

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-465](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act established a grant program to help the nation's homeless students—more than one million in school year 2011-12—have access to public education. Under the Education for Homeless Children and Youth grant program, states and their school districts are required to identify homeless children and provide them with needed services and support. In fiscal year 2014, Education received about \$65 million to administer this program. Education provided formula grants to states, which competitively awarded funds to school districts to help meet program requirements. GAO was asked to review program implementation and oversight.

GAO examined (1) how districts identify and serve homeless students and challenges they face (2) how Education and states collaborate with other service providers to address student needs and any barriers, and (3) the extent to which Education monitors program compliance. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, guidance, and reports, and analyzed Education's state and school district survey data from school year 2010-11. GAO also interviewed federal officials, and state and local officials in 20 school districts—representing a mix of urban, suburban, and rural districts and grant status—in four states, selected for geographic diversity and other characteristics, such as experience with natural disasters.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education develop a plan to ensure adequate oversight of the EHCY program. Education concurred with our recommendation.

View [GAO-14-465](#). For more information, contact Kay Brown at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov.

July 2014

EDUCATION OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

Improved Program Oversight Needed

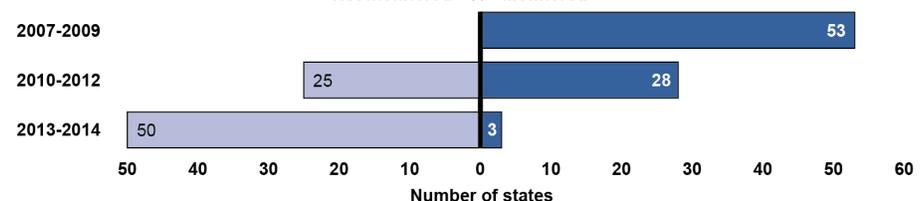
What GAO Found

To identify and serve homeless students under the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, officials in the 20 school districts where GAO conducted interviews reported conducting a range of activities to support homeless youth, but cited several challenges. With regard to GAO's interviews, 13 of the 20 districts identified homeless students through housing surveys at enrollment, while all 20 relied on referrals from schools or service providers. However, officials in 8 of the 20 districts noted that the under-identification of homeless students was a problem. Districts GAO reviewed provided eligible students with transportation to and from school, educational services, and referrals to other service providers for support such as health care or food assistance. Among the challenges that officials in the 20 districts cited were limited staff and resources to provide services, the cost of transportation, student stigma associated with homelessness, and responding to students made homeless by natural disasters. Nationally, school districts surveyed most recently in school year 2010-11 by the Department of Education (Education) reported providing many services while facing similar challenges.

Education's EHCY program manager and state program coordinators have collaborated with other government agencies and with private organizations by sharing information, participating in interagency councils on homelessness, and providing technical assistance to relevant staff. In addition, state EHCY program coordinators have provided training to school districts and helped connect local programs to ensure homeless students receive various services. However, federal and state officials frequently cited limited resources and differing federal definitions of homelessness as constraints to greater collaboration.

Education has protocols for monitoring state EHCY programs, but no plan to ensure adequate oversight of all states, though monitoring is a key management tool for assessing the quality of performance over time and resolving problems promptly. Prior to fiscal year 2010, it had been Education's policy to monitor 50 states and 3 area programs at least once during a 3-year period, and it did so for fiscal years 2007 to 2009. Subsequently, the department adopted a risk-based approach in fiscal year 2010 and monitored 28 states over the next 3 years. In fiscal year 2013, Education again changed its approach to EHCY program monitoring and has monitored 3 state programs since then. Department officials cited other priorities and a lack of staff capacity as reasons for the decrease in oversight. As a result, Education lacks assurance that states are complying with program requirements. GAO found gaps in state monitoring of districts that could weaken program performance, reinforcing the importance of effective federal monitoring of states.

Declining Frequency of Federal Monitoring for EHCY Compliance since Fiscal Year 2007
Not monitored ◀ ▶ Monitored



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education documents. | GAO-14-465