HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

HOMELESS STUDENTS IN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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A REPORT BY CIVIC ENTERPRISES AND HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

In working to increase the number of students who graduate high school prepared for college and employment, another hidden epidemic has come to light – the children and youth in pre-K through high school who are homeless. Their numbers are more than one million every year and their homelessness is a threat to everything they might want to achieve in life.

In our nation's efforts to ensure no child is left behind and every child can succeed, public policy has required states, districts and schools to set high school graduation rate goals, to track progress by income, race, ethnicity, disability and English Language Learners (ELL), and to be accountable for progress. Civic and its partner organizations in the GradNation campaign have issued annual updates showing a more than 11 percentage point gain in high school graduation rates over the last dozen years and the significant challenges that remain to reach the 90 percent high school graduation rate goal for *all* students by the Class of 2020.

In subsequent efforts, the nation focused on "opportunity youth" – the 5.5 million young people ages 16-24 who were disconnected from school and work and whose reconnection became a top priority for individuals, nonprofits, businesses, governments, taxpayers and society. Their numbers are declining as more opportunity youth reconnect to school and work. Here, too, the nation is making progress.

From these efforts, we have learned that to be successful, everyone has a role to play—community leaders, funders, parents, educators, and students. The recent PBS film, *The Homestretch*, funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, highlights the deep need of homeless students for the support of all of these stakeholder groups if they are to persist in school in the face of homelessness. The film shares the stories of three homeless teenagers experiencing the pressures of high school and life alone on the streets while holding on to their dreams for a brighter future. This film is a powerful testament to the challenges these young people and their families face, and a strong argument for how we must work together to help all of our students succeed despite the barriers in their paths.

Encouragingly, Congress and States collaborated in bipartisan fashion nearly 30 years ago to pass the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, authorized by a Democratic Congress and signed into law by Republican President Ronald Reagan, and reauthorized in more recent years. This law provided some infrastructure to help address the challenges faced by homeless youth and their families. The recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act strengthens existing supports, requires states, districts and schools to disaggregate graduation rates by homeless students, and affirms the urgency and importance of addressing homelessness to the futures of our young people.

Working with extraordinary groups and associations at the local, state and national levels, and seeing rays of hope in how some schools, districts and communities are innovating to address youth homelessness, we hope to elevate this issue to prompt more discussion and action. We must work together to elevate the voices of young people who experience homelessness while in school, and the caring adults who are working so hard to help them. By listening to those on the frontlines of this issue, we can learn how and why they experienced homelessness, what effect it had on their ability to succeed in school and life, and what might help them persist toward high school graduation, college, and future careers.

These young people have large dreams even in the face of great challenges. They do not choose to be homeless, nor want it to define their futures. It is time for America to address this issue that affects millions of our young people and work together to ensure homeless children have the supports, stability and care they deserve to pursue the American Dream.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While student homelessness is on the rise, with more than 1.3 million homeless students identified during the 2013-14 school year[1], these students and the school liaisons and state coordinators that support them tell us that student homelessness remains an invisible and extremely disruptive problem, compounded by the lack of awareness of the issue in many communities.

Students experiencing homelessness struggle to stay in school, to perform well, and to form meaningful connections with peers and adults. Ultimately, they are much more likely to fall off track and eventually drop out of school than their non-homeless peers. Until this year, states and schools were not even accountable for tracking and making progress on their rates of graduation for homeless students.

Although student homelessness is a challenging problem, we believe it is a solvable one. Our nation's public schools have a critical role to play in connecting students to the supports that will help them regain stable housing, weather the trauma and disruption homelessness brings to their lives, and stay on track to get a quality education fundamental to their success in life. The majority of jobs will now require high school completion and further education of some kind, and these students cannot afford to miss out on the opportunity to complete the critical first step of a high school diploma due to homelessness.

Schools are a central touch point for students and their families, with deep roots and connections to the communities they serve. These institutions can function as a hub for quickly identifying homeless students, and connecting them and their families to the organizations and agencies that have the capacity and resources to provide housing, transportation, mental health care, and other tangible and emotional supports that will help students persist in school during these difficult times. Students spend a significant portion of their day in school – and as a result, schools can offer these students a safe and consistent place to study and access to caring adults who can help them navigate some of the challenges they face. In an otherwise chaotic time of homelessness, schools can be pillars of stability.

Frequently Used Terms

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (referred to as McKinney-Vento throughout this report) is a federal law that provides for immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth, and provides federal funding to states and school districts for the purpose of supporting homeless children and youth.

For a full definition of child and youth homelessness under McKinney-Vento, see Appendix III.

Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, each state is required to appoint a **State Coordinator** who is responsible for overseeing and ensuring the effective implementation of McKinney-Vento within their state. Each school district must also appoint a **Local Liaison** who is responsible for ensuring that homeless children and youth in their area receive all the protections and services required by law.

McKinney-Vento defines **"unaccompanied youth"** as youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, while **accompanied youth** are those experiencing homelessness with a parent or guardian.

The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 strengthens the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act through provisions that recognize the central role schools must play in addressing this issue. Federal laws alone, however, are not a panacea, as many homeless students and their parents remain unaware of their rights, and go without critical supports they need. Furthermore, communities and the country continue to undercount and miss many homeless students who hesitate to identify themselves out of embarrassment, fear of stigma, or worry that their family may be broken apart by government intervention.

The rising numbers of homeless students, with a more than 100 percent increase since 2006-07, together with model programs that are showing good results, and the strengthening of law through ESSA around the responsibilities of schools to provide for their education, all mean the time is right to reach out to our schools, communities, and leaders at all levels to engage their attention on this pressing and growing problem. The homeless students,

Methodology

Hart Research Associates conducted the following qualitative and quantitative research between October 2015 and February 2016:

1. One telephone focus group with state coordinators, and two telephone focus groups with McKinney-Vento liaisons
2. Quantitative online survey among 504 McKinney-Vento liaisons
3. 44 in-depth interviews with currently homeless youth in diverse locations around the country
4. Quantitative survey of a cross section of 158 18-24 year-olds who experienced homelessness at some point during their middle- and/or high- school careers

Youth Survey respondents were screened at the beginning of the survey to ensure they qualified based on the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless youths. Because homeless youth often do not describe themselves as homeless, in several questions throughout the survey the phrase "being homeless or had a very unstable housing situation" was used.

A note on the scales used in the quantitative research:

- In the youth survey, metrics of importance and performance are based on Likert-type scales with defined response options (e.g., very good job, good job, fair job, or poor job).
- In the liaison survey, metrics of importance and performance are based on 0 to 10 numeric rating scales with defined anchors (e.g., 10 = very good job and 0 = falling far short).

school liaisons and state coordinators interviewed for this report overwhelmingly tell us that with heightened public awareness of the problem, schools making it a priority for action, and the right supports to students at the right times, homeless students can succeed in school and continue toward successful futures.

The Trauma and Disruption of Student Homelessness

Youth interviewed and surveyed for this report overwhelmingly report that **homelessness is taking or has taken a significant toll on their lives, their health, their relationships, and their education.**

- **Greater than 8 in 10 (82 percent) of formerly homeless youth say that being homeless had a big impact on their life overall.** Majorities of homeless youth cite specific impacts, such as:
  - 72 percent on their ability to feel safe and secure;
  - 71 percent on their mental and emotional health and 62 percent on their physical health; and
  - 69 percent on their self-confidence.
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) cite how homelessness made it difficult to maintain relationships with their own families, and 57 percent cite the same challenge with friends.
- **Sixty-seven percent say homelessness had a big impact on their education,** with:
  - **Six in 10 formerly homeless youth saying it was hard to *stay* in school** while they were homeless**;** and
  - **68 percent saying it was hard to succeed and *do well* in school** during their homelessness.
- Reflecting the impacts of homelessness on a student's education, **42 percent of youth surveyed told us they had at one or more points dropped out of school.**

These findings bolster existing research showing homeless students are more likely to be held back from grade to grade, be chronically absent, fail courses, have more disciplinary issues, and drop out of high school than their non-homeless peers. Homelessness can have highly negative impacts on a young person's life, with dramatic effects on early development and learning, performance in middle and high school, and entry into the juvenile justice system. Often, the longer the period of homelessness the more dramatic the impact. In turn, research also indicates that when newly homeless unaccompanied youth return home safely and quickly, they are often able to stay home for long periods of time, mitigate the negative effects, and have the opportunity to complete their education.

The Invisibility of Student Homelessness

Given the heavy toll that homelessness takes on students, it is critical that they be identified and connected to the right support systems as soon as possible. This is made difficult, however, by the fact that **many students do not want to share the fact that they are homeless** with friends, classmates, teachers, counselors, or liaisons due to embarrassment, fear of stigma or bullying, or worry over what will happen if they self-report.

- **Approximately two thirds (67 percent) of formerly homeless youth say they were uncomfortable (and nearly 4 in 10 were *very* uncomfortable)** talking with people at their school

about their housing situation and related challenges. In fact, in qualitative interviews many report that *no one* at their school was ever aware of their situation.

