

**Immigrant and Homeless:  
Information for School District Title III Programs and Community Agencies**



Adjusting to U.S. culture can take immigrants 10-20 years.<sup>1</sup> Even those who are well-educated and hold professional credentials usually experience an initial drop in their status and earnings while they improve their English skills, re-take courses, and pass licensing exams needed to practice in this country.<sup>2</sup> Those with less education may struggle to find employment sufficient to meet their families' basic needs. These economic challenges make immigrant families more likely to experience poverty and homelessness.

Immigrant children are often in the center of a culture clash between their parents and the American way of life, but school can serve as a stabilizer by having a significant impact on the assimilation of the entire family to the country. This is especially true for families experiencing poverty, high mobility, and homelessness.

Many immigrant children experiencing high mobility and poverty may be eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. These services can help create a safe and welcoming environment for immigrant students and their parents who are experiencing homelessness. According to the McKinney-Vento Act, students who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” are eligible for services designed to reduce academic barriers and have a positive impact on the educational outcomes of eligible students. (See box at left for additional information).

Immigrant students tend to have higher mobility rates,<sup>3</sup> which are linked with learning difficulties, academic failure, and increased dropout rates. The McKinney-Vento Act promotes school stability by allowing eligible students to remain in the same school (school of origin) despite frequent moves. The Act requires each district to appoint a local homeless education liaison, who will examine each child or youth's situation on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility. The liaison will help eligible students to:

- Enroll in school immediately, even without documents typically required for enrollment.
- Remain in the school of origin, if feasible (in the student's best interest), even if they move to another district.
- Receive transportation to and from their school of origin.
- Access support like tutoring, free meals, medical, dental, and mental health services, etc.
- Obtain clothes, school supplies, etc.

Strong collaborative relationships with Title III programs and community agencies enable liaisons to secure the most appropriate services for immigrant children and families, thereby enhancing their

*(continued on the next page)*

**Who is homeless?  
(McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Sec 725)**

*The term “homeless children and youth”—*

- A. *means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and*
- B. *includes —*
- children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;*
  - children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...*
  - children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and*
  - migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).*

adjustment to the community. Local homeless education liaisons can increase opportunities for and the quality of parental participation in school activities for homeless immigrant parents by providing interpreters, explaining the school's expectations, and arranging transportation for school meetings. They can help retrieve immunization records and arrange any needed immunizations while also ensuring the student is enrolled in and attending school. Dental problems are another common issue that can be addressed through the liaison's collaboration with social service agencies.

### **What You Can Do:**

Contact the school district's local homeless education liaison to:

- Increase your awareness of the McKinney-Vento Act and which children are eligible for services under the Act.
- Find out what services are provided for McKinney-Vento eligible students.
- Discuss immigrant children you think may fit the definition of homeless.
- Brainstorm ways to coordinate services for eligible children.
- Offer assistance in communication and translating materials into immigrants' native languages
- Share information on immigrants' needs and services available in the community.

Also:

- Encourage immigrant parents who may be eligible for McKinney-Vento services to meet with school personnel or the liaison to discuss their special needs; accompany them, if necessary.
- Provide information to the school system when you know immigrant families with school-aged children are moving into or leaving the community. Give this information to the local liaison for families experiencing homelessness.

### **References**

- Allen, J.P. (2005, October). *How successful are recent immigrants to the United States and their children?* Presidential address presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Geographers, Phoenix, AZ.
- Clark, W.A. (2003). *Immigrants and the American dream: Remaking the middle class*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Hartman, C. (2006, February). Students on the move. *Educational Leadership*, 63(5), 20-24.

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### **Endnotes**

1. Clark, 2003, p. 90
2. Allen, 2005, p. 13
3. Hartman, 2006, p. 21

### **Immigrant Students' Educational Barriers to Success**

- Deficits in previous education from large gaps in schooling or from never having been in school
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, grief, and other emotional issues
- Perceived lack of academic support from parents
- Language barriers
- Different culture and learning styles
- Difficulty of tracking students due to high mobility and language barriers
- Varied definitions and classification systems for ELL
- Lack of quality staff development programs for administrative, instructional, diagnostic, and support staff in school districts
- Lack of parental materials in native languages
- Discrimination/rejection – often from lack of accurate information and cultural misunderstandings
- Few classes for students who must work full-time to help their families

## Helpful Resources

**National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)**  
**1-800-308-2145**  
*<http://www.serve.org/nche>*

The Center provides research, resources, and information enabling communities to address the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Visit the NCHE website at *<http://www.serve.org/nche>*.

One particular NCHE publication of interest, *The Educational Rights of Students in Homeless Situations: What Service Providers Should Know*, is available for downloading at: *[http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/service\\_providers.pdf](http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/service_providers.pdf)*



### **National Partners in Homeless Education**

The agencies listed below can serve as helpful resources for understanding education laws and programs that can provide valuable services to homeless students.

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth  
202-364-7392  
*<http://www.naehcy.org>*

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty  
202-638-2535  
*<http://www.nlchp.org>*

U.S. Department of Education, Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) Program  
*<http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless>*

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This brief was developed by:  
National Center for Homeless Education  
800-308-2145 (toll-free HelpLine)  
*<http://www.serve.org/nche>*

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Every state is required to have a coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth, and every school district is required to have a liaison for homeless students. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the

McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your state coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at *<http://www.serve.org/nche>*.



For further information on the McKinney-Vento Act and resources for implementation, call the NCHE HelpLine at 800-308-2145 or e-mail *[homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org)*.



**Local Contact Information:**