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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a number of interventions that are aimed at increasing educational opportunities of homeless students in the United States. Only a few of these programs have been locally evaluated, and the evaluation process is particularly challenging for local evaluators to undertake. At a state and national level, commitment to evaluation for accountability and continuous improvement has not been strong, due to politicization of funding for programs. At the local level, programs rarely know how long students will stay in their program, and they must provide a diversity of services to student of all ages with highly individual needs. This paper considers strategies used by one local homeless education program in Nashville (Tennessee) to address these problems in evaluation process and design. A well-designed evaluation plan was made a component of program planning for the new grant cycle. Program participants were asked to define distant objectives (those for a longer period of time) and nearby objectives (those that could be met with one or two sessions with a student), and then to define strategies for reaching these objectives. Strategies were developed to face the particular obstacles this program faced, obstacles that face most local evaluations of programs. These were: (1) a way to determine the length of stay of subjects and the size of the sample; (2) attempts to improve the accuracy of school records; (3) enhancing the diversity and availability, in terms of location, of services; and (4) better measurement of social development outcomes. State support for evaluation efforts and increased funding and direction at both state and national levels would help the tasks of local evaluators. (Contains 3 tables and 65 references.) (SLD)

Evaluation Design for Homeless Education Programs: A Meta-Evaluation of McKinney Programs in Tennessee

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RUNNING HEAD: EVALUATION OF HOMELESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

Research on homelessness has long been fraught with political and methodological challenges (Johnson, 1989; Shlay & Rossi, 1992). At the same time, a number of interventions that merit evaluation in the past seven years have been funded that are aimed at increasing educational opportunities of homeless students in the United States. Only a few of these programs have been locally evaluated, and the evaluation process is particularly challenging for practitioners to undertake. At a state and national level, commitment to evaluation for accountability and continuous improvement has not been strong, due to politicization of funding for programs. Locally, programs rarely know how long students will stay in their program, and they must provide a diversity of services to students of all ages with highly individual needs. This paper considers strategies used by one local homeless education program to address these problems in evaluation process and design.

Evaluation Design for Homeless Education Programs: A Meta-Evaluation of McKinney Programs in Tennessee

Introduction

Research on homelessness has long been fraught with political and methodological challenges (Johnson, 1989; Shlay & Rossi, 1992). For instance, researchers have disagreed on definitions of homelessness. Federal law counts people who are "doubled-up" in public housing as homeless. Those people, however, are difficult for researchers to identify, as public housing officials would be obliged to evict families sharing their apartments with other families if they had knowledge of doubling-up. Homeless people living on the street, in abandoned buildings, and in cars are also difficult for census takers and others to identify (Dennis, 1991). Advocates have estimated that in some censuses of homeless people, up to 70% of people living in the streets were missed (Cousineau & Ward, 1990).

Estimating the number of homeless children and youth poses its own problems (Burt, 1991). While recent studies show that the majority do attend public schools regularly (Anderson, Janger, & Panton, 1995), it is unclear across all contexts to whom the attendance data refer: Do they include students living in cars or in public housing? Do they include families living under bridges or on the streets? In some cases, although there is extensive demographic information available about homeless children and youth (e.g., Children's Defense Fund, 1988), there is still much to be learned about the academic and psychosocial functioning of homeless children and youth. While Molnar, Rath, and Klein (1990) noted over seven years ago that it is time to move past

preliminary studies that describe only the scope and dimension of homelessness, much work remains to be done in this area. To that end, researchers need to focus their efforts on basic psychological research on homeless children and their families and on evaluative research designed to measure the effectiveness of programs and interventions that have been developed for homeless children and their families (Davey, 1995).

What Is Known About Homeless Students and Programs Designed To Serve Them

Social-Emotional Characteristics of Homeless Students

Several studies have examined the social and emotional characteristics of homeless students and the special needs generated by those characteristics. Bassuk and Rubin (1987), for example, found that homeless students experienced high levels of anxiety and depression (see also Hughes & Borad, 1983). The same study also found that homeless students have difficulty making friends (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987). Other studies show that teachers report homeless students are more listless and apathetic (Ely, 1987) and have difficulty with social functioning in the classroom (Timberlake, 1993).