In addition, student homelessness is a highly fluid situation, with 45 percent of young people interviewed reporting that homelessness is something they experienced more than a few times, and a similar proportion (47%) reporting that they experienced homelessness both on their own and with their families at different points in time. This ambiguity adds to the difficulties of identifying homeless students quickly.

- **78 percent were homeless a few times or more.**
- 94 percent stayed with other people, rather than in one consistent place.
- 68 percent slept somewhere not typically designated for sleep because they had nowhere else to go.
- **50 percent slept in a car, park, abandoned building, bus station or other public place.**
- 44 percent slept in a hotel/motel and 34 percent in an emergency shelter.

McKinney-Vento liaisons report that identifying homeless students is made more difficult because not all school staff receive training to help identify and intervene with homeless youth and families.

- One-third of liaisons (34 percent) report that **they are the only person within their school district who receives training** to help identify and intervene with homeless youth and families, while 57 percent report that they and others receive training, and 9 percent report that no training at all is provided in their district.
- Only a minority (44 percent) of liaisons report most staff were aware of the problem and knowledgeable about the signs to look for, while liaisons cite the following individuals within schools as most important to help identify homeless youth:
  - Guidance counselors and social workers (74 percent);
  - Office and clerical staff (63 percent);
  - Teachers (55 percent);
  - Principals/administrators (31 percent);
  - Nurses and medical staff (23 percent); and
  - Cafeteria workers and bus drivers (19 percent).

Supports and Services Needed to Keep Students in Schools

Homelessness presents students with a myriad of barriers that they struggle against every day to stay in school and on track. These students need a range of supports from their schools, as well as from outside entities that can offer additional resources that schools cannot.

Youth and liaisons have similar priorities in terms of the services and supports that are most important to helping homeless students succeed in school. At high rates, both groups identify supports that provide basic human needs such as food, shelter, emotional support and mental health care, as well as additional services such as transportation, clothing, school supplies, and academic assistance.

Notably, youth identify **both** the concrete supports (such as school supplies, transportation, and academic support), as well as emotional factors (feeling safe, emotional supports) as important to their ability to stay in and do well in school. They also long to stay connected as homelessness threatens to disconnect them from family, friends, and school.

- **More than half of formerly homeless youth (54 percent) say both concrete supports and emotional factors were equally important.**
- Eighty-six percent cite having someone to talk to or check in with for emotional support as very or fairly important as they navigated the difficulties of homelessness.
- Eighty-six percent highlight the importance of connecting with their peers or maintaining friendships.
- Eighty-two percent cite participating in school activities such as sports, music, art, or school clubs.
- Seventy-nine percent highlight engaging in outside school activities, such as field trips and dances, during their homelessness.

Nearly 90 percent of liaisons report that they work with unaccompanied youth, and **fully half of liaisons report that unaccompanied youth present a major challenge when it comes to connecting them to the services and supports they need.**

Homelessness puts students in a state of constant transition, meaning that they may have to navigate the disruption of changing schools multiple times as their living arrangements shift.

- Half of homeless students had to change schools, and many did so multiple times.
- **Sixty-two percent of youth who had to change schools during their homelessness report that this process was difficult to navigate**, given the various logistical and legal barriers that they experienced.
- **Majorities of youth tell us that proof of residency requirements** (62 percent) and **lack of cooperation between their new and old schools** (56 percent) posed a major challenge for them while changing schools.

- Other key challenges cited by homeless students that made changing schools or enrolling in a new school difficult include: medical records or immunizations (50 percent cite); being behind on credits due to missing school (48 percent); needing a parent or guardian to sign forms (48 percent); transportation to/from school (48 percent).

Gaps in Perception and Practice

Youth and liaisons both identify the same sets of supports and services as most important to keeping homeless students in school and engaged in learning. But despite general agreement on what homeless students most need to stay connected to school, there are several areas where there are gaps between perceptions of what should be done, or what is working, and practice within schools.

- Eight in 10 liaisons (82 percent) say their schools are doing a good or fair job of addressing youth homelessness.
- However, **fully one-third of liaisons (33 percent) believe their school district does not place a high priority on the problem of youth homelessness.**
- Nine out of 10 (89 percent) see room for improvement in the job their schools and other organizations are doing of addressing this issue.
- Students and liaisons agree that, by far, the most significant challenge is connecting homeless youth to housing. While both youth and liaisons identify safe, stable housing as imperative to these young peoples' success in school, **only 25 percent of youth and 29 percent of liaisons believe their schools are doing a good job on this vexing issue.**
- In addition, nearly six in 10 youth (58 percent) feel that their schools did only a fair job or a poor job supporting them and helping them stay in and succeed in school.

Youth give their schools the most credit for doing a good job ensuring students have enough food to eat (56 percent), transportation (54 percent), and access to before- and after-school programs (54 percent). **Just over half of homeless students, however, indicate that their schools did a good job providing or connecting them to each of these services.** By contrast, liaisons give their schools more credit than homeless students for doing a good job connecting youth to these same three services.

Other areas where significant gaps in perception between youth and liaisons exist include:

- Clothing and school supplies: Only 36 percent of youth, but 82 percent of liaisons, say schools are doing a good job.
- **Academic tutoring and support: Only 46 percent of youth, but 73 percent of liaisons say schools are doing a good job.**

- Help with college preparation: Only 42 percent of youth, but 65 percent of liaisons say schools are doing a good job.

Challenges and Opportunities

Schools are critical access points to identify homeless students in need of help and connect them to a wide range of resources, both inside and outside school walls. Schools themselves are stretched thin, however, with limited time and dollars to adequately support this demographic of students. Our research illuminated many deeply challenging issues for youth, and the school systems that they encounter.

Liaisons tell us that **while the problem of student homelessness has intensified, the resources available to address it have not kept up.** Beyond funding, over 90 percent of liaisons report that they work in another official capacity other than as a homeless liaison within their school district, and 89 percent tell us they spend half of their time or less on their responsibilities as homeless liaisons.

Liaisons identify core challenges in providing homeless students and families with the services and supports they need. In addition to the expected challenge of funding (cited by 78 percent) and time, staff and resources (57 percent), liaisons highlight as one of their top three obstacles:

- Community awareness of the problem (36 percent).
- Ability to find safe spaces for homeless students before or after school (30 percent).

- Collaborating and sharing information with outside entities and agencies (29 percent).
- Support from local and city government (24 percent).

Liaisons also pinpoint actions that could improve the identification of and supports and services to homeless youth.

- Sixty percent cite more efforts to raise public awareness of the problem.
- Fifty-five percent want more efforts outside of school (and 45 percent within schools) to notify homeless students and their parents about their rights and services available.
- Fifty-five percent cite more opportunities for liaisons across the country to share information.
- Fifty-two percent highlight more training and professional development for school staff.
- Fifty percent want standardized procedures and forms to identify homeless youth.

Resilience and Perseverance of Homeless Students

Despite the enormous challenges homeless students face, state coordinators, local liaisons, and youth themselves are confident that, given the right supports, these students can succeed in school. **In fact, fully 88 percent of liaisons interviewed say they are optimistic regarding the potential of youth they work with to graduate from high school college- and career-ready.**

Youth themselves reflect strength, perseverance, resilience, and the motivation to succeed, as well as a very real understanding of education as a very important factor in achieving their goals. **Three in four young adults interviewed (73 percent) say they feel motivated to take the next steps in their lives, whether that is completing their education, or pursuing a career.**

Policy and Practice Paths Forward

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) addresses many concerns that were raised by homeless and formerly homeless youth, as well as state coordinators and district liaisons (a full comparison of ESSA and the concerns of students and educators raised in this report can be found in Appendix I). Given that the new provisions align so closely with what we heard from students and adults on the front lines of this issue, **it is essential that states, schools, and districts focus on fully implementing the measures regarding homeless students in the ESSA**, which will go into effect during the 2016-17 school year.

The following recommendations highlight paths forward through ESSA implementation, as well as those that go beyond the scope of the new law.

IN SCHOOLS

1. **Refine and standardize systems for identifying homeless students** *(ESSA contains five separate amendments designed to increase the identification of homeless children and youth – see Appendix I for a full list).*
   - Ensure that *all* school staff, not just McKinney-Vento liaisons and coordinators, receive adequate training so that they can assist in identifying and supporting homeless students.
   - Gather residency information from students and families at *multiple* points throughout the year, not just at the beginning, and conduct regular reassessments to ensure students receive the appropriate supports.
2. **Focus on outreach efforts to inform homeless students and their families of their rights** *(ESSA requires that liaisons disseminate public notice of McKinney-Vento rights in locations frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth, in a manner and form understandable to parents, guardians, and youth).*
   - Significant proportions of liaisons believe that enhanced efforts to inform homeless students and parents about their rights and the services and supports available to them—both *inside* schools (45 percent) and *outside* schools (55 percent)—would make a big difference in their willingness to actively seek help and support.
3. **Actively work with students to help them stay in school** *(ESSA addresses many issues of enrollment, academic records, and credit accrual – see Appendix I for a full list):* Beyond emotional supports and the tangible services discussed, many youth report that there are things schools could have done to make it easier for them to stay in school, including:
   - Proactively work with students to find ways to get them assignments and provide extra assistance when they have to miss school.
   - Be more flexible with policies around attendance or timelines for assignments.
   - Assist homeless students as they work through delays and challenges in the transfer of transcripts and test scores between schools.
   - Help homeless students navigate legal issues such as obtaining parental consent to reenroll, or participate in school activities. This is especially important for students who have difficult or strained relationships with parents or guardians.

