



An Update: Prevalence of Young Children Identified as Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania

October 2025



This brief is brought to you by HopePHL, the Pennsylvania Head Start Collaboration Office, and Dr. Grace Whitney.

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We rely on data from all levels of government to inform comprehensive strategies to remove barriers to education and housing for Pennsylvania's children and families.

Roslyn Edwards, HopePHL

Introduction

This report is Part 1 in a series that seeks to inform state and local practitioners and policymakers about young children¹ identified as experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania. It updates an earlier summary using data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). Part 2 will focus on data from the HUD Continuum of Care System² in Pennsylvania and other sources.

Highlights of this Report³

- Overall, PDE identified **10,601 children birth through kindergarten** to be experiencing homelessness during the 2023-24 school year, representing a **4% increase** over one year and a **13% increase over five years**.
- The **largest increase** was for **preschool-aged children**: a **3% increase** in children identified over one year but a **32% increase over five years**.
- Although **infants and toddlers accounted for 34% of the 10,601 children** identified in 2023-24, this represented a negligible difference over the last year but a **6% decrease over five years**.

The data demonstrate the power of coordinated systems change. Pennsylvania's progress in identifying and enrolling more preschool-aged children experiencing homelessness is the direct result of stronger collaboration among early learning, housing, and education partners statewide. Yet, the decline in identification of infants and toddlers reminds us that we must continue to align data systems, policies, and outreach strategies to ensure that no child—especially in the earliest years—is left unseen or unsupported."

Tracy Duarte, Director, Pennsylvania Head Start Collaboration Office

Who Should Read This?

We encourage policymakers and their staff, funders, child service agencies, school personnel, family advocates, and others to read this document, gain an understanding of the data, and consider expanding their efforts to reach out to children and youth who experience homelessness.

The Good News

- The number of children identified as experiencing homelessness increased in part because the education system has become **more effective in identifying children experiencing homelessness** since 2016 due to improved coordination with multiple human service systems at the County level, and an infusion of resources from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) that were not available prior to 2021. According to one education leader⁴ ARP funds were used to build upon existing resources, creating lasting community partnerships that are believed to not only increase identification but also contribute to improved educational outcomes for students.

¹ Note that in this report, the term young children' includes children who are in kindergarten.

² The [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 'Continuum of Care'](#) is designed to promote a community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness by providing funding and guidance.

³ Find the full 2023-24 [PDE report here](#). Links to all data sources are on page 18.

⁴ Anonymous source.

- Statewide collaboration expanded through the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) McKinney-Vento Advisory Group,⁵ led by the Pennsylvania Head Start Collaboration Office, which likely contributed to the 32% increase in the identification of preschoolers and a 15% increase in their enrollment in prekindergarten programs over this five-year period.
- PDE's eight Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) regional coordinators continue to expand their networks, supporting children. Most of them coordinate with the homeless housing system and systems serving infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children.
- Finally, Pennsylvania's Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRC) serve as regional hubs to coordinate child care and other early childhood services. The ELRC is a driving force in the early childhood education system.

Early childhood is a critical time for opportunity and growth, yet for many young children in families experiencing homelessness in our commonwealth, uncertainty and stress can harm health, development, learning, and socialization. As the statewide child advocacy organization for over 30 years, we champion greater investments in resources and supports—such as early learning, early intervention, and health services—to help these children and families thrive.

Kari King
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

The Unwelcome News

- Family homelessness, thus child homelessness, continues to rise due to many factors, including the **termination of federal COVID funding via the ARP** that supported homeless prevention strategies, the **elimination of transitional and emergency housing, reductions in federal housing dollars**, and the **prohibitive cost of rental housing** for low- and moderate-income families.
- Additional efforts are necessary to **better identify infants and toddlers**.

This report from the Children Cannot Wait Campaign confirms what we're seeing nationwide: homelessness is rising among young children. In Pennsylvania, state agencies and campaign partners have taken the critical first step every state should follow—clearly defining the problem with data so we can work toward real solutions.