Other studies have focused on homeless students' lack of opportunities to develop healthy self-concepts and a sense of belonging (Rivlin, 1990; Timberlake & Sabatino, 1994). In some cases, school staff may contribute to the problem by identifying students as homeless and tease them about their living environment, the clothes they wear, and poor performance (Children's Defense Fund, 1988). Homeless children and

youth, it seems, have difficulty developing stable friendships and a sense of themselves as able to act to make a difference in their environments.

The spatial arrangements of shelters contribute to this problem of self-development. Both studies by Berezin (1988) and Gewirtzman and Fodor (1987) for example found that shelters typically do not provide play space for children, giving them few opportunities to develop informal peer relationships. The result of being placed in a shelter, where there is little privacy and where one has little that one can call one's "own," is a sense of loss of personal space and placelessness (Rivlin, 1990). In addition, the loudness of many shelters, coupled with the inability to escape the noise, contributes to high anxiety and stress (Rivlin & Wolfe, 1985). According to Rivlin (1990),

> ...it is clear that there is little opportunity to escape the stimulation or to control the space. Living under these conditions, often in neighborhoods that are, at the very least, unfamiliar and often dangerous, there is little spatial privacy. (Rivlin, 1990, p. 47)

In shelters, finding one's own space becomes a source of conflict, and residents often complain about theft from other residents and the inability to trust those with whom they are staying (Rivlin, 1990).

Educational Characteristics of Homeless Students

Homeless students are typically young, ranging from pre-school through fifth or sixth grade. Among school-aged children, the average age is 9, and of these children, many are underperforming relative to their peers. Research on school performance of

homeless students show that these youth are significantly less likely to succeed than their peers with more stable housing. In a study completed with students in St. Louis, homeless students have been shown to score lower on standardized tests measuring the ability to use and produce language (Whitman, 1987). Other studies have shown that only a few homeless students score at grade level in math and reading (Ziesemer & Marcoux, 1992). They are more likely to repeat a grade (Shaver & Caton, 1984) and twice as likely as their housed peers to be failing in their current grade (Bassuk, Rubin, & Lauriat, 1986; Bassuk & Rubin, 1987). They are, moreover, four times more likely to drop out of school than their housed peers (Rafferty, 1991; Homes for the Homeless, 1995).

Whitman, Accardo, Boyert, and Kendagor (1990) suggest that homeless children may be less likely to be able to participate in school activities in ways that might predict success. They argue,

> These children's capacity to sit and attend, to process and recall, and to answer test questions may be further impaired by the emotional and transitional nature of the crisis situation. (Whitman et al., 1990, p. 516)

Indeed, they found that homeless students were disproportionately represented at the low end of the Slosson Intelligence Test-Revised (SIT) (Jensen & Armstrong, 1985) as compared against published norms.

Other studies of educational achievement, which compared homeless with other poor and mobile students, yielded more mixed results. For example, Rescorla, Parker, and Stolley (1991) found that homeless school-age children did not differ strongly in academic achievement from a comparison group of poor students, but that pre-school

aged children showed slower cognitive development than a comparison group and were less likely to be enrolled in a pre-school. The Bassuk and Rubin (1987) study described above, which compared poor housed students with homeless found only trends, and no significant differences, in rates of being retained or failing in school.

Studies of barriers to access to schooling for homeless students yield differing (but overlapping results). In one study, directors of shelters and school personnel were asked to identify the three top barriers to access to education for homeless children (Dupper & Halter, 1994). They were: lack of parental involvement; inadequate transportation; and inadequate clothing. One of the ways parental involvement serves as a barrier to homeless students is that parents are preoccupied with daily survival needs; unwillingness to register children in school due to being unsure of duration in the shelter; and yielding responsibility to shelter staff.

In another study completed by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (1995), homeless service providers in 20 states were asked about barriers to access to schooling for homeless students. Primary among barriers to school participation they identified are mobility, which involve frequent changes in school and residence, and preoccupation of meeting such basic needs as food and shelter (National Law Center, 1995; see also Rafferty, 1991). Within school barriers identified include difficulty in transferring school records or obtaining birth certificates and lack of transportation, which forces children to change schools. Nearly 40% of respondents in the national study reported that delays in the transfer of school records and transportation were barriers to educational participation and success for homeless students (National Law Center, 1995).

