An Active Homeless Liaison—Asset to Your District

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KSDE Conference

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leadership and support for student learning

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Reauthorized 2002 as part of NCLB

- Educational achievement and accountability
- School stability
- Awareness of educational rights
- Child-centered, best interest decision making
- Services for preschool-aged children and unaccompanied youth
- Central role of the **local homeless liaison**

Homeless Program Personnel

- State Coordinator of Homeless Education—each state has a coordinator of state-level activities including collecting data, providing trainings and technical assistance, communicating with U.S. Dept. of Ed.
- Local Homeless Liaison—each school district must appoint a liaison to assist homeless families with enrollment, services, and disputes.

Causes of Child Homelessness

- Sudden Loss of Income
    - Job Loss
    - Loss of a spouse/partner
    - High healthcare costs
- Health Problems
    - Parental Mental Health Issues
    - Parental Drug or Alcohol Abuse
- Natural Disasters
- Fleeing Domestic Violence

Definition of Homeless

Children who **lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—**

- Sharing the housing of others due to economic hardship or similar reason
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds
- Living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Abandoned in hospitals

Definition of Homeless

- Awaiting foster care placement
- Living a in public or private place not designed for sleeping
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, etc.
- Migratory living in circumstances described above

Kansas Homeless Data

2005-2006	45 districts	3064 students
2006-2007	57 districts	3569 students
2007-2008	65 districts	4890 students
2008-2009	90 districts	6700 students
2009-2010	126 districts	8452 students
2010-2011	119 districts	8996 students

What the research tells us about school mobility:

- Students who switch schools frequently score lower on standardized tests (study found mobile students scored 20 points lower than non-mobile students).
- Mobility also hurts non-mobile students (study found average test scores for non-mobile students were significantly lower in high schools with high student mobility rates).
- It takes children 4-6 months to recover academically after changing schools.

What the research tells us about school mobility:

- Students suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from mobility; mobile students are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and more likely to act out or get into trouble.
- Mobility during high school greatly diminishes likelihood of graduation (study found students who changed high schools even once were less than half as likely as stable students to graduate, even controlling for other factors).

School Selection—Key Provisions

- School of origin—school attended when permanently housed or in which last enrolled.
- Homeless students can stay in their schools of origin or enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend, according to their best interest.
- Students can remain in school of origin the entire time they are homeless, and until the end of any academic year in which they move into permanent housing.
- Best interest—keep students who are homeless in their school of origin, to the extent feasible, unless against the parents' or guardians' wishes.

Feasibility—Sample Criteria

- Continuity of instruction
- Age of the child or youth
- Safety of the child or youth
- Length of stay at the shelter
- Likely area where family will find permanent housing
- Student's need for special instructional programs
- Impact of commute on education
- School placement of siblings
- Time remaining in the school year

Identification—Strategies

- Provide awareness activities for school staff.
- Coordinate with community agencies.
- Provide outreach materials and posters.
- Work with truancy and attendance officers
- Ask school-age children about pre-school siblings
- Use enrollment and withdrawal forms to inquire about housing status
- Have students write or draw about where they live
- Avoid using the word “homeless”

Preschool-Aged Children

- Liaisons must ensure that families and children receive Head Start, Even Start, and other public preschool programs.
- State plans must describe procedures that ensure that children have access to preschool programs.
- U.S. HHS issued a memo describing how Head Start grantees should collaborate and adjust their programs to serve homeless children.

Unaccompanied Youth—Key Provisions

- Liaisons must help unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youth's wishes, and inform the youth of his or her appeal rights.
- School personnel must be made aware of the specific needs of runaway and homeless youth.

Advantages of an Active Liaison

- Homeless families often need very specialized resources, many times Administrators and Counselors are not as familiar with what is available, and how to access it.
- Homeless families usually feel very uncomfortable sharing too many details with regular school staff. They are more secure knowing that there is a specific resource person dedicated to their situation.
- Knowing and using the McKinney-Vento law reassures families that they have an advocate, not a threat to make a report to SRS or police, which is always a concern.

Advantages, continued

- Homeless families are very skeptical of school staff, the relationship they build with the Liaison is crucial, and often long lasting.
- Attendance is often greatly improved by the relationship, many reasons these families do not or cannot send their children to school can be easily solved by an active Liaison
- Active Liaisons can and should “market” the homeless program to the community. Many needs can be met just by getting the information out. Churches and civic organizations are almost always willing to help with donations when they know what the needs are.
- Families see the Liaison as a special advocate, who is neutral. This is important in so many situations that arise at the school. The Liaison can present both sides.

Advantages, continued

- Liaison can be very important to unaccompanied youth… in communicating with colleges, assisting with life skills. Can be easy to quit when you are old enough to give up, but the lifeline a Liaison provides can be the difference.
- A one stop resource for help in your district… the person to call when you don't know who to call… the Liaison can dig deeper for solutions to the difficult problems.
- Great public relations for your community and school partnership.

Staff Development Resources

- Staff Inservice Training on McKinney-Vento law.
- Secretary, Counselor and Administrator Trainings, at least annually.
- Specialized trainings, such as Just Neighbors program, America's Invisible Children, My Own Four Walls, News and Documentary segments.
- Review of enrollment documents
- Community meetings
- Church group presentations

Resources

- National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP)
  202-638-2535
  http://www.nlchp.org

- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)
  202-364-7392
  http://www.naehcy.org

- National Center for Homeless Education
  1-800-308-2145
  http://www.serve.org/nche

- National Network for Youth
  202-783-7949
  http://www.nn4youth.org

Resources

KSDE Homeless website

http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=372

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