florida HSCO to set a goal of doubling the number of children experiencing homelessness enrolled in programs across Florida. This would amount to an overall increase in homeless children served from 4.6% to approximately 9.2% over the next enrollment year.

In addition to identifying and setting a numeric goal, Florida HSCO should take steps to actualize this goal. This could include:


- Incorporating the goal into a Florida HSCO strategic plan;
- Publicly sharing the goal with Head Start programs and partner agencies, including the Florida Department of Education;
- Encouraging programs to integrate the goal into their MOUs with LEAs and other partner agencies;
- Gathering input through additional surveys and/or conversations with programs regarding barriers and support needed to meet this goal;

2

Strengthen partnerships between Head Start and K12 systems for the purpose of identifying and enrolling children experiencing homelessness

Head Start programs and LEAs can be natural partners for serving children experiencing homelessness, and there are already a number of mechanisms in place to strengthen this partnership. However, only 58% of survey respondents indicated an Excellent or Very Good relationship with their school district, and many respondents do not know if and how their MOUs with LEAs address homelessness. While many respondents noted they partner with their LEAs to identify children experiencing homelessness, this could indicate that the referral processes are mostly automated and do not require direct contact with the homeless education liaison. Head Start programs might also receive referrals and identification support from LEA staff who are not the homeless education liaison. Regardless, it is imperative that programs are directly connected to liaisons themselves, and Florida HSCO can address these gaps and strengthen partnerships at both the state and local levels in the following ways:

- Create a statewide contact directory of Head Start programs along with their LEA homeless education liaisons, and ensure all programs are able to access this information to conduct at least one outreach call or email at the start of each program year.
- Facilitate joint professional development opportunities, in partnership with the Florida Department of Education, in which Head Start grantees and LEAs come



together with the specific goal of improving coordination. This could include featuring programs with effective homeless outreach, facilitating site visits, etc;

- Five respondents indicated they provide and/or participate in joint training on homelessness with their local school districts. Gauge these programs' interest in leading a virtual or in-person session to guide other communities in this process and in developing materials to outline their best practices.

- Offer sample language for MOUs between Head Start programs and LEAs that specifically articulates strategies for coordinating to improve the identification and enrollment of children experiencing homelessness.
- Convene regular (monthly) statewide early childhood homelessness coordination calls, to include representatives from Florida HSCO, Florida Department of Education McKinney-Vento Program, and others from Child Care licensing, Florida Pre-K (VPK), etc.
- Produce an annual report on the number of children under age six experiencing homelessness across Florida along with their enrollment rates in Head Start, Early Head Start, and other early childhood development programs, and present it to other statewide early childhood, K12, and homeless agencies.
- Transportation was identified as a significant challenge for multiple survey respondents. Encourage partnerships between Head Start/Early Head Start and their local K12 school district partners, specifically utilizing shared funds to remove barriers to access for children experiencing homelessness. Examples include developing a rideshare program and coordinating buses across the district to serve both early childhood learners and school age students.

3

Increase support for Early Head Start programs to meet the needs of infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness

SchoolHouse Connection data estimates show there are nearly 35,788 infants and toddlers ages birth - three experiencing homelessness across Florida, accounting for approximately 4% of all birth - three year olds, which is above the national average of 3.04%. Based on Early Head Start PIR data, 736 infants and toddlers were enrolled in EHS during the 2022-2023 program year, accounting for only 2.06% of all children birth - three experiencing homelessness in Florida.

In order to meet the specific needs of infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness, Florida HSCO should provide targeted training to Early Head Start programs, including the long-term developmental impacts of homelessness, and strategies for reaching expectant families experiencing homelessness.