4. **Actively work to connect homeless students to outside supports:** Connections with caring adults beyond the walls of the school are invaluable to youth personally. However, **young people tell us that these connections were not made nearly as frequently as they were needed.** And while they acknowledge and emphasize the importance of collaboration with outside entities, only 36 percent of liaisons report that they work "a great deal" with community organizations, agencies, or businesses to help provide services and supports. Another 37 percent work with these groups a fair amount, while 27 percent do so just some, or not at all. However, **those liaisons who work more frequently with outside entities give their districts much higher ratings on providing students with the services and supports they need.**

5. **Leverage early warnings systems to prevent student homelessness:** Early warning systems that track student attendance, behavior, and course performance can be leveraged to identify not only students who are falling behind academically, but also those students who may show these same warning signs due to housing struggles. Identifying students who are at risk of becoming homeless through these early warning systems can allow schools to preventatively connect them to the right supports before their housing situation becomes unstable.

IN COMMUNITIES

1. **Build connections to local schools:** Liaisons emphasize that schools cannot do this work alone – support from outside organizations is critical. This includes nonprofits, local businesses, faith-based organizations, local government, service providers, and other community-based agencies and programs that can fill in the gaps in services and supports that schools cannot provide.

2. **Work to raise awareness across the community:** Liaisons and students told us that in many cases, this problem remains invisible due to stigma, embarrassment, and fear. Community organizations can help remove some of these barriers by raising awareness among the public that this problem is prevalent and rising, even in wealthy or more isolated communities where it may not be readily visible. This can help to diminish the stigma and fear that many students feel, and build empathy and understanding in communities.

3. **Set community goals and use data to drive progress:** Many communities currently engage in collective impact efforts, and use data across a variety of social, economic, and educational measures to track and improve progress among vulnerable youth. These collaborative efforts should also disaggregate data by homelessness, and work towards achieving equal outcomes for homeless students, particularly now that federal law will enable the collection and reporting of such data.

IN STATES AND THE NATION

Building on the work of McKinney-Vento, with the 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there is now a stronger federal mandate for homeless students to have access to the supports they need to remain in their home schools. The law also includes provisions for tracking outcomes for homeless students, opening the door to create accountability, and setting school, district, state and federal goals around keeping these students in school and on track.

1. **Work to ensure ESSA is fully implemented:** Enactment of laws is often only the beginning of an effort to change practice. Schools must be educated on the new requirements of McKinney-Vento under ESSA, and ensure that those requirements are fully carried out and funded as mandated by law. This includes removing barriers to access as required by law, such as proof of residency requirements, and ensuring cooperation between schools to share student records and transfer credits quickly. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education must provide adequate oversight, guidance, and regulation to ensure the full and effective implementation of the legislation.

2. **Increase efforts around affordable housing:** The problem of connecting students to housing was identified by liaisons and youth as one of their biggest obstacles, made more difficult by the chronic shortage of affordable housing in so many communities across the United States. Lawmakers at the local, state, and national levels must find ways to increase public sector funding to bring innovative housing concepts to scale, examine restrictive regulations that may prevent unaccompanied youth or families of homeless students from qualifying for existing public funds, and find ways to circumvent or remove those restrictions. In addition, lawmakers should review outcomes of successful innovations such as host homes and school partnerships with housing agencies, and help to scale those efforts whenever possible.

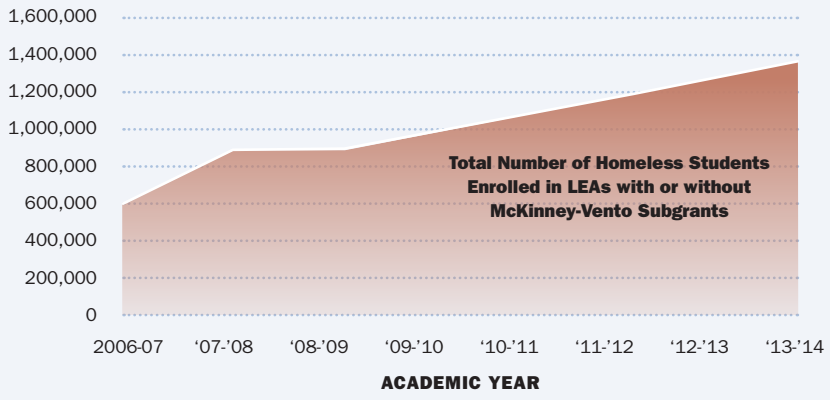
3. **Set a national high school graduation rate goal for homeless students:** Under the ESSA reauthorization, states are now required to track and report graduation rates for homeless students as they already do for other subgroups (such as for low-income students, minorities, and English Language Learners,) to close the opportunity gap on educational attainment. States and the nation should set the goal of progressively moving towards a 90 percent graduation rate for homeless students, and use the new required data to keep schools, districts, and states, accountable.

INTRODUCTION: STUDENT HOMELESSNESS RISING ACROSS OUR NATION

The number of homeless students in American schools is rising. In the 2013-14 school year, more than 1.3 million public school students in K-12 were identified as homeless, representing a seven percent increase from the previous year, and a more than 100 percent increase[i] from 2006-07.[2] As high as these numbers seem, they are almost certainly undercounts. Student homelessness is difficult to track and measure for a myriad of reasons that will be discussed in this report, meaning that these estimates likely do not accurately capture the full breadth and depth of this problem.

Student homelessness is not a homogenous experience. Some students may be part of a family that has lost their home due to a lack of income, recent trauma, or unexpected tragedy. These families may be living temporarily with other people, in motels or shelters, out of their cars, or on the streets. Other youth may be "unaccompanied," on their own with no adult supports. These unaccompanied youth may have left their homes and families to escape abuse or poverty, or have been pushed out when they identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or because they became pregnant and their families no longer accepted them. And while some young people may experience homelessness only briefly before regaining stable housing, for others, homelessness reoccurs intermittently, or becomes a chronic circumstance.

Graph 1: Rising Rates of Student Homelessness, 2006-07 to 2013-14



Source: ED Data Express. "Total Number of Homeless Students Enrolled in LEAs with or without McKinney-Vento Subgrants - Total: 2013-2014." U.S. Department of Education. Accessed from http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm/tab/trend/deid/5353/state/US/.

Whether these students experience homelessness with their families or alone, for a week, a month, or for years, the experience is extremely damaging to their ability to stay in school and on track. They are more likely to be held back from grade to grade, to have poor attendance or be chronically absent from school, to fail courses, to have more disciplinary issues, and to drop out of school before getting their high school diploma than their non-homeless peers.[3] These negative effects are amplified the longer a student remains homeless.

i This sharp rise in the number of homeless students can in part be accounted for due to improved reporting and identification of homeless students on the part of schools and districts. However, researchers believe that this increase also reflects real growth in the total homeless student population.

Causes of Student Homelessness

Just as the experiences of homeless students differ, so do the causes. Accompanied and unaccompanied students experience homelessness for many reasons, including:

- They literally no longer have a home. A lack of affordable housing and the long-lasting effects of the Great Recession have strained many families, causing them to be unable to afford to keep a home, and instead live temporarily with other people, in shelters or transitional housing, or in motels or other buildings not intended for habitation.[4]
- They are fleeing a violent or dangerous situation within their home. This may include physical or sexual abuse, substance abuse on the part of a parent, neglect, or constant conflict with parents or other adults in the home.[5] Additional studies show that 40 to 60 percent of all homeless youth have experienced some kind of physical abuse, while 17 to 35 percent have experienced sexual abuse.[6]
- They were rejected by their families and forced to leave. A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that more than half of youth interviewed during stays in a shelter reported that their parents either told them to leave, or knew they were leaving and did not care.[7] Other homeless youth reported leaving home due to financial strain and instability. This included parental unemployment or low wages that made it difficult for parents to provide for their children, and led to the children being asked to leave to alleviate the financial strain.[8]
- Youth who want to maintain their own household are also struggling with youth employment rates that dropped as low as 50 percent for 18 to 24 year olds in 2010, the lowest employment rate since 1948. Rates of employment for this group currently hover at just over 52 percent.[9] Without steady employment opportunities, youth on their own are not able to afford a place to live. This is especially poignant for teen parents with school-aged children. With declining opportunities for employment, these young parents may struggle to maintain a home for their children.