Other studies focused on different aspects of the social and institutional ecology that might contribute to homeless children and youth not attending school. Some have suggested that responsibility for attendance in school is often not clear among school officials and shelter providers (Dupper & Halter, 1994). Others have suggested that discriminatory remarks by teachers contribute to homeless students' problems with school (Nann, 1982). Others have argued that shelters provide little space for students to do their homework quietly and successfully (Gewirtzman & Fodor, 1987; Moroz & Segal, 1990; Whitman et al., 1990). Finally, Moreno (1984) found that from the children's viewpoint, not having appropriate clothing was a perceived barrier to school attendance.

Two of these barriers, transportation and mobility, are interrelated, and deserve more detailed consideration. Mobility is one of the greatest barriers to educational achievement (Whitman et al., 1990). A study of students in New York found that 80% of homeless students had changed schools at least twice in the last year (Nunez, 1994b). Of that 80%, 27% had attended three different schools, and 13% had attended at least four different schools (Nunez, 1994b). Homeless students' mobility, moreover, is not a temporary phenomenon, but appears to be a consistent feature of homeless students' lives. A report from Homes for the Homeless (1996) reveals that only 16% of homeless families became homeless due to one-time housing emergencies. Prior to becoming homeless, 80% moved two or more times within a year, and 63% lived in doubled-up situations with friends or relatives (Homes for the Homeless, 1996).

Evaluations of Interventions Aimed at Promoting Social and Academic Development

Only a few assessments of successful shelter- or school-based social and educational programs for homeless students provide detail on how practical these suggestions are. For example, the summative evaluation of the B.F. Day School's program, which employs a model of interprofessional case management, focused mainly on demographics of participants and less on social or educational outcomes (James, Smith, & Mann, 1991; Washington State Coalition for the Homeless, 1989). One study, though not an evaluation of a specific intervention. did assess how well shelter providers and school staff exhibited inter-agency cooperation and coordination (Dupper & Halter, 1994). The responses were wide-ranging, but those who rated coordination as excellent or very good reported examples in which there was:

> (1) direct communication between a designated shelter worker and a designated member of the school staff (school staff included school principals, guidance counselors, and school social workers);
>
> (2) an education advocate who works closely with both shelter and school staff to provide better access to school services; and
>
> (3) a meeting between shelter and school staff at the beginning of the school year to establish mutually agreed upon policies and procedures. (Dupper & Halter, 1994, p. 42)

Dupper and Halter's (1994) study also identified barriers to successful inter-agency coordination. When there was no designated person to ensure regular attendance and no procedure to track students, coordination of services for homeless students was

less effective. Also, when schools required birth certificates and other documents, such as past school records, these requirements acted as barriers to student enrollment and attendance. Finally, insensitivity of both school officials and shelter staff contributed to failure to coordinate effectively services to homeless students.

The New York City organization Homes for the Homeless' family-based approach to encouraging educational achievement among homeless students has shown positive educational results (Nunez, 1994b). The programs there use Residential Educational Training Centers, on-site supplementary schooling at shelters for homeless families. The centers include comprehensive job training programs for parents and for children and learning in an accelerated school called the Brownstone School. An overall educational plan is developed for each member of the family. Family counselors serve as liaisons to the schools, working closely with teachers and other school personnel and addressing specific educational needs of students.

The Accelerated Learning School, based on models of education developed by Levin (1986), stresses concept learning, analysis, and problem-solving. It also practices students in discourses of writing, science, and mathematics. There are several projects for project-based learning, such as a garden (used for teaching science) and journaling (used for teaching writing). The students make learning contracts which are revised every two weeks (Nunez, 1994b). The Brownstone School also monitors attendance of students (see also Social Work intervention recommendations).

One of the strengths of the program there is the early childhood education program, Jump-Start, which gives pre-schoolers a chance to participate in activities designed to develop children's cognitive and social abilities. Homes for the Homeless

found that only 21% of homeless kindergarten students had ever been enrolled in a preschool program, compared with 60% of families with incomes of $50,000 or above. Homes for the Homeless' Jump-Start program showed educational gains after as little as eight weeks in the areas of language skills, attention span, and cooperation (Nunez, 1994b). The Brownstone School shows similar success, showing gains in reading and mathematics as well as higher attendance rates (Nunez, 1994b). Adults, too, were inspired by their children's success: 60% earned their GED while at HFH (Nunez, 1994b).