Further, Florida HSCO can strengthen partnerships with other early childhood development providers who serve children and families prenatal to three specifically. This could include Home Visiting, licensed child care providers, and Early Intervention services. Levers for strengthening partnerships might include:

- Referral agreements, so that when an Early Head Start program is fully enrolled and unable to provide services to families and children experiencing homelessness, there is an alternative in place;
- Joint training and professional development specifically about meeting the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness;
- Presenting to early childhood state advisory agencies, homeless service providers, and other statewide partners about the prevalence and impacts of homelessness on children prenatal - three across Florida;

4

Facilitate more training opportunities for programs to learn about homelessness and best practices

Learning more about homelessness generally, can help improve the identification of children experiencing homelessness who are currently enrolled, as well as strengthen outreach efforts to target families experiencing homelessness for services. Florida HSCO should facilitate training and professional development opportunities that include:

- An overview of the Head Start Program Performance Standards and requirements related to identifying and serving children experiencing homelessness.
- Documentation of best practices that programs are currently utilizing, including form language, templates, and procedures. Notably, housing questionnaires can be a strong source of identification, yet survey respondents indicated they are the least utilized strategy among programs for identifying children and families experiencing homelessness. This could serve as a good starting point.
- Spotlighting programs who have successfully increased their identification of families experiencing homelessness.
- Encouraging caregivers with lived experience of homelessness to participate on Policy Council to inform programs' procedures for identifying and best serving young children and families experiencing homelessness.

SchoolHouse Connection welcomes the opportunity to answer questions or discuss these recommendations further. Please contact:

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Appendix A: Survey Respondents

- **The Early Learning Coalition Miami-Dade/Monroe**

- Counties served: Miami-Dade
- Programs provided: EHS center-based and EHS home-based
- 750 children (out of 750 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 6 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (0.8% of total slots)
- 8 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Brevard Public School Head Start**

- Counties served: Brevard
- Programs provided: Head Start (school district)
- 611 children (out of 634 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 62 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (9.8% of total slots)
- 52 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **North Florida Child Development**

- Counties served: Gulf, Calhoun/Liberty, Wakulla, Madison
- Programs provided: EHS center-based, HS private provider, Child Care partnership
- 334 children (out of 311 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 4 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (1.3% of total slots)
- 7 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Monroe County School District**

- Counties served: Monroe
- Programs provided: Head Start school district
- 180 children (out of 180 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 15 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (8.3% of total slots)
- 29 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Orange County Head Start**

- Counties served: Orange
- Programs provided: Head Start private provider
- 1536 children (out of 1536 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- “Not Sure” of amount of children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey
- 180 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR (11.7% of total slots)

- **Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County**

- Counties served: Palm Beach County
- Programs provided: Child Care Partnership, Family Child Care Home
- 16 children (out of 270 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 15 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (5.6% of total slots)
- 12 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Children’s Home Society**

- Counties served: Orange, Osceola, Seminole
- Programs provided: EHS home-based
- 140 children (out of 140 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- “Not sure” amount of children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey
- “Do not know” the number of children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Jackson County School District**

- Counties served: Jackson
- Programs provided: EHS center-based, HS school district
- 242 children (out of 240 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 4 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (1.7% of total slots)
- 5 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Lutheran Services Florida**

- Counties served: Hillsborough
- Programs provided: Family Child Care Home
- 120 children (out of 120 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 8 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (6.7% of total slots)
- 6 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Gadsden County Schools Head Start Program**

- Counties served: Gadsden
- Programs provided: Head Start school district
- 227 children (out of 227 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 2 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (0.9% of total slots)
- 4 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **You Thrive FL**

- Counties served: Volusia, Hernando, Sumter
- Programs provided: EHS center-based, EHS home-based, Head Start school district, Head Start private provider
- 815 children (out of 1011 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 64 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (6.3% of total slots)
- 72 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Suwannee Valley 4Cs HS/EHS**

- Counties served: Columbia, Lafayette, Suwannee, Hamilton
- Programs provided: EHS center-based
- 357 children (out of 365 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 5 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (1.4% of total slots)
- 11 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **RCMA**