Disproportionate Numbers of Youth of Color & Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Youth

Comparisons of state and local surveys, as well as work by researchers, demonstrate that LGBTQ youth are heavily overrepresented in the unaccompanied homeless youth population, as well as African Americans in urban areas, and Native Americans in rural communities,[10, 11] and African American shelter use was seven times that of White families.[12] In addition, while African Americans encompass 12.5% of the United States population, they amount to 38% of the shelter population in the country.[13]

Among unaccompanied homeless students, LGBTQ young people are disproportionally represented. Estimates at the state and local levels suggest that between nine and 45 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.[14] In addition, a study by the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior survey from 2005-07 found that LGB youth were more likely to be homeless than their heterosexual peers, and that this relationship between sexual orientation and homelessness held steady, even when accounting for age, race, ethnicity, and immigration status.[15]

A recent report by Child Trends gathered data around homeless youth, both accompanied and unaccompanied, and noted disparities by race.

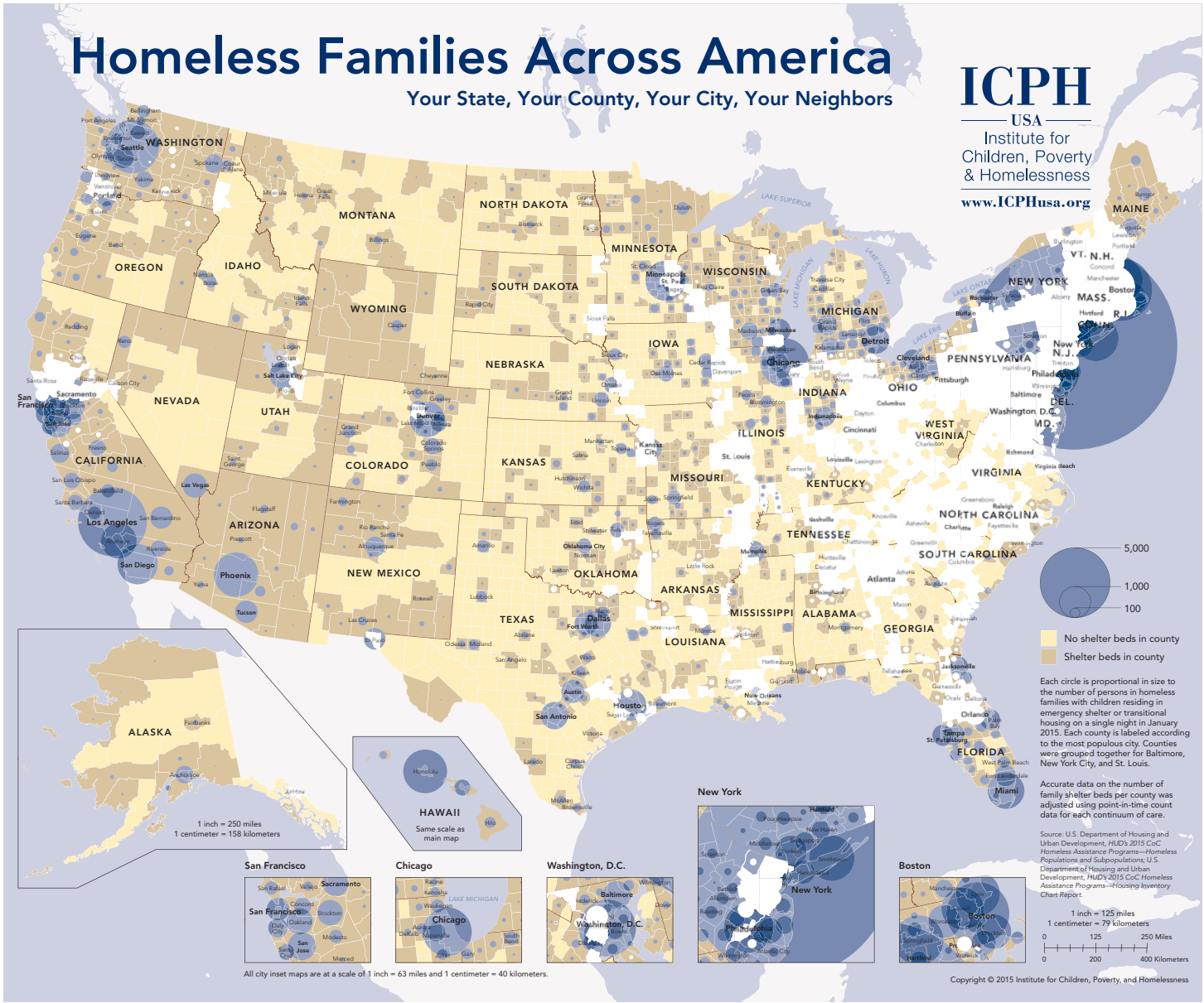
- Individuals and families who are minorities comprise a disproportionate percentage of the homeless population: nearly 60 percent of shelter residents are minorities. Minority individuals are 1.5 times more likely to be homeless, and African Americans are three times more likely to be homeless.[16]
- In 2013, approximately 48 percent of sheltered homeless families with children were African American, even though African American families made up only 14 percent of U.S. families with children, and just 29 percent of families in poverty.[17] In contrast, White families comprised 54 percent of U.S. families with children, but only 23 percent of sheltered homeless families.
- A 2013 survey by the Homeless Youth Project found that African American youth were less likely to identify themselves as homeless. White youth surveyed were more likely to self-identify, and to access services for the homeless, such as shelters and food banks.

Rural Homelessness

Homeless students in rural areas face different challenges than their urban counterparts, especially because resources and services are more likely to be scarce, or difficult to access. This includes difficulty accessing transportation that would take them to school, shelters, or other

support agencies, and the overall lack of services for homeless youth that would help them find shelter, food, and security. A report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimated that in 2007, based on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition of homelessness[18], about seven percent of the overall homeless population lives in rural areas.[19] This figure may in fact be higher, given that HUD's count would look for those sleeping outside, or accessing shelters or other such services, both of which are less prevalent in rural areas.

Regardless of their background or family situation, the percentage of homeless students is rising in communities all across the United States.



Impacts on early learning

The effects of homelessness on academic achievement appear very early in a child's development.

- In one study, researchers found that **homeless preschoolers had vocabularies at or below the first percentile – meaning they recognized fewer words than 99 percent of their peers.**[20]
- The same study found that 38 percent of preschoolers tested had emotional or behavioral problems.

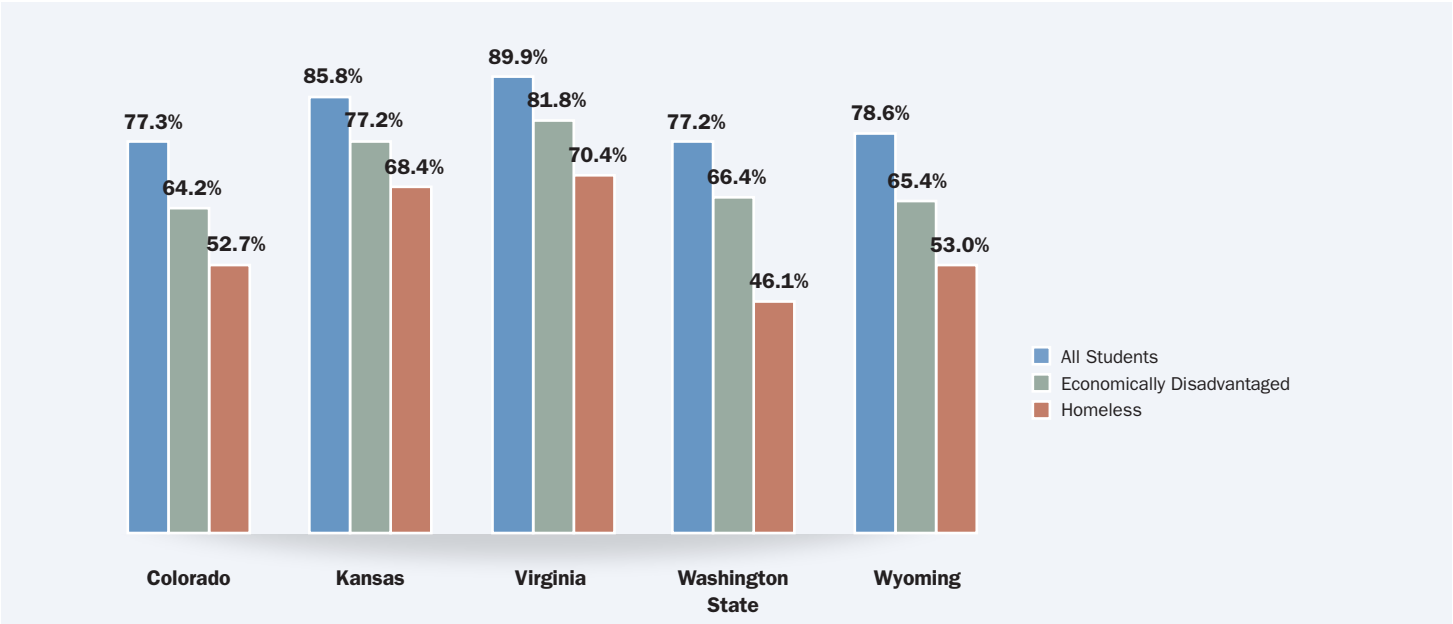
- The National Center on Family Homelessness reported that **75 percent of homeless elementary school students performed below grade level in reading and math** – that number rose to 85 percent for high school students.[21]
- In 2011, researchers determined that half of homeless children were held back for one grade, and 22 percent were held back for multiple grades.[22]
- A 2016 report showed that negative impacts of homelessness continued, even after those students were housed. In New York City, only 20 percent of students who had been homeless within the last three years performed at grade level or above on their 3rd – 8th grade state math tests – just three percentage points higher than currently homeless students. Only 16 percent of those same students achieved proficiency in English Language Arts.[23]

Impacts on Middle and High School Education

Homelessness during middle and high school years can severely impact a student's ability to remain focused, graduate on time, and complete the more rigorous courses needed to prepare for college and future employment.