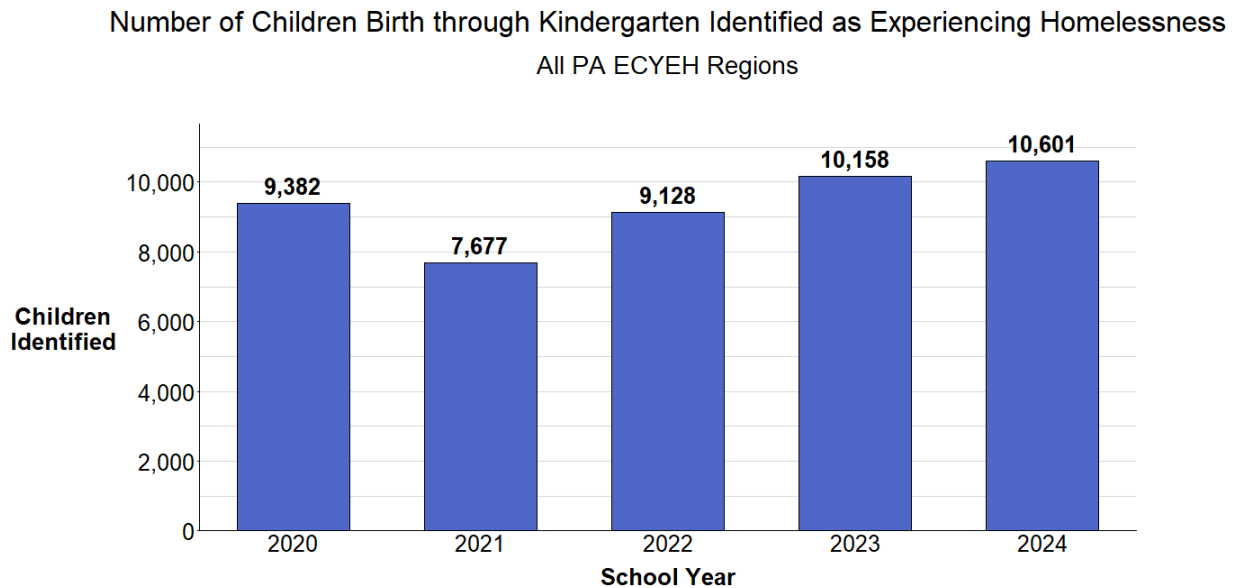
Erin Patterson, SchoolHouse Connection



⁵ This group brings together leaders from the County, state government, and nonprofit communities to discuss how to improve the identification of young children experiencing homelessness using systems designed to provide support and education. Their suggestions are shared with leadership at the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).

Figure 1 below shows the increase in identification over five school years: a 4% increase from 2022-23 to 2023-24 and 13% increase from 2019-20 to 2023-24.

Figure 1. Number of young children identified in Pennsylvania.⁶



As seen in Table 1 below, PDE uses three age categories in reporting data for young children.

Table 1. Identified young children in Pennsylvania by age group and school year.⁷

Age Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	% Change over 1 year	% Change over 5 years
Birth to age 2 (aka, infants & toddlers ages <1, 1, & 2)	3,803	2,814	3,378	3,599	3,585	-0.4%	-6%
3-5/Pre-kindergarten (aka, preschool ages 3&4)	3,067	3,225	3,382	3,939	4,043	3%	32%
Kindergarten (aka, 5-year-olds)	2,512	1,628	2,368	2,620	2,973	13%	18%
Total	9,382	7,667	9,128	10,158	10,601	4%	13%

Takeaways:

- The decrease in the number of identified infants and toddlers
- The notable increase in the number of pre-kindergarten children identified
- The increase in the number of kindergarten children identified

⁶ NOTE: **2020** represents PDE's 2021 report on data from the 2019-20 school year; **2021** represents PDE's 2022 report on data from the 2020-21 school year; **2022** represents PDE's report on data from the 2021-22 school year; **2023** represents PDE's report on data for the 2022-23 school year; **2024** represents PDE's report on data for the 2023-24 school year. Links to each of the PDE reports are included at the end of this brief.

⁷ See NOTE above regarding PDE report years and school year labels.

Two categories are used for preschool children: Pre-kindergarten (enrolled in a preschool program) and Ages 3-5, not pre-kindergarten (not enrolled or unknown):

Table 2. Identified preschoolers in Pennsylvania by enrollment and school year.⁸

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	% Change over 1 year	% Change over 5 years
Pre-kindergarten	1,205	1,290	1,346	1,797	1,903	6%	58%
Ages 3-5, not pre-kindergarten	1,862	1,935	2,036	2,142	2,140	0%	15%
Total	3,067	3,225	3,382	3,939	4,043	3%	32%

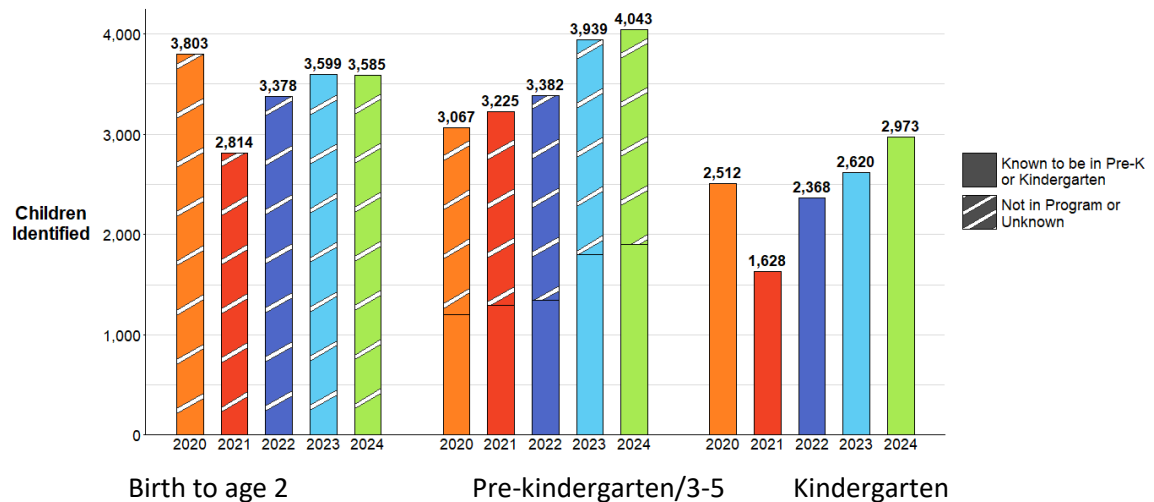
Takeaway:

- There has been a steady increase in the number of identified preschoolers attending pre-kindergarten.

Figure 2 below presents data for the same five school years, along with a comparison of identified children, including whether they are known to be participating in any educational program, such as pre-kindergarten or kindergarten.

Figure 2. Children identified by age group and known program enrollment.⁹

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
All PA ECYEH Regions



⁸ Same as above.

⁹ Note that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align, e.g., “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

Takeaways:

- All identified kindergarten children and an increasing proportion of identified preschool children are known to be in an educational program.
- The urgent need to improve the identification and reporting of infants and toddlers and to understand if they are enrolled in available developmental or educational programs!!!

Questions to Readers:

- **How can you explain the increase in preschool identification and program enrollment?**
- **How can you better identify and support infants and toddlers?**

Please send your response to policy@hopephl.org.



When we think about protecting a child's life, it's clear that the early years are critical to their long-term success. Growing up without a stable home—and facing food and clothing insecurity—puts children at high risk for serious challenges later in life. No child should have to endure such instability. As a community, we must come together to provide protective supports that reduce lifelong risks and promote healthy development.

Deb Jones, MSW, LCSW, Lancaster County

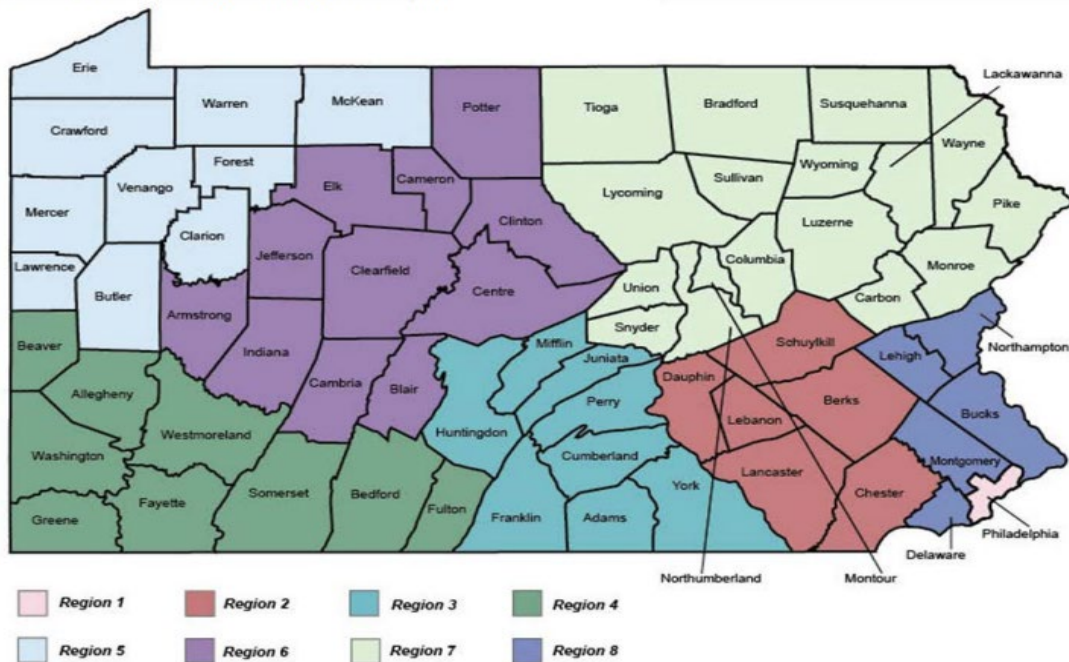
Regional Data

The PDE's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program is a federally funded program designed to eliminate barriers to education for children identified as experiencing homelessness. PDE contracts with eight regions in the Commonwealth for local implementation.

Each region utilizes its funds to train school personnel in the 499 school districts and over 170 charter and cyber schools in the Commonwealth. Funds also provide for school personnel to deliver direct services to students, including transportation, mentoring, emergency funds, school supplies, uniforms, and other essential resources.

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) is the only federal agency required by statute to report on children and youth experiencing homelessness. PDE publishes an annual evaluation of data gathered and reported to USDOE, and these reports are the source of the data presented in this brief. The map below displays ECYEH regions to help readers understand the counties within each of the eight numbered regions.