- Counties served: Collier, DeSoto, Hillsborough, Hardee, Lee, Hendry, Glades, Highlands, Manatee, and Palm Beach
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, Early Head Start home-based, Head Start (private provider), Head Start (migrant/seasonal), Child Care partnership, Family Child Care Home
- 2082 children (out of 2383 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 189 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (7.9% of total slots)
- 189 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **ECS4kids (Episcopal Children's Services)**

- Counties served: Baker, Bradford, Clay, Nassau, Duval, Alachua, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, Marion, Citrus, Lake
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, Early Head Start home-based, Head Start (private provider), Child Care partnership
- 2175 children (out of 2234 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 99 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (4.4% of total slots)
- 94 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Children First**

- Counties served: Sarasota
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, HS school district, HS private provider, Child Care partnership
- 315 children (out of 315 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 33 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (10.5% of total slots)
- 33 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **FSU Early Head Start**

- Counties served: Gadsden County
- Programs provided: Early Head Start home-based
- 68 children (out of 68 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 5 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (7.4% of total slots)
- 11 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **School District of Lee County**

- Counties served: Lee County
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, Head Start (school district), Head Start (migrant/seasonal), Child Care partnership
- 798 children (out of 880 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 151 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (17.2% of total slots)
- 151 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Tri-County Committee Council, Inc.**

- Counties served: Holmes, Walton, Washington
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, Head Start private provider
- 165 children (out of 165 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 5 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (3.0% of total slots)
- 16 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Early Education and Care, Inc.**

- Counties served: Bay (HS and EHS), Franklin (EHS)
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, Early Head Start home-based, Head Start (private provider)
- 465 children (out of 587 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 22 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (3.8% of total slots)
- 30 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **The School Board of Broward County**

- Counties served: Broward County
- Programs provided: Early Head Start center-based, Head Start school district
- 2033 children (out of 2120 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 80 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (3.8% of total slots)
- 74 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **United Way Miami EHS-CCP**

- Counties served: Miami-Dade County
- Programs provided: Child Care partnership
- 497 children (out of 504 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 118 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (23.4% of total slots)
- 132 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

- **Orange County FL Head Start**

- Counties served: Orange
- Programs provided: Head Start school district
- 1501 children (out of 1536 funded slots) enrolled at time of survey
- 91 children experiencing homelessness enrolled at time of survey (5.9% of total slots)
- 147 children experiencing homelessness reported served in last PIR

Appendix B: Local Educational Agencies served by program respondents

1. Miami-Dade Public School District
2. Brevard
3. Gulf
4. Calhoun/Liberty
5. Wakulla
6. Madison
7. Monroe County Schools
8. Orange County Public Schools
9. Palm Beach County
10. Osceola
11. Seminole
12. Jackson County School District
13. Hillsborough County School District
14. Gadsden County Schools
15. Volusia
16. Hernando
17. Sumter
18. Columbia
19. Lafayette
20. Suwannee
21. Hamilton
22. Collier
23. DeSoto
24. Hardee
25. Lee
26. Hendry
27. Glades
28. Highlands
29. Manatee
30. Baker
31. Bradford
32. Clay
33. Nassau
34. Duval
35. Alachua
36. Dixie
37. Gilchrist
38. Levy
39. Marion
40. Citrus
41. Lake
42. Sarasota
43. Holmes
44. Walton
45. Washington
46. Bay District Schools
47. Franklin County Schools
48. Broward County Public Schools
49. PDIS

Appendix C: Survey Short Answer Responses

How would you describe your process of identifying children experiencing homelessness?