- Among the five states that report high school graduation rates for homeless students (Colorado, Kansas, Virginia, Washington State, and Wyoming), rates lag well behind those for all students, and even behind other economically disadvantaged students. The gap between all students and homeless students in Colorado and Wyoming was some 25 points in 2014. In Washington State, that gap was over 30 points in 2014, and the most recent graduation rate showed homeless students had rates lower than *all* other subgroups other than foster youth.[24]

Graph 2: Class of 2014 On-time (Four-year) State High School Graduation Rate by Poverty and Housing Status



Source: Colorado Department of Education, 2013–14 State Policy Report: Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement; Kansas State Department of Education, State Level 2013–14 Graduation and Dropout Data—State-level Four- and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates by Subgroup (Public Schools Only); Kansas State Department of Education, Four-year and Five-year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates 2014–15 Fact Sheet; Virginia Department of Education, State-level Cohort Report, Four Year Rate—Class of 2014; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Graduation and Dropout Statistics Annual Report, April 2015; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bulletin No. 072–11 Assessment and Student Information—Attachment 2 Class of 2011 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculations: Wyoming Department of Education, "Wyoming State Graduation Rates: Federally Adjusted Graduation Rates for the 2013-14 Cohort," http://edu.wyoming.gov/data/graduation-rates.

- A 2013-14 survey conducted in Seattle showed that 63 percent of homeless youth had six or more absences and at least one course failure in 9th grade, as compared to just 38 percent of low-income students, and 48 percent of special education students. The same study showed higher rates of suspensions and expulsions for homeless students, and much lower rates of rigorous course taking.[25]

- A 2003 survey conducted in Minnesota found that just 51 percent of homeless young adults (ages 18-20) had completed high school or passed their GED.[26]
- Among homeless youth surveyed in Minnesota (those ages 13-17), twenty-seven percent attended two schools over the course of the year, and 17 percent attended three schools.
- In 2008, the California Research Bureau conducted a peer-administered survey of homeless youth. Of those surveyed, 76 percent were not in school at the time of the interview. The majority of students had left school during their high school years. Only 20 percent of those surveyed said that they had left school of their own accord – the rest cited reasons entangled with homelessness itself. For example, difficulties getting to school, no place to study, inability to shower and wash their clothes, or turmoil in their personal lives.
- The residential instability that accompanies homelessness also leads to increased school mobility. Within one year, 41 percent of homeless children will attend two different schools, while 28 percent will attend three or more schools.[27] Research suggests that school mobility has a negative effect on academic achievement, including lower scores on standardized tests and higher dropout rates.[28]

Other Negative Impacts of Homelessness

Students who are homeless struggle with **learning disabilities and emotional difficulties** at higher rates than their housed peers.

- Research by AIR reported that homeless children were four times more likely to show delayed development, and twice as likely to have a learning disability as non-homeless children. [29]
- Research indicated that street experiences (affiliation with deviant peers, deviant subsistence strategies, risky sexual behaviors, and drug and/or alcohol use) increased the risk of serious victimization and depressive symptoms among runaway and homeless youth.[30]

Homeless students also face the challenge of **both over- and under-identification for special education and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).**

- Homeless students may be placed into special education courses unnecessarily, due to behavioral or emotional difficulties, trouble concentrating, or because they have fallen far behind in their coursework due to the stresses they experience in daily life, or lack of consistency in their schooling.
- Conversely, homeless students may also be under-identified for special education courses, given that they may not have a consistent adult advocate, or because they have been moved so often that their new school does not accurately place them. Studies show that fewer than 25 percent of homeless students who were eligible for special education courses actually were enrolled in them.[31]

Homeless students are also more likely than their peers to have **engaged with the juvenile justice system**. This places them at further risk of falling behind on their studies, becoming less likely to graduate, and setting them on a trajectory for continued housing instability and future engagements with law enforcement.

- An estimated 20 to 30 percent of unstably housed young people have arrest histories, equating to about 150,000 entering the criminal justice system annually.[32]
- The 2012 Homeless Youth study conducted by Wilder Research found that 38 percent of homeless youth (21 years or younger) in Minnesota had placement in correctional facilities.[33]

Increased Risk Over Time

Negative impacts of homelessness begin to manifest themselves quickly, and become worse over time. Studies show that once a child or youth becomes homeless, they enter into negative developmental pathways that often result in chronic homelessness.[34] However, research also indicates that when newly homeless unaccompanied youth are able to return home quickly and safely, they are often able to stay home for long periods of time, mitigating the negative effects of the experience, giving them the opportunity to complete their education and make positive choices.[35] It is therefore essential that schools work as part of the mechanism that identifies homeless youth quickly, and connects them to the services that can help stabilize their housing, keep them in their community, and get them back on track.

Perspectives of Homeless Students, District Liaisons, and State Coordinators

The challenges facing homeless students are immense, with significant negative effects on educational and life outcomes for students. Supporting this vulnerable population requires a clear and deep understanding of the challenges they face, and the supports that will be most effective. It is also important to understand the perspectives of the adults in schools charged with connecting homeless students to the resources that will help them stay in school and on track. This report combines the perspectives of both young people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, as well as McKinney-Vento state coordinators and local liaisons. Studying both perspectives can assist school leaders, policy makers, and communities to better serve homeless students, and help them overcome the challenges they face.

By combining what we heard from homeless students, young adults who were homeless while in middle and/or high school, and local liaisons and state coordinators, we found areas of commonality. These areas encompassed supports that were almost universally acknowledged by youth and adults as essential to student success in school, areas where schools still struggle, and ideas for improvement. This research also revealed that youth and adult perceptions are not always aligned. Youth highlighted significant challenges that the professionals interviewed rated as being fairly well in hand that youth still found stressful and difficult to navigate.

The research also affirms that schools desperately need the support of their communities to manage this growing issue. While schools can serve as a strong and consistent point of contact and support, and can do much to support homeless students within the school walls, they need strong partners to help manage the issues that students face outside of the school building.

Adding a note of great encouragement, both youth themselves and the adults included in the research are extremely optimistic about the potential of young people experiencing homelessness to succeed in school and beyond if given the right supports. **In fact, fully 88 percent of liaisons interviewed tell us they are optimistic regarding the potential of the youth they work with to graduate from high school college- and career-ready.**

Youth themselves reflect strength, perseverance, resilience, and the motivation to succeed, as well as a very real understanding of education as a very important factor in achieving their goals. Three in four young adults interviewed (73 percent) tell us they feel motivated to take the next steps in their lives, whether that means completing their education, or pursuing a career.

The time to act is now, as we hear from the field the far-reaching negative impacts of homelessness, and see the rising tide of students in our nation's public schools who are homeless.

PART 1: THE DISRUPTION AND TRAUMA OF STUDENT HOMELESSNESS

"Their issues surviving trump their education, making it difficult for them to follow through with the plans created to help them."

—LOCAL LIAISON

In line with national research, a very significant majority of liaisons (more than nine in 10) report that the problem of youth homelessness has gotten worse in their area (47 percent) or stayed the same (46 percent) in recent years. Just seven percent report that things have improved.

Liaisons cite lingering effects of the recession and the housing crisis as partly to blame. They also point to other factors, including drug epidemics that have hit their areas hard and compounded the problem.

"Our housing market is really tough on families. Last year, at the end of the year, I had 1,845 homeless students. We're on track this year to have probably more than that."