The Current Research

This paper reports the results of a meta-evaluation of two researchers' collaborative work with coordinators of homeless education hired by local educational agencies (LEAs) in the state of Tennessee. Meta-evaluation, a method for examining or evaluating the process of evaluation, has the potential to ensure greater participation and ownership of the evaluation process by giving stakeholders a chance to comment and review on the evaluation process (Kemmis, 1986; Aspinwall, *et al.,* 1992). Our meta-evaluation is more limited in scope than most, focused primarily on two kinds of issues related to the design of program evaluations for homeless education programs: (1) problems in the usefulness of data about homeless students available to practitioners; and (2) problems in the design of tools for practitioners to use to evaluate program effectiveness. In the last section, we examine strategies we developed collaboratively with the homeless education program coordinator in a large district in the state for use with the current year's evaluation.

In our examination of issues in the design of evaluation of homeless education programs, we take an evaluation approach that is participatory (Cousins & Earl, 1992), utilization-focused (Patton, 1986; 1994), and integrated with processes of continuous improvement and program planning (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996). Our approach is based on the idea that for program coordinators, participation in the evaluation process is key to ensuring that program planners and managers use evaluation data to support decision-making. The involvement of program managers of homeless education programs has the potential to encourage program staff to think more systematically about the relationship between program activities and objectives. Such systematic reflection would be aimed at building a "culture of learning" (Patton, 1997, p. 147) to lead to continuous program improvement.

To that end, we developed a survey of evaluation practices that was distributed to eleven homeless education coordinators in Tennessee in the spring, 1997. The surveys asked coordinators to describe the basic aims and activities of their programs, name current data collection activities that were a part of their program, and identify outcomes that coordinators wish they could measure but did not currently know how to measure. The surveys were used to design a training for program coordinators in program evaluation. During the training, coordinators were asked:

- To identify both academic and non-academic outcomes for their program;
- To develop a program "logic model" to indicate the relationships between their activities and their program objectives;
- To choose from a list of tools (provided by us the researchers) to measure social development outcomes for their programs; and

- To develop an evaluation plan to be implemented in the 1997-98 school year.

We used the results of the survey and the responses to the training session to generate a list of shared evaluation problems faced by homeless education coordinators, which are described in detail in this paper.

While each district is required every year to submit an annual evaluation report, for the past five years only two districts have consistently done so: Memphis and Nashville. We include data from both districts' reports in this meta-evaluation, though we believe these reports—as well as the fact that few districts have been able to complete an evaluation of their programs—are indicative of how challenging conducting an evaluation of a homeless education program can be.

McKinney Act Programs: Educational Programs for Homeless Children and Youth

In 1987, Title VII of the Stuart B. McKinney Act authorized the creation of educational programs designed to serve homeless children and youth. Funding, however, for these programs was limited until 1990, when Congress authorized funding to states to give to local educational agencies to help implement the law, which required school districts to provide equal educational opportunities for homeless students. While the program has been found to be successful in reducing barriers to school for homeless children and youth (Anderson et al., 1995), support has been waning in the past five years, and in FY95, Republicans in Congress proposed ending funding for the program altogether. While funding was saved, there have been significant reductions in overall appropriations for Title VII programs in the past three years.

Reduced funding levels have meant that many states have scaled back the number of programs they can fund. The Coalition for the Homeless (1998) estimates that some 41 local homeless education programs have been or will be eliminated: these programs have served some 12,800 homeless children and youth. In Tennessee, funding to programs fell 21% between 1995-96 and 1996-97. At the same time, as the table below shows, more students were served despite the reduced funding.