- “The process for identifying children within the Orange County is smooth.”
- “As part of the eligibility interview meeting questions are asked to identify families experiencing homelessness.”
- “Our application intake process has a question that asks families if they are experiencing homelessness. We also are in contact with our school district's HEART program which connects us to homeless families.”
- “During the eligibility meeting, trained staff ask questions and discuss with families their current living situation, to identify families experiencing homelessness.”
- “Canvassing areas, interview questions, referrals”
- “We work to ensure that we are asking the right questions and knowing our families.”
- “Application process”
- “Our application includes a living situation interview that is completed with families at intake to determine if a family is homeless according to the McKinney Vento Act. While Home Visitors are working with enrolled families, they are familiar with McKinney Vento and know how to identify them as homeless and start the process of helping them through the process.”
- “We identify homeless youth throughout the interview process during enrollment.”
- “During the application process, a family is interviewed. Depending on their answer to questions about their situation, it will determine other questions asked about living situations.”
- “Recruitment and interviewing and collaborating with local McKinney-Vento liaisons and training staff to recognize and identify signs of homelessness. Ensure staff understand the definition of homelessness and know how to ask appropriate questions during the application process to identify eligible families accurately.”
- “We actively provide information to shelters, involved in Homelessness committees through United Way to recruit children/families experiencing homelessness”
- “Compassionate. Family Advocates are very in tune to what families need in regards to this sensitive subject.”
- “We ask key questions during our interviewing session.”
- “First step is through enrollment orientation and staffing.”
- “At the moment of completing application process we ask to our families applying to give us information about their current situation in order to support them and offer them services as our priority.”
- “Trauma impact”
- “Interviews, referrals”
- “Needs assessment”
- “Our program works with community based agencies to identify homeless families. Our ongoing working relationships with community providers is the foundation for our success.”

- “If the family meets the McKinney Veto definition of homelessness, the child is “categorically” eligible for Head Start and enrolled child in our program.”
- “When children apply to our program questions are asked and identified. If homelessness occur after enrollment, it's the family follow-up through the IFPA”
- “It is a question on the EHS application and the Family Advocate discusses the family circumstances during the Enrollment Interview.”

How does your community needs assessment reflect families experiencing homelessness?

- “1,373,213 children under age 6 for early childhood homelessness, Early childhood education for children experiencing homelessness under age 6 5% serviced in Head Start, 37% of families with children under 18 have a high housing cost burden and 9% of children under age 6 had no resident parent in the US labor force.”
- “Florida Homeless Education Program The Florida Department of Education reports that 40,217 homeless students were served in Local Education Agencies (LEAs) during the 2021-22 school year, of which 2,970 students were served in MiamiDade County Schools (Table 34).^{lii} Of the 2,970 homeless students in Miami-Dade County, the largest group are third grade students (9.6 percent). A total of 81 pre-K students were served by the homeless education program in Miami-Dade County schools.”
- “There is an increasing need and there more families experiencing homelessness.”
- “Data specific to families experiencing homelessness is outlined in the community assessment. The data is identified through the “Point in Time Count” and the number of Florida Homeless Students served by the LEA.”
- “Our number of families reflect similarities in the local population. Some families experiencing homelessness do not want services, we try to refer them to other programs that can help them.”
- “The community assessment identifies homeless in each county we serve.”
- “The community needs assessment reflects the three year data of homeless families in the program as well as overall in the county. It also reflects the possible reasons for homelessness in the county and how the program supports families experiencing homelessness.”
- “We use local school data and data from outlying counties.”
- “The assessment details the zip codes where homelessness is most prominent and has trended down since the previous assessment (although not much).”
- “Our community assessment from 2023 reported data from the National Center for Homeless Education. In 2022, there were an estimated 9,536 school age students experiencing homelessness in our service area. The numbers dropped during the pandemic but rose again in 2022.”
- “The RCMA Community Needs Assessment identifies the number of families experiencing homelessness and the challenges they face, such as housing and transportation. It highlights gaps in services and uses community feedback to improve support for these families. This ensures RCMA’s policies and resources align with the McKinney-Vento Act and Head Start standards to better serve homeless families.”