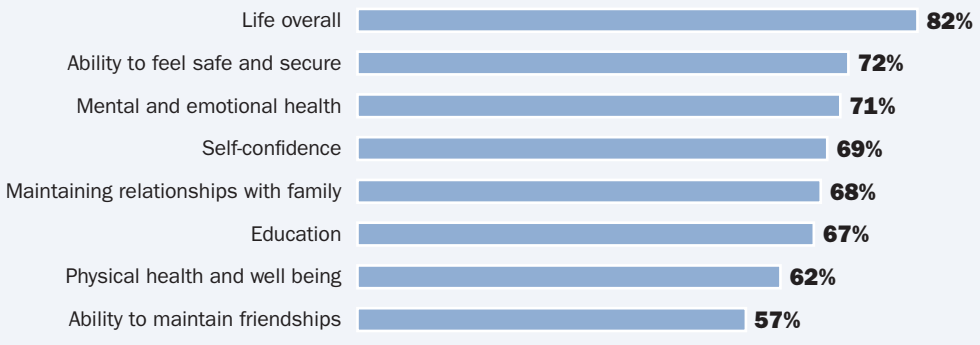
—LOCAL LIAISON

These rising levels are very concerning, given the negative impacts of homelessness on the lives of young people.

Young people participating in the research overwhelmingly report that homelessness is taking or has taken a significant toll on their lives. Greater than eight in 10 formerly homeless youth say that their homeless situation had a large impact on their lives overall. Significant numbers of respondents say their homelessness had a significant impact on numerous other aspects of their lives, including their ability to feel safe; their mental and emotional health; self-confidence; ability to maintain relationships with family and friends; and their physical health and wellbeing.

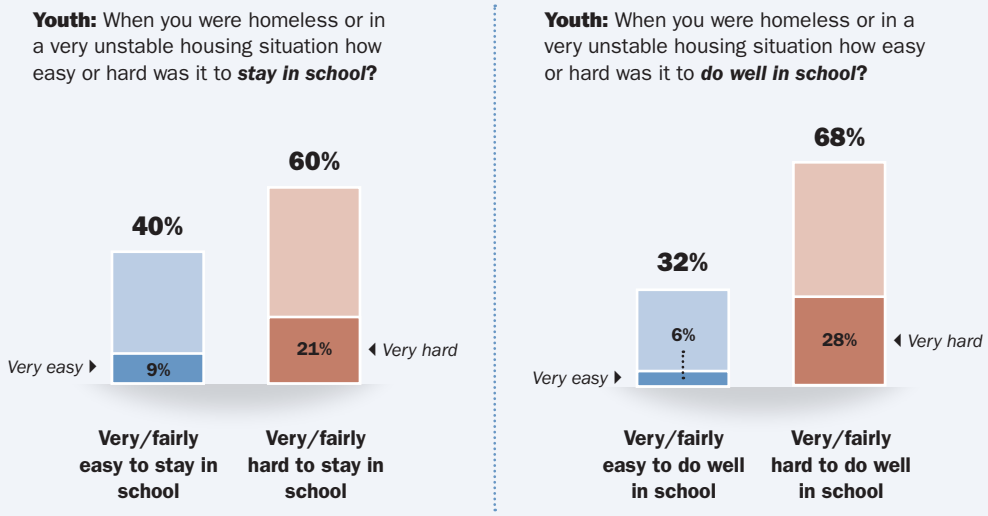
Impacts of Homelessness on the Lives of Youth

Youth: Proportions saying that being homeless/in very unstable housing situation had a big impact on the following areas of their life



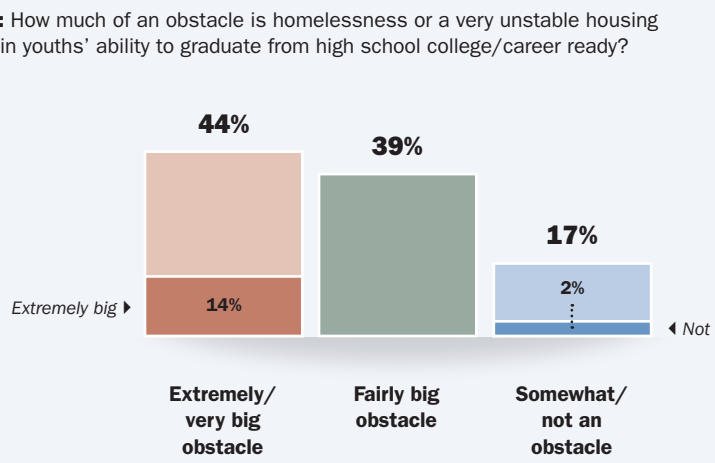
In addition, two in three (67 percent) formerly homeless youth say their homelessness had a large impact on their education. **Six in 10 formerly homeless youth say it was hard to stay in school while they were homeless, and nearly seven in 10 say it was hard to succeed and *do well* in school while they were homeless.**

Impact on Homelessness on Staying in and Succeeding in School



Liaisons affirm this heavy impact of homelessness, with **83 percent reporting that being homeless poses a large obstacle to a student's ability to succeed in school.**

Liaison Perspectives on the Impacts of Homelessness on Education



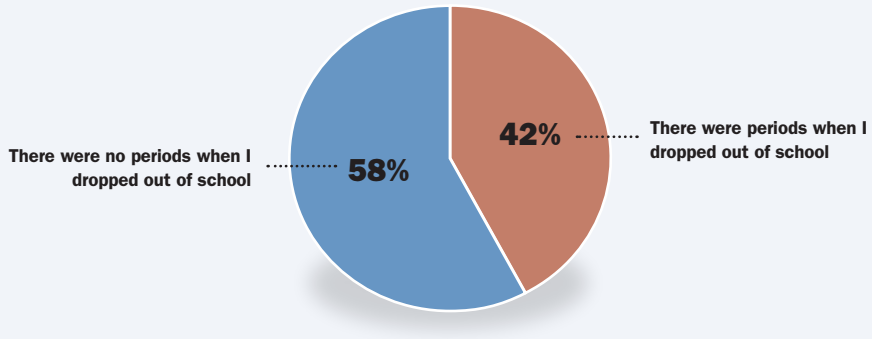
Consistent with the assessment that homelessness makes it hard for students to stay in school, 42 percent of youth surveyed tell us that they had at one or more points dropped out of school.

"I had a hard time motivating myself to wake up every day and continue through life when I just became homeless!"

—YOUTH

Impact of Homelessness on Ability to Attend School

Youth: Were there periods of time while you were in middle and high school that you dropped out of school or stopped atttending school for two weeks or longer?

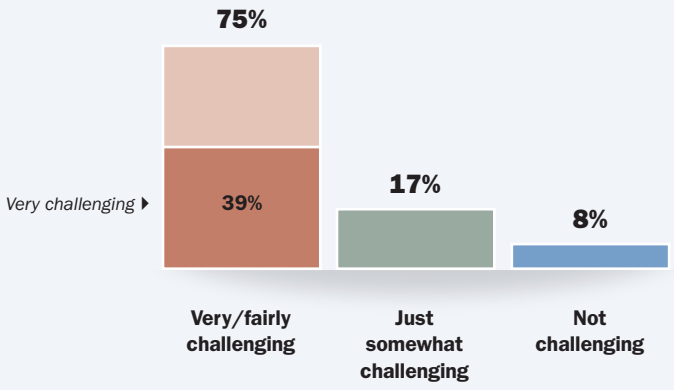


Once a student leaves school, it becomes even more difficult to reengage him or her in the educational system, increasing the risk that he or she will never complete their high school diploma, a critical step towards a stable future.

- Liaisons included in this research report that getting youth who have stopped attending school re-enrolled is particularly challenging. Fully three in four liaisons (75 percent) consider re-enrollment a challenge, and four in 10 (39 percent) said it is "very" challenging.

Challenge of Re-Enrolling Students Who Drop Out

Liaisons: How challenging is it for you and your school or school district to find homeless students or young people who have dropped out of school or fallen out of the school system?



- Only one-third (34 percent) of liaisons believe their districts are doing a good job re-enrolling homeless students who have dropped out of school.

"We continue to struggle with finding students who become homeless and do not come to school. If they don't come to school, they are out on their own without support and it can become overwhelming to think about coming back in to school."

—LOCAL LIAISON

- By far, the largest obstacles to re-enrolling students that liaisons report are keeping in regular contact with youth who have dropped out (73 percent consider this a major challenge), and dealing with resistance from youth who do not want to re-enroll (59 percent consider this a major challenge).
- Liaisons also reference the many other factors that make it difficult to get students who drop out to re-enroll in school. These include accommodating the needs of students who have to work, logistical challenges such as distance from school and lack of transportation, disciplinary issues, and social stigma.

"Changing schools requires a lot of paperwork and moving from place to place in order to get everything straightened out. Being homeless, I didn't exactly have the transportation needed to get from place to place, or have the Internet to do certain things. Another problem I encountered was not knowing HOW to do the paperwork."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

Given the many barriers to re-enrolling homeless students once they have left school, it makes sense to offer these youth as many supports as possible to keep them from leaving in the first place. Youth suggest several ways that schools could have made it easier for them to stay in school. They recommend that schools:

- Proactively work with students to find ways to get them assignments and provide extra assistance when they have to miss school.
- Be more flexible with policies around attendance or timelines for assignments.
- Assist homeless students as they work through delays and challenges in the transfer of transcripts and test scores between schools.
- Help homeless students navigate legal issues such as obtaining parental consent to reenroll, or participate in school activities. This is especially important for students who have difficult or strained relationships with parents or guardians.