Figure 1. ECYEH Program Regional Map



The following data displays and highlights for each of the eight ECYEH regions provide a starting point for local data discussions and efforts to better understand the needs of young children experiencing homelessness in local communities.

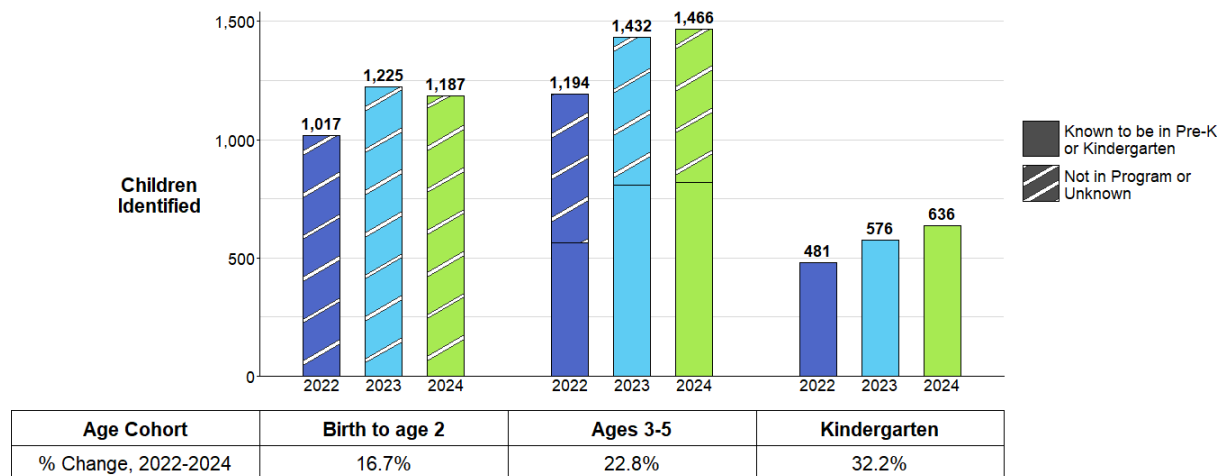
Region 1

Region 1 includes Philadelphia County.

- There were **3,289 children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an **18% increase** since 2022.
- There was a **23% increase** in preschool children identified as experiencing homelessness in 2024 compared with 2022.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 1 (Philadelphia)



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

We collaborate with city-wide agencies that are known to support McKinney-Vento eligible children, setting up a streamlined referral process. We also thoroughly train our staff to identify McKinney-Vento eligible children during the intake and interview process by gathering relevant housing details through sensitive and caring conversations. Through this approach, we are able to eliminate barriers and prioritize placement for our McKinney-Vento eligible children.

Region 1 Educator

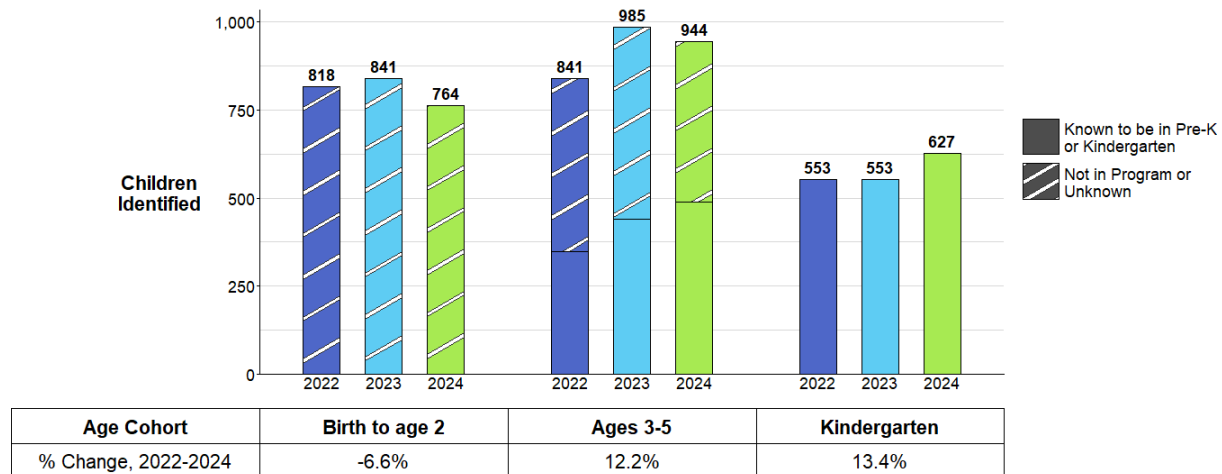
Region 2

Region 2 includes Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and Schuylkill counties.