- “We seek out community data, services provide etc.”
- “All about partnerships and referrals.”
- “It allows us to adequately help those families that are homeless by evaluating or criteria points to accommodate the families.”
- “Through numbers”
- “we need to have better connections with the Lewis Center and other agencies.”
- “Much needed.”
- “Reflects changes in zip codes and tracks immigration”
- “Our community assessment does not necessarily accurately reflect the numbers as many of our families live in unconventional living situations that are not depicted in the community assessment or in other community wide available data.”
- “Our Agency's Community Needs Assessment reflects the needs of each county in our service areas and is updated as needed.”
- “We ask and offer a lot of resources at each of our Family Service Meetings”

How are you coordinating efforts with your local school district to identify and serve families experiencing homelessness?

- “We are housed on some of their campuses and we have an OCPS liaison.”
- “We have centers located at Miami Dade Public schools, if a family is experiencing homelessness and have a sibling at a public school we coordinate our efforts with the school's social worker.”
- “We coordinate with The county's HEART department that identifies and supports homeless families.”
- “We are in contact with the homeless liaison for the school district.”
- “We are the local school district.”
- “During transition, we share family's living situation information with local school district.”
- “We work closely with the homeless outreach liaison to ensure that we are serving homeless families.”
- “ECS met with Clay County School District in the fall 2024, sent flyers and referral forms. ECS already has a referral system set up with Citrus County Schools via school house connection. Some of our other counties are rural and staff have relationships with those contacts, visit schools regularly, and ensure our flyers and referrals forms are made available.”
- “I met with my local homeless liaison to establish a partnership agreement.”
- “We work very close with the School District liaisons, providing information about the program; attend collaboration meetings.”
- “Conversations between Family Advocates and registrars.”
- “Our FACE office informs us of homeless families.”
- “Through my grantee.”
- “Work closely with school district homeless liaison.”
- “Our program is within the school district.”
- “The Local Education Agency (LEA) refers families to our program.”
- “Our family advocates work with the SIT coordinators at each of our 12 district schools since we are a public school-based Head Start program.”
- “Currently, we do not have a partnership with the school district.”

Please share in detail how you formed a relationship with your LEA and how your program connects to community partners.

- “We have worked with OCPS for years, so am not sure of how we formed the relationship.”
- “We established an MOU with the LEA.”
- “We conduct community outreach to agencies and organizations that work with homeless families. We provide flyers and information about the Head Start program.”
- “We communicate with community partners and have dialog to best serve families in our area. The LEA is helpful with information regarding homeless families and we also share information that families with older children need.”
- “We are currently rebuilding relationships with our local LEA. Historically we have coordinated services, transitions and local trainings. We have very strong, long-term relationships with other community partners. We coordinate efforts to address local concerns, recruitment, share referrals and meet regularly on programmatic and systemic levels. We have a MOU with our local partners on how we coordinate that is reviewed annually.”
- “We work closely with the LEA and homeless liaison; we also work closely with local homeless outreach agencies and community partners.”
- “Our Family Advocates attend community meetings/events regularly and network with community partners. We have MOAs with each county documenting TATS (transition) agreements, and LEAs are also a part of other collaborations where MOAs have been developed such as with Child Welfare and Early Education.”
- “I met with Highlands County School Board to establish an MOU. They said they were able to refer parents to our website or give them information on our available programs, but they were not able to agree to the MOU.”
- “We are a long-standing grantee in our rural community. We are part of the Homeless Services Network of Suwannee Valley which includes various community agencies and individuals that focus on services available to those that are homeless or threatened with homelessness.”
- “Needs to improve dramatically. Want more of a partnership and not a division”
- “They’re our Grantee.”
- “Director attends our monthly grantee meetings and I collaborate regularly with LEA coordinators.”
- “We have community partners on our policy council and are recognized at other events we sponsor. We also have a partnership with the local health department and provide a health fair.”
- “We are working in partnership with Early Steps.”
- “Our program is within the school district and Head Start and the district's homeless programs collaborate regularly and attend various community events together.”
- “Partnerships are formed through MOUs”
- “We are the LEA. We connect to outside community partners, such as Brevard Cares, to contract assistance working with our highest needed family, we sit on various boards (ELC, Hippy, Elevation) with our community partners, we invite them in to educate our staff on what they offer to the community. We are members of Community Connect Coalition sponsor through Healthy Start.”