Failure to complete high school, or obtain a postsecondary degree, puts these students at serious risk of failing to find stable employment that will allow them to break the cycle of homelessness. The majority of jobs will now require a high school diploma *and* further education of some kind, and these students cannot afford to miss out on the opportunity to complete the critical first step of a high school diploma due to homelessness.

PART 2: THE INVISIBILITY OF STUDENT HOMELESSNESS

"We have students who live with other families that should be identified as homeless, but are not because we do not know about their situations until a crisis occurs."

—LOCAL LIAISON

One of the most significant challenges in addressing the needs of homeless youth is simply identifying them. While seven in 10 liaisons (69 percent) believe their schools are doing a good job identifying homeless youth, they also point to major barriers to identification and express concern that they are "missing" many homeless students in their communities.

Compounding the difficulties of identifying homeless students is the fact that many students do not want to share the fact that they are homeless with friends, classmates, teachers, counselors, or liaisons. Students may be embarrassed, fear being stigmatized or bullied, or worry about potential negative outcomes should social services intervene after they report.

"I don't want to tell nobody, I don't. I learned that one time from telling the school that I was homeless and it went basically viral. And I didn't like it because you know how school kids are, they want to get all idiotic and say little things, and they find out some little information and then it's like "oh, he's homeless" and this and that…I want to tell my case manager…but I don't want anybody feeling pity or sorrowful for me because I'm homeless."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

Parents may not want to report their living situation for fear of losing custody of their children. Unaccompanied youth in particular fear being reported to Child Protective Services, placed into the foster care system, or returned to a dangerous home. Both accompanied and unaccompanied youth may simply not see themselves as homeless – particularly those who are living in motels, or bouncing between temporary living situations with other people.

Given all these reasons, many formerly homeless youth tell us that they were uncomfortable discussing their housing situation with anyone at school. In fact, many report that **no one at their school was ever aware of their situation,** and furthermore, two-thirds of formerly homeless youth (67 percent) say they were uncomfortable (four in 10 were *very* uncomfortable) talking with people at their school about their housing situation and related challenges.

"Families are afraid of their children being removed and placed into foster care."

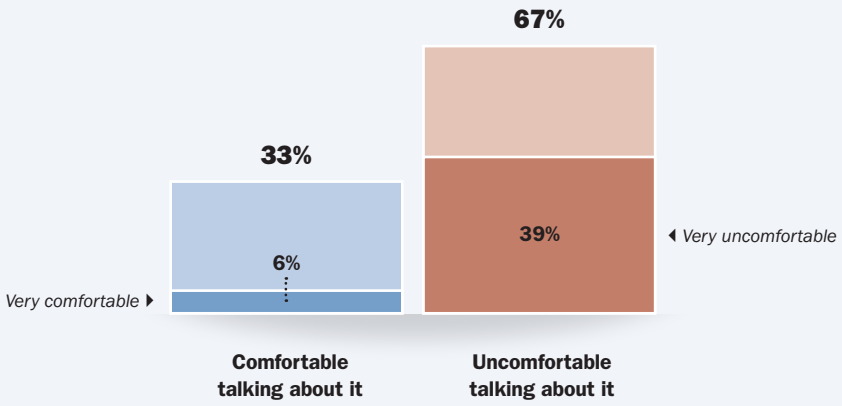
—LOCAL LIAISON

"There was nothing the education system could do because I was too embarrassed to tell them about my homeless situation at the time."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

Discomfort of Youth in Discussing Homelessness at School

Youth: During the time(s) you were homeless or in a very unstable housing situation, how comfortable were you talking about your housing situation and the challenges it caused with people who worked at the schools you attended?

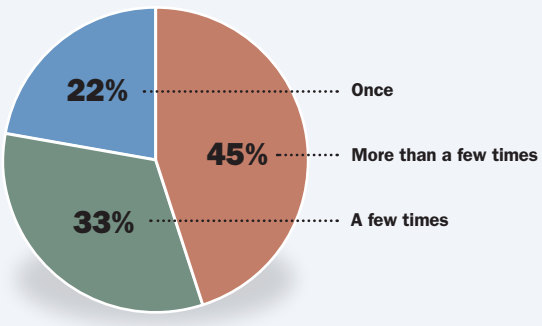


The fluidity of youth homelessness further compounds the difficulties of identifying homeless students. Young people frequently drift between different living arrangements, or fall in and out of stable housing repeatedly. Of the young people we surveyed, **45 percent report being homeless on and off more than a few times,** and nearly half (47 percent) report that they experienced both being homeless on their own, as well as homeless with a parent or guardian.

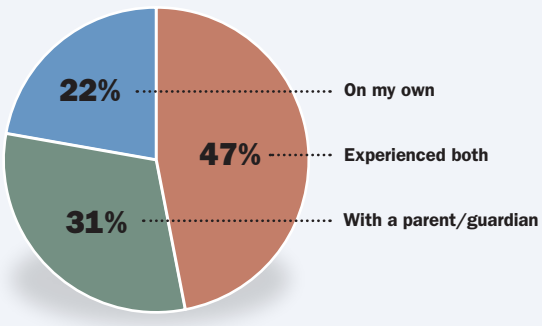
- 94 percent have stayed with friends, family, or others instead of one consistent place.
- 68 percent have slept somewhere not typically designated for sleep because they had nowhere else to go.
- 50 percent stayed in a car, park, abandoned building, bus station, or other public place.
- 44 percent lived in a hotel or motel.
- 34 percent lived in an emergency shelter.
- 22 percent were homeless on their own (i.e. *unaccompanied),* 31 percent were with a parent or guardian, and **47 percent experienced both**.

Re-Occurring Instances of Homelessness

Youth: When you were age 12 to 18, how frequently were you in this unstable housing situation?



Youth: When you were homeless or had very unstable housing situations, were you...



The most difficult situations to identify are these "fluid" homeless situations that, unfortunately, **liaisons and youth tell us are most common**, such as families or youth living with others, and moving around a lot to stay with different individuals; in fact, 94 percent of youth we surveyed had experienced this at some point.

"Couch surfing is the hardest one to be on top of, as the students that have either been kicked out, abandoned or left home due to fear, anger, angst, etc., usually do their best to hide it. Only after they are caught sleeping on school grounds or confess to a friend who comes forward, do we find out who is on the streets, and this is usually weeks or months into their hardship, with attendance, grades and hygiene dropping."

—LOCAL LIAISON

In sum, low levels of awareness within the community as a whole, and even among some educators and administrators, about the existence of student homelessness, the many different ways homelessness manifests itself, the unwillingness of students and families to self-identify, and the fluidity of housing situations can make it very difficult to accurately identify when a student is experiencing homelessness, and intervention is needed.

"There are many people who simply come upon hard times and actively work to regain their independence and are too proud to ask for assistance. These are the ones that I believe fall through the cracks."

—LOCAL LIAISON

"Our biggest challenge is student mobility. Students who move in and out of the district may struggle with challenges that we are never aware of because we never have a chance to build a relationship."

—LOCAL LIAISON

Contributing to the difficulties of identifying homeless students, liaisons report that other staff members in their schools, who could potentially be very helpful in quickly identifying homeless students, do not receive training in the signs that point to homelessness, or the proper way to intervene if they suspect a student is experiencing housing instability.

- One-third of liaisons (34 percent) report that **they are the only person within their school district who receives training** to help identify and intervene with homeless youth and families, while 57 percent report that they and others receive training, and 9 percent report that no training at all is provided in their district.
- Only a minority of liaisons (44 percent) report that most staff in their schools are aware of the problem and knowledgeable about the signs to look for to identify students experiencing unstable housing or homelessness.

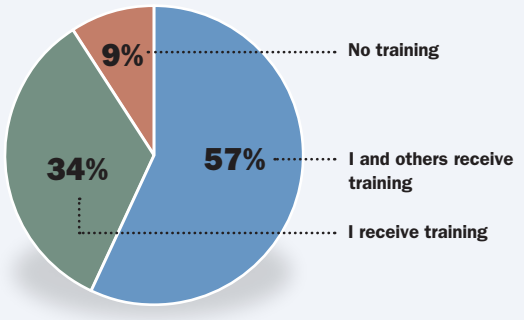
On a positive note, among those liaisons whose school districts do provide training, **three in four (74 percent) rate that training as extremely or very helpful.** And liaisons from school districts that provide training to multiple staff report that their schools are doing a better job of addressing the problem of youth homelessness overall, and specifically of identifying homeless youth.

"I can't be everywhere, and training staff and giving them the skills to understand and see and be able to talk to students is a key for me…so if this kind of thing comes up, then they know what to listen for and what kind of questions to ask, and they know to connect that family with me."