- There were 2,335 **children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an **increase of 6%** compared to 2022.
- There was a nearly **7% decrease in infants and toddlers identified** as experiencing homelessness from 2022 to 2024.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 2



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

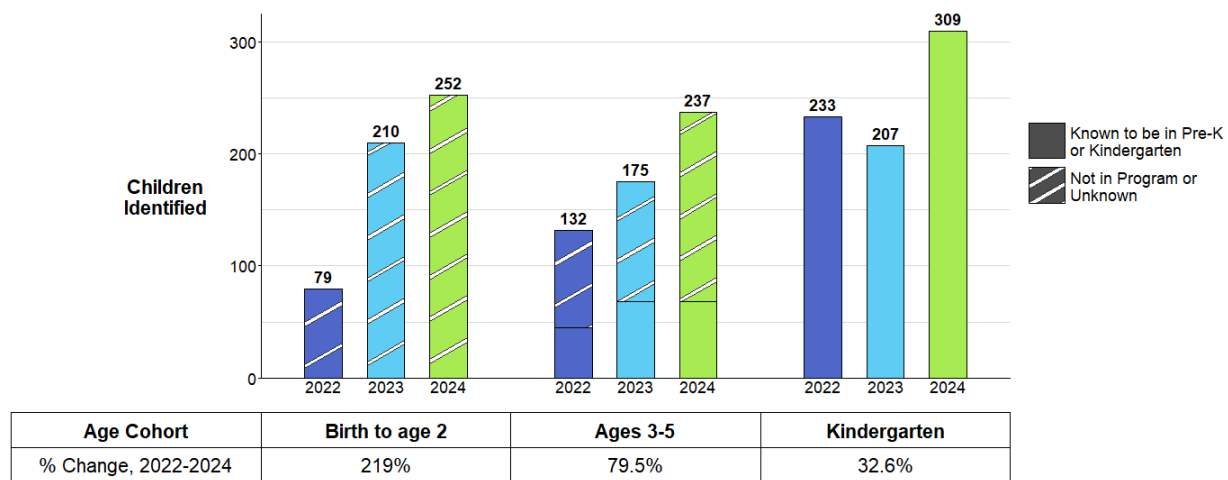
Region 3

Region 3 includes Adams, Cumberland, Huntingdon, Juniata, Franklin, Mifflin, Perry, and York counties.

- There were **798 children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an **80% increase in children identified** from **2022 to 2024**.
- There was a **219% increase** in the number of **infants and toddlers** identified from **2022 to 2024**.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 3



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

The ECYEH Regional Office in our area has demonstrated a deliberate and strategic approach in delivering professional development and awareness training to ELRCs, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs, as well as to the coordinating school districts with which we collaborate. These efforts were focused on establishing a specific identifier for young children who are not yet enrolled in school, with the goal of streamlining support and ensuring that resources are directed appropriately and effectively based on identified needs or specific requests.

York County Educator

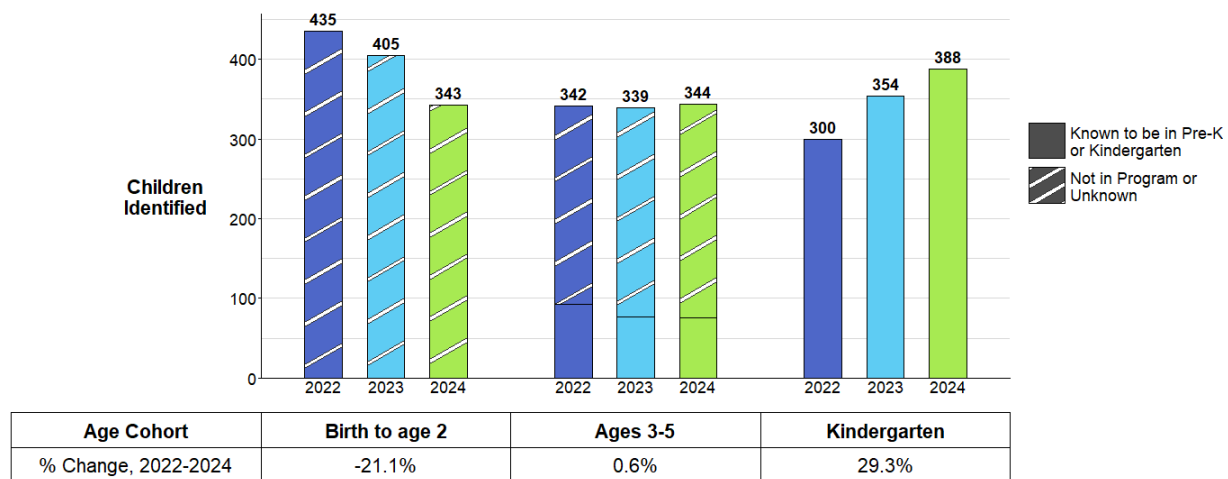
Region 4

Region 4 includes Allegheny, Beaver, Bedford, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Somerset, Washington, and Westmoreland counties.