Please share any areas of challenge you experience when working with your school district partners to identify and support children experiencing homelessness.

- 12 respondents answered “None” or “N/A”
- “We serve children 0-3 before they enter the local school system. We typically refer children experiencing homelessness to the local LEA.”
- “We have an online pre-application that we like families to complete, so if possible, it would be helpful for LEAs to help families with this process. If not, the referral could state that family needs in person appointment with specific instructions for how to contact parent.”
- “The school board not being able to sign an MOU”
- “No huge challenge, sometimes they are focusing on school students.”
- “Want to be shared conversations. Not a district vs. Head Start mindset.”
- “We are the school district, so when children apply to Head Start we interview the families, and they become part of our program. Our family advocates work with the families once they are in to ensure they remain safe.”

What are the barriers (if any) your program encounters in maintaining enrollment and service to families experiencing homelessness?

- “For the most part we maintain the enrollment, but sometimes families leave due to living outside of the county and can not get back and forth. Parents just decide they don't want to make things worse by sometimes it being difficult to get to school regardless of assistance with the transportation.”
- “Families dis-enrolling when they find housing in another area.”
- “Sometimes we have a homeless family, but we do not have open seats at the schools they have selected at the time they apply. Homeless families usually have difficulty with transportation so it can be a challenge if there are no openings.”
- “The attendance rates can be a challenge. We partner with local health clinic to assist with well child appointments and Health Department for immunizations. Transportation can be a problem, if they can get to a Trolley stop we can provide passes.”
- “Transportation.”
- “Lack of local community services, most families have to utilize services in Leon County.”
- “Lack of contact information, lack of transportation, stigma and trust, trainings, staff turnover, awareness”
- “1. Transportation is tough 2. Movement of families- can't move kids to different sites if families are moving. 3. Getting them to be honest so we can help.”
- “Fortunately we are holding steady at 95-97% enrollment. Only barrier could be the heavy influx of infants that present ratio challenges”
- “We currently do not have any”
- “Families not knowing community services in the area”
- “Affordable housing is the biggest barrier along with community based resources.”
- “Transportation to school (SIT helps when they can) and attendance.”
- “The families fully understanding the criteria of being homeless.”

Please share any areas of strength in identifying and supporting children experiencing homelessness, including working with your school district partners.

- “Yearly we meet to provide an overview of our program to school personnel and also a training with homeless families at one big facility or virtual.”
- “Partnering with a local homeless shelter and having a center at that location.”
- “Communication on goal of getting a permanent place to stay, helping with obstacles. Encouragement in the process, it can be lengthy.”
- “Support from local churches Overall community understanding of the different types of homelessness Staff trained on McKinney Vento and what to look for Part of our application process and priority criteria”
- “We work very well with the school district to identify homeless children; our community agencies are also fantastic at referring these children and families to us.”
- “The school districts we have collaborated with are responsive and helpful.”
- “Flexible enrollment policies.”
- “Our application process is very user friendly in supporting and recruiting.”
- “It’s all about building trust and collaboration so families feel comfortable talking to us.”
- “We have the support of our school district.”
- “Implementing IMH consultants at public schools.”
- “Our program’s biggest strength is recruitment efforts in Monroe County. We do a “grass roots” recruitment campaign of families in areas where families are living in doubled up living situations and campgrounds in Monroe County.”
- “Our program makes serving families experiencing homelessness our top priority.”
- “We are the LEA so we have direct access to the school district homeless liaison. We have an extensive enrollment process using the McKinney Vento Homelessness language to identify needed families. We have community partnership with local homeless shelters to help support families in need.”