Table 1. Tennessee McKinney Act Programs

	Year	
	1995-96	**1996-97**
Total Funding for State	$512.243	$401,917
Number of LEAs with Programs	11	12
Total Students Served	5,500	5,900

In the current year, the funding for McKinney programs in Tennessee has been changed to three-year cycle. Each year, however, programs will be expected to demonstrate that the students in their programs are accountable to the same educational outcomes all students in Tennessee are expected to meet. Among these expected outcomes include a year's growth in achievement test scores as measured by the CTBS and high attendance rates (94-97%). With this increased level of accountability, however, there has not been an increase in support available to programs from the state level: the coordinators' position has been reduced from a full-time position three years ago to a position that accounts for 5% of a state Department of Education staff member. The imperative to develop and share strategies for evaluation of programs, then, is greater now than ever.

Specific Challenges to Evaluation in Tennessee: Results of Survey Analysis

With the threat of continued reductions in funding of McKinney programs for homeless children and youth, the imperative to demonstrate the success of programs grows stronger each year. Yet specific challenges remain for programs in Tennessee that make local evaluation of progress difficult:

Commitment to Evaluation for Accountability. The clear link between Congressional funding levels for McKinney programs and political pressure at the national level to cut social programs has led many state and local coordinators to be defensive about the programs they currently offer. Most coordinators use the strategy of documentation of services to defend why their program is worth preserving. Evaluation is rarely used at the local level as a tool for continuous improvement or accountability to stakeholders for specific educational outcomes.

Uncertain Length of Stay in Programs. While the law permits homeless education programs to serve students for the entire school year in which they become homeless, even if they move to a more permanent residence, often students are involved in such programs for a short period of time. In Nashville, for example, the average stay in the program was six weeks (Penuel, Davey, & Allison,1996). Programs may provide tutoring and other social services to students twice or three times a week during that period, but if students leave the shelter and/or school, continuing to monitor the progress of those students becomes difficult. Only rarely can homeless education program

managers monitor this process so that students are not lost to the program. Moreover, if the program serves students on site at a shelter, providing services to students beyond the shelter stay is dependent on the availability of transportation for students and on the willingness of parents to continue supporting their child through tutoring at the program.

The short length of stay poses a difficulty for choosing a unit of analysis for educational and social progress. In some cases, the student may be in the program for less than a six weeks grading period, while in other cases, the student may remain in the program for three to four months and have assessment data that can demonstrate whether the student has made significant progress or not. Often, there is time for a social-psychological intake, but students leave the shelter before a social worker or psychologist can follow-up and assess a student's progress. The unit of analysis for assessment, then, has to be short enough to match the average length of stay for a student in the program and yet long enough to show measurable progress in academic and/or social development.

Size of Ns for Academic Programs. A related problem of measuring the effects of programs is the number of students served in smaller programs. In an urban district like Nashville or Memphis, a program can serve intensively between 200 and 500 students, but smaller districts may serve under 50 students, and many of these students may have been in the program for a short duration of time. Even within larger districts, the number of students who may have received intensive services--such as tutoring, transportation assistance, social work services--may include a much smaller proportion of students.

Knowing how these students differ from the wider group of students served on anything other than demographic variables may be difficult for programs to ascertain.

Developing a single assessment tool that is useful for all the students in a program is similarly challenging. Most programs have students from a full age range: Table 2 shows the distribution of students by grade for Memphis' homeless education program.

Table 2. Grade Distribution of Homeless Education Program Students in Memphis

Grade	Number and Percentage of Students
K	31 (13%)
1	35 (15%)
2	28 (12%)
3	19 (8%)
4	28 (12%)
5	24 (10%)
6	16 (7%)
7	9 (4%)
8	11 (5%)
9	15 (7%)
10	6 (3%)
11	0 (0%)
12	1 (<1%)

While many standardized tests have different, but comparable versions for students in different grade levels, the forms used by the state are not available to teachers. The number of students in each grade, moreover, makes statistical comparisons difficult for the middle grades and high school students.