- There was about an equal number of **children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2022 and 2024, 1,075 compared to 1,077, respectively.
- There was a **21% decrease** in the number of children **born to age 2** identified, and a **29% increase** in the number of **kindergarten** children identified.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 4



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

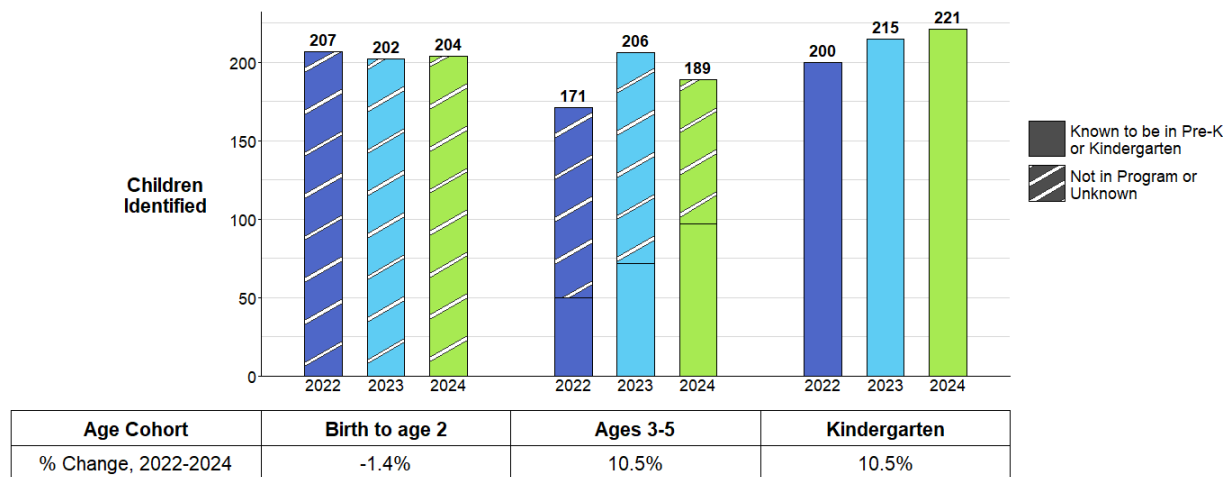
Region 5

Region 5 includes Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, McKean, Mercer, Venango, and Warren counties.

- There were **614 children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an **increase of 6%** compared to 2022.
- Region 5 identified **11% more preschool children in 2024 compared to 2022, but fewer than those identified in 2023.**

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 5



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

Region 6

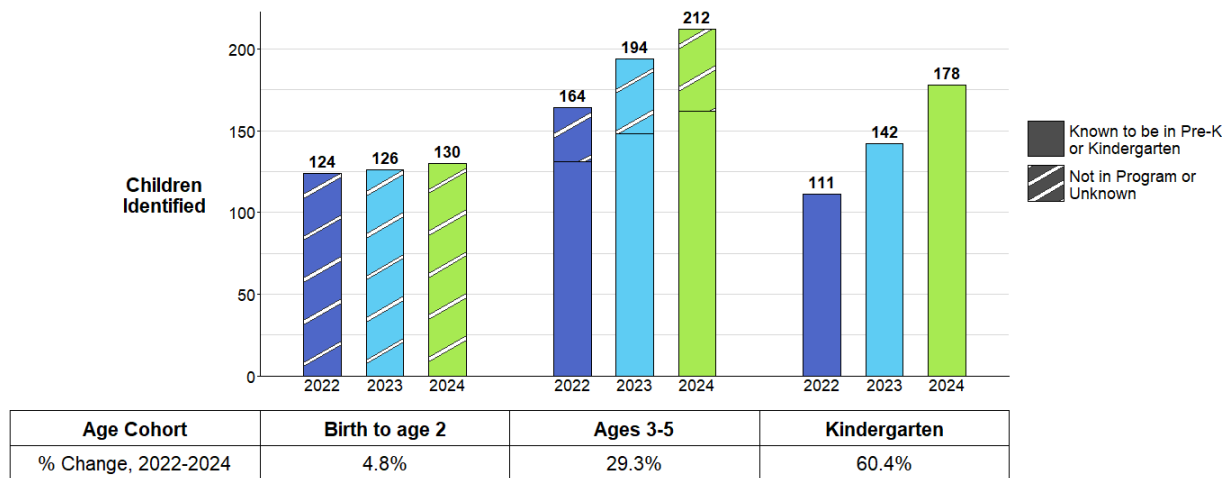
Region 6 includes Armstrong, Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Indiana, Jefferson, and Potter counties.

There were **520 children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an **increase of 30%** compared to 2022.

There was a **29% increase** overall in the number of **preschool children identified** as experiencing homelessness **for this same period**, with over two-thirds attending a pre-kindergarten program.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 6



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

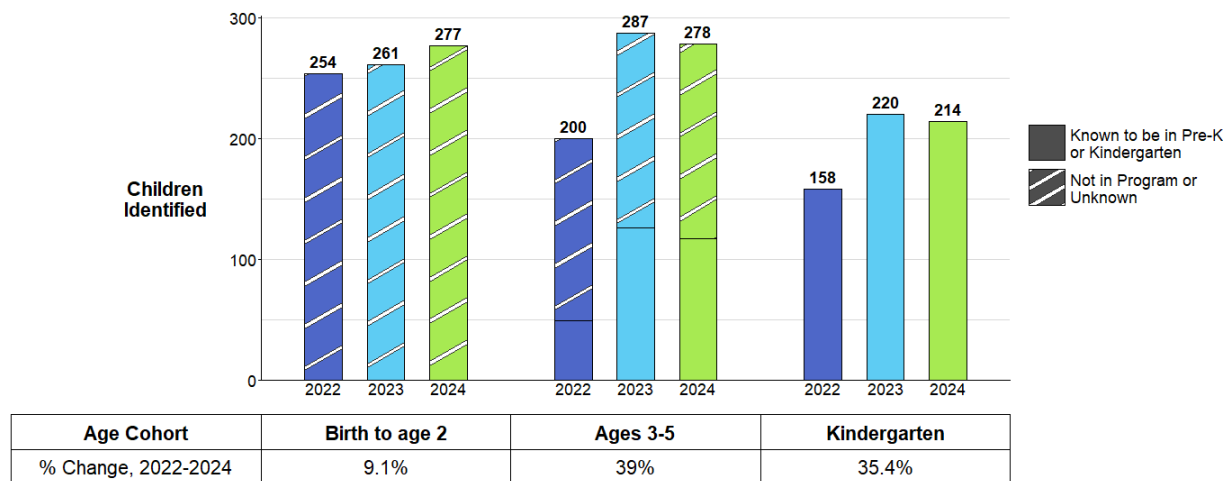
Region 7

Region 7 includes Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Pike, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, and Wyoming counties.

- There were **769 children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an increase of **26%** compared to 2022.
- There was a **39% increase** in the number of **identified preschool children** experiencing homelessness.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 7



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

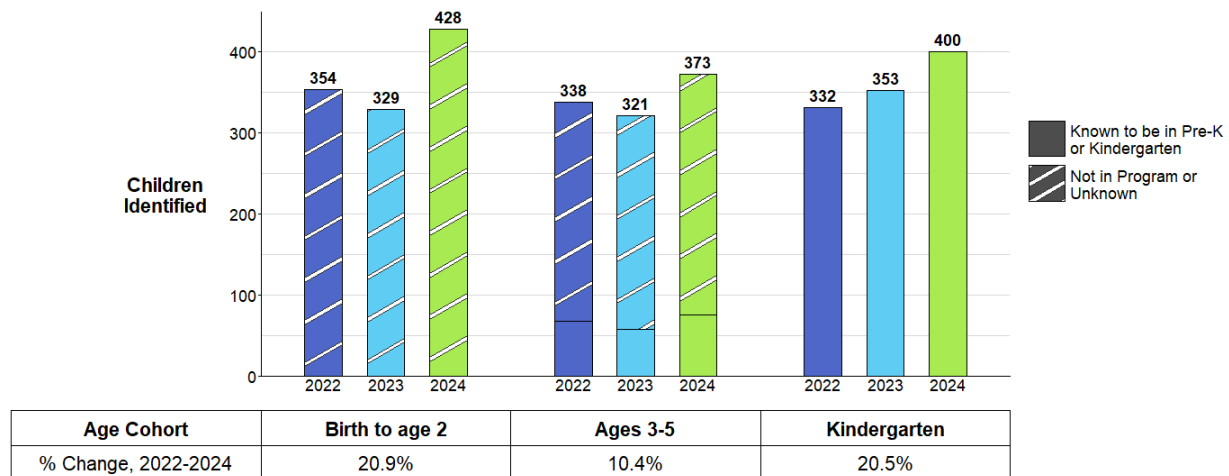
Region 8

Region 8 includes Bucks, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, and Northampton counties.

- There were **1,201 children identified as experiencing homelessness** in 2024, an increase of **17%** compared to 2022.
- Although **Region 8** decreased identification of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from 2022 to 2023, there were **increases in all three categories from 2022 to 2024**.

What trends do you see and wish to explore further?

Number of Children Birth through Kindergarten Identified as Experiencing Homelessness
PA ECYEH Region 8



Note that **2022** represents PDE’s report on data from the 2021-2022 school year; **2023** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2022-2023 school year; **2024** represents PDE’s report on data for the 2023-2024 school year.

Note also that age cohorts differ in size and do not clearly align. For example, “Birth to age 2” represents an age range of three years (ages <1, 1, and 2) while “Kindergarten” generally represents one year (age 5) but may include some 4-year-olds or 6-year-olds.