Accuracy of School Records School attendance records in many districts in Tennessee are most accurately kept in the cumulative file of students. Homeless education coordinators and program evaluators in larger districts, however, must often rely on

electronic data systems at a central office level to track students who have left the shelter and possibly transferred to another school in the district: students they track may attend between 30 to 40 different schools in the district. The students they are tracking, however, may not be in this centralized database of attendance information. The schools may be slow in transferring records, or there may be two records for a student, one showing the student has missed a large number of days of school with another indicating they had been in attendance at another school during the days marked absent by the first school. Attendance records from the Nashville program in 1995-96 show how problematic these records are for calculating school attendance:

Table 5. Nashville HERO Homework Students in Attendance Tracking System
(source: Penuel, Davey, & Allison, 1996)

Status of Records	# of students
Accurate attendance records	105
Do not appear in school system database	38
"Lost," whereabouts unknown	9

According to their annual evaluation report for 1995-96, in Memphis some 8% of all students in the database either never registered for school officially or their whereabouts were unknown.

Diversity and Location of Services. Tennessee's homeless education programs each have a different core focus. In two large cities, the focus is on providing transportation to homeless children and youth to ensure they can go to their "school of origin," that is, the school they were attending before they came homeless. In two other large cities, the

focus is on academic tutorial services. In smaller districts, funds are evenly distributed among tutorial, social development, and transportation activities. The diversity of services and distribution of resources makes it difficult to assess powerfully the impact of one set of services for homeless children and youth. Tutorial services, moreover, are not the same across all sites. Some employ certificated teachers, while others rely on instructional support staff. Some provide homework assistance, while others also provide direct instruction to students.

The location of services poses additional challenges to program evaluation. Many programs in Tennessee offer tutorial and other services at the shelter site. The tutors may have little direct contact with other service providers in the schools, unless that contact is mediated by the program coordinator. School staff may have critical information about students that is lost when the shelter staff, families, and the direct experience of tutors and social workers are the only source of information about a students' educational and social needs and progress.

Measurement of Social Development Outcomes. Most programs reported on their surveys that they believed their programs built students' self esteem; yet none of the programs currently used a measure to gather baseline and evaluative information about social development effects of their programs. While large scale research studies have been able to measure these outcomes (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Davey, 1995), smaller scale programs often have difficulty identifying appropriate measures of social development and finding staff skilled in analyzing their results. As a result, key

outcomes of homeless education programs may go unmeasured, despite the fact that these outcomes may be central to the efforts of McKinney Act programs.

Strategies for Addressing the Problems of Evaluation: The Case of Nashville

Evaluation for Accountability and Program Improvement. As part of our work with the Nashville program, we facilitated the development of program objectives and activities for the current grant cycle. In this facilitation process, we asked local school officials to invite various stakeholders to a series of meetings to plan the program. The program planning process invited participants to:

- define a set of "distant objectives" for their program; that is, objectives that could be obtained over a longer period of time with students;
- define "nearby objectives" that could be met after one or two sessions with a student (e.g. completion of homework);
- define a set of activities that would help reach the nearby and distant objectives; and
- articulate the links between activities and objectives.

During this process, we helped participants identify a set of indicators for each nearby and distant outcome they named. These nearby indicators, as we called them, could serve as an important role in the evaluation process: even if long-term or distant outcome data were unavailable, the program could regularly track each time a student got to school safely and on time; each time a student completed a homework assignment during a tutoring session; or each time a student received clothes to wear to school.

What resulted from this planning process was a clearer grant application than had been submitted in the past and a well-defined evaluation plan. The new coordinator in Nashville, who participated in the process, reports that grant now serves as a tool to guide her data collection activities. She feels that the process of collecting data on nearby indicators makes the evaluation process more manageable and tangible than it would be if the evaluation focused only on distant outcomes such as student achievement and self esteem. It frames the relationship with the evaluator (the second author) for the program, and gives a clear action plan for completing the evaluation.

Length of Stay/Size of Ns. This remains a challenging problem for the program coordinator. In particular, she has found that there is no set pattern of services that she can offer to all families to measure program effectiveness. She finds that some families require much individual attention (transportation, clothing, et cetera), while others are fairly independent, using only the tutoring program at the shelters. A small percentage of families occupy about half of the coordinator's time.

In the face of these challenges, the coordinator has developed specific forms that can be used by each tutor and by her to document services provided, however diverse they might be. She has also revised an earlier version of a Teacher Report Form, developed by the first author (Penuel), that invites tutors to rate each student weekly on behavior and attitude (see attached form). The form asks questions about how well the student listens, works cooperatively, shows self controls, and successfully completes homework. The form also asks about students' attitudes toward and engagement with learning tasks and school. In the past, student engagement with learning has been

identified by teachers in Nashville as a key positive outcome of the program (Penuel, Davey, & Allison, 1996).

Accuracy of School Records. There has been no way to fix the two to three week delay in getting accurate attendance records for students when they change schools. The program this year has hired a quarter-time attendance worker, facilitated by the fact that the program is sponsored by the Social Work and Attendance Division in the public schools in Nashville. Thus far this year, the coordinator has found that there is no substitute for the time-intensive process of calling schools directly to find out the truancy status of particular students who miss a lot of school. Experience in other districts has been similar (Cronin, personal communication). Even where electronically-uploaded data exists, accurate data can only be achieved when persons integrate and evaluate various sources of data for reliability and accuracy. As a policy matter, districts seeking to serve homeless children and youth must allocate more resources to people whose job it is to make sure data is up-to-date and reliable.

Diversity and Location of Services. The original grant application for this year called for a full-time social worker to assist with linkages between the program and the schools where students attend. Providing services at the shelter has been in the past the most effective site of service delivery, since the number of shelters in Nashville is small and since there is no risk of singling out homeless students at their schools. At the same time, the large number of schools attended by students and limited program budget has meant that there has been little regular contact with classroom teachers. The position outlined in

the grant application called for regular contact with the classroom teacher to identify specific learning needs for tutored students. In this way, a better bridge could be built between the program and individual schools not only for more targeted services but also for better and more complete information on student progress.

Unfortunately, this position was not funded by the state. To date, the coordinator reports this aspect of program evaluation remains a challenge. The challenge is made even more difficult by the continued inability to identify more students who are living doubled-up in public housing who could benefit from the program. Serving such youth would require more than just identifying those students (a problem in itself) but would also require the program to provide transportation to tutoring services currently being offered at shelters. Whether students and families would be interested in such services, even if they could be provided, would be difficult to ascertain.

Measurement of Social Development Outcomes. Our research team (Penuel, Davey, & Allison, 1996) has been developing interview protocols over the past two years to help assess social development outcomes of homeless education programs. Among the topics covered in these protocols are: student perceptions of the shelter as a home (see Penuel & Davey, 1998); friendship development; and experiences in school. We interviewed some fifty students using the protocol in 1996-97, and administered the Teacher Report Form of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) and the Harter Self-Concept Profile (1985). This year, the coordinator, who is a trained social worker, is administering both the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and Harter Self-Concept scale to students in the program, as a way of collecting social development information on

students in the program. The Harter in particular is a useful scale, as there are different versions of the scale available for kindergarten through early adolescence.

Conclusion: Implications for Design of McKinney Program Evaluations

As the problems in Tennessee highlight, the challenges of designing and implementing evaluations of homeless education programs are numerous, and not all of them are readily solved. We have worked closely with programs across the state, but particularly in Nashville, to develop systems for addressing some of those problems, and we believe it is important for researchers to develop such a collaborative role with programs. The aim of our collaboration is not simply to conduct the evaluation but to work closely with staff who work with students directly to define what kinds of process and outcome data are useful to collect and what systems would need to be in place to support evaluation of their homeless education program. This process, even when it does not find solutions to every problem, has been helpful in Nashville, where each year the evaluation process has improved in its ability to track student process and outcomes.

Many of the solutions for conducting local program evaluations do not lie with the programs themselves but within the district, the state, and national levels. It is imperative that researchers support program staff in understanding which solutions can be constructed at each of those levels. In Nashville, for example, the program evaluation would benefit from the assignment of staff in the district who could check attendance data for accuracy and make sure such data are up-to-date for each student. The state, meanwhile, might assign an evaluation assistant to work closely with programs each year

as part of its support system. Such an evaluation assistant might play the role that we the authors have been able to provide in Nashville, helping to design strategies for serving homeless children and youth and assisting with evaluation. At the national level, more stable funding and clearer direction on program objectives would enable states and local programs to plan more effectively and design evaluations that could effectively defend the program against critics. In the end, until each of these levels of educational governance coordinates the evaluation work, McKinney programs will remain programs-at-risk, just as the students they serve remain in great need of educational opportunity.

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