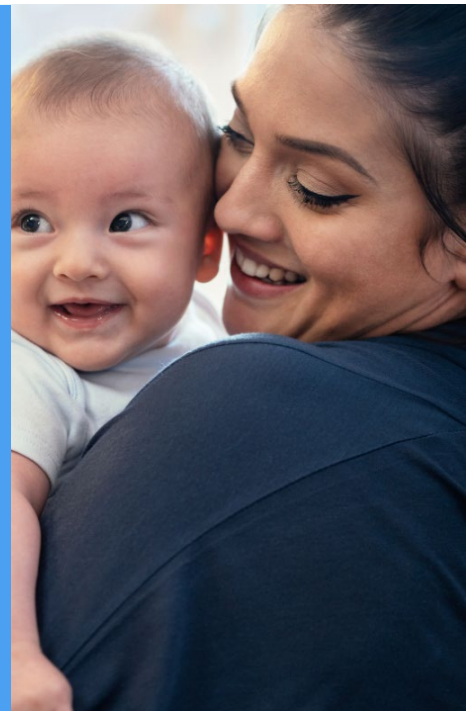
Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. The homeless housing and education systems need to increase collaboration in the collection and reporting of data, noting the **different definitions** used to identify and track homelessness, in particular partnering to address **children living “doubled up”**, a definition accounting for **70% of identified children** enrolled in LEA prekindergarten through grade 12 in the 2023-24 school year which **acknowledges children’s unique need for stability to grow and learn**.
2. Locally, the **homeless housing and the education systems** need to **cooperate to connect families** experiencing homelessness **to housing, especially** for those living **doubled up**, with multiple families in one home.
3. Across the Commonwealth, there is an urgent need to better **identify infants and toddlers** and ensure **their access to early learning** programs.

This important report highlights the growing number of young learners who are beginning their lives experiencing homelessness – including a 49% increase in homelessness among preschool children since 2020. Policymakers at all levels must take action to address the educational needs of these children. Research shows that young children who experience adverse childhood experiences, such as homelessness, are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled from preschool, and many more face barriers to accessing high-quality early childhood programs at all. Lack of access to preschool not only contributes to the preschool-to-prison pipeline but also leads to lifelong negative consequences for these children. Early learning opportunities and skill development are crucial for children to start school ready to learn. We must work together to expand preschool supports for young children and families experiencing homelessness, including providing inclusive, trauma-informed early learning programs that prioritize and support young learners impacted by homelessness.

Rose Wehman, Education Law Center, Equal Justice Works Legal Fellow,
Project: Preventing Preschool Pushout



Available Resources

PA ECTEH www.ecteh.center-school.org/

Regional ECTEH www.directory.center-school.org/homeless/contacts/display

PA ECTEH annual reports

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (August 2021). *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2019-2020 State Evaluation Report*.
www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/homeless-education/reports/2019-20%20ecteh%20state%20evaluation%20report.pdf

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (May 2022). *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2020-2021 State Evaluation Report*.
www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/homeless-education/reports/2020-21%20ecteh%20state%20evaluation%20report.pdf

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (May 2023). *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2021-2022 State Evaluation Report*.
www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/homeless-education/reports/2021-22%20ecteh%20state%20evaluation%20report.pdf

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (May 2024). *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2022-2023 State Evaluation Report*.
www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/homeless-education/reports/2022-23%20ecteh%20evaluation%20report.pdf

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (May 2025). *Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2023-2024 State Evaluation Report*.
www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/instruction/homeless-education/reports/2023-24%20ecteh%20evaluation%20report.pdf

About

HopePHL™ (pronounced “hopeful”) was founded through an integration of two human service organizations in Philadelphia, PA: People’s Emergency Center (PEC) and Youth Service, Inc. (YSI). Leveraging 120 years of combined service experience, HopePHL’s mission is to inspire Philadelphia’s children, youth, families, and communities to thrive by providing housing, advocacy, and trauma-responsive social services designed to promote equity, resilience, autonomy, and overall well-being. Learn more at www.hopephl.org. Contact: policy@hopephl.org

The **Pennsylvania Head Start Collaboration Office (PA HSCO)** serves as the link between the federal Office of Head Start (OHS) and Pennsylvania’s Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). The office is administered through the Pennsylvania Key, which supports OCDEL’s statewide quality and professional development initiatives for the early childhood system. Contact Tracy Duarte at tradura@pakeys.org for more info.

An Update: Prevalence of Young Children Identified as Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania
 October 2025

The PA HSCO's mission is to build partnerships and align policies across state and local systems to strengthen services for young children and families experiencing economic hardship. Rather than providing direct services, the office acts as a strategic connector—ensuring that Head Start and Early Head Start programs are fully integrated into Pennsylvania's broader early learning, health, and family support systems.

Grace Whitney, PhD, MPA, IMHE® consults with the Pennsylvania Head Start Collaboration on issues related to young children experiencing homelessness and early childhood systems. Dr. Whitney assisted with the development of this report.

We thank the following colleagues for their contributions to this policy brief: Tom Bischoff, Roslyn Edwards, Erin Patterson, Deb Jones, Kari King, Rose Wehman, and several anonymous educators for their contributions to this paper.

With recognition for all the dedicated McKinney-Vento Regional Coordinators, McKinney-Vento Local School District Liaisons, and early learning partners who make the time to report on the critically important work of PA ECYEH for children, families, and communities. Your efforts help others understand, assist, and advocate. Thank you.