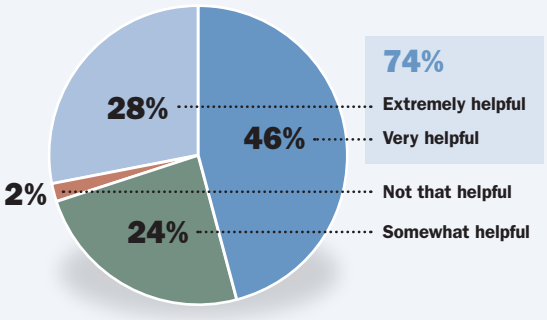
—LOCAL LIAISON

Frequency of Staff Training and Helpfulness of Training

Liaisons: Do you/others in your school/district receive training/ professional development to help identify and intervene with students and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness?



Liaisons: How helpful is the training you receive in helping you identify and intervene with these students and families?*



* Among the 91% who receive training

Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count

In response to the growing number of homeless youth across the country, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago launched Voices of Youth Count, a multi-year research effort aimed at capturing the scope of runaway and youth homelessness in the United States. Through rigorous independent research, the initiative will seek to establish an accurate estimate of the number of unaccompanied homeless and runaway youth across the country. Voices of Youth Count hopes to create a better understanding of the causes and consequences of youth homelessness.

Youth Point-in-Time Counts

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January. HUD requires that Continuums of Care (CoC) annually conduct a count of homeless persons living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and Safe Havens (a type of supportive housing that serves homeless persons with severe mental illness primarily from the streets[36]) on a single night. In addition, CoCs are required to conduct a count of unsheltered homeless individuals every other year.

The PIT count offers one measure of individuals who are in shelter, or living outside on the streets. However, it does not capture the full range of homeless situations that many youth or families may experience. For example, many unaccompanied youth may not be included in the PIT count as they are not accessing shelters or services where PIT counts are being conducted.

In response to this challenge, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) launched the Youth Count! initiative to develop strategies for counting unaccompanied homeless youth through innovative implementations of HUD's 2013 PIT count. The goal of the initiative was to learn promising strategies for conducting credible and collaborative PIT counts of unaccompanied youth (up to age 24) that engage CoCs, Runaway and Homeless Youth providers, district liaisons, and other local stakeholders. Eight communities across the country and the State of Washington participated in the initiative including Boston, MA; Cleveland, OH; Hennepin County, MN; Houston, TX; Los Angeles, CA; New York City, NY; King County, WA; and Winston-Salem, NC.[37]

To assist communities in administering their own youth PIT counts, the True Colors Fund developed the Youth Count Toolkit. The toolkit provides community members with best practices for locating and counting children and youth experiencing homelessness, as well as tips on recruiting community partners to help administer the count. The toolkit also provides resources, such as sample surveys and training tools for staff and volunteers surveying youth.[38]

PART 3: SUPPORTS AND SERVICES NEEDED TO KEEP STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Homelessness presents students with a myriad of barriers and difficulties that they struggle against every day to stay in school and on track. To persist in school, these students need a range of supports from their schools, as well as from outside entities that can offer additional resources that schools cannot.

Just over half of liaisons (55 percent) believe that their schools are doing a good job connecting homeless students to the services and supports they need, with another 26 percent feeling that they are doing a fair job.

Youth and liaisons had similar priorities in terms of the services and supports that are most important to helping homeless students succeed in school. At high rates, both groups identified supports that provide basic human needs such as food, shelter, emotional support and mental health care, as well as additional services such as transportation, clothing, school supplies, and academic assistance.

Critical Supports Needed to Stay in and Succeed in School

Youth/Liaisons: How important is this in helping homeless students stay in and succeed in school?

Importance		Youth saying each is very important	Liaisons rating each as very important*
TIER 1	Enough food to eat	**78%**	**85%**
	Transportation to and from school	**76%**	**87%**
	Safe, stable housing	**73%**	**83%**
	Emotional/motivational support or mentorship	**72%**	**80%**
TIER 2	Clothing and school supplies	68%	80%
	Mental health or counseling	68%	74%
	Help with college prep, applications/financial aid	68%	62%
	Academic tutoring and support	66%	78%
TIER 3	After- or before-school programs and activities	62%	58%
	Medical and/or dental care	57%	62%
	Legal services	49%	27%

* 8-10 ratings on a zero-to-10 scale, 10 = very important, 0 = much less important

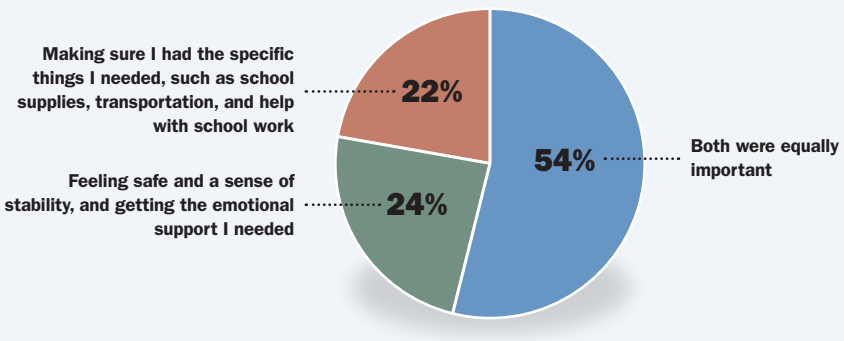
Significantly, youth identify **both** the concrete supports (such as school supplies, transportation, and academic support), as well as more emotional factors (feeling safe, emotional supports) as important to their ability to stay in school and do well in school.

"Students cannot attend to learning when they are worrying about a multitude of issues that come with homelessness or a lack of stable housing."

—LOCAL LIAISON

Importance of Both Tangible and Emotional Supports for Youth

Youth: What was a bigger challenge for you in being able to stay in school and focus on doing well in school?



This finding demonstrates the importance of providing these students with mental health care and counseling to help them manage the trauma and disruption that homelessness presents. The urgent need for connections to mental health care is evidenced by the fact that **89 percent of liaisons report having worked with students who have experienced trauma or abuse, and 72 percent have worked with homeless youth struggling with addiction.**

"I wish I had been able to see a therapist. Being homeless, I had no money or insurance. I needed medication for my anxiety and depression, which only worsened with stress. I feel if the school could have helped provide this for me, I would have handled everything better and maybe even have done better in school…The stress of being in school and being homeless and not receiving any real help almost sent me to a psychiatric ward."

—YOUTH

"These children will continue to perpetuate the cycle if not given the emotional support necessary to help them feel valuable and equipped with the self-esteem and skills to know they can be successful. It is about feeling safe and important and supported along the way. The majority of these children have a variety of mental health issues, ranging from depression to anxiety, as a result of physical and emotional trauma. Increasing access to mental health services, solely based on experiencing homelessness, is crucial and imperative to increase the probability of not experiencing homelessness as an adult."

—LOCAL LIAISON

Particular Challenges of Connecting Unaccompanied Youth to Services

"[With] unaccompanied youth, lots of times, their attendance is horrible because they don't have an adult advocating for them…they don't have someone in their life telling them 'hey, your education is important'… we provide a free ride to school every day, but the motivational piece is the million-dollar question: how do you get them to be motivated to come?"

—LOCAL LIAISON

Unaccompanied youth in particular present a major challenge – from identification to connecting them to the services and supports they need.

- Liaisons report that unaccompanied youth are even more difficult to identify than accompanied youth, largely because fluid situations like couch-surfing are difficult to detect without students themselves coming forward.

Promotor Pathway Program – LAYC and Partnership with Project Hope

Temporary participation in a short-term program is not enough to address the obstacles facing homeless and disconnected youth. In response, the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) in the Washington, D.C. metro region created a new intervention model to address the needs of this population. LAYC's Promotor Pathway is a long-term, intensive client program that pairs youth with a mentor for up to six years. The goals of the Promotor Pathway Program are for youth to:

- Earn a high school diploma or the equivalent and enroll in post-secondary education;
- Secure and retain employment with long-term career potential; and
- Gain the skills necessary to lead a happy and healthy life.

Youth in the program are assigned a Promotor, who serves as a mentor, case manager, community health worker, and advocate. Promotors work closely with youth to link them to the services they need to achieve their goals, and intentionally seek to foster a trusting relationship with their mentees. Case managers carry a cell phone constantly so they are accessible to their mentees 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For youth experiencing homelessness, long-term, readily available support by a single advocate offers much-needed stability and support.

Since 2008, LAYC's Promotor Pathway has shown evidence of success, including:[39]

- Connecting 148 youth with stable housing;
- Securing 188 youth a job;
- Re-enrolling 55 youth in school;
- Helping 19 youth graduate from high school, while another 37 obtained their GED;
- 19 youth enrolled in post-secondary education.

LAYC will announce further findings of effectiveness later this year. The success of LAYC's Promotor Pathway has brought national recognition and inspired other nonprofits across the nation to adopt the same intervention model.

Partnership with Project Hope Alliance & Newport-Mesa Unified School District

Jennifer Friend, CEO of the California-based Project Hope Alliance, first heard of LAYC's Promotor Pathway in 2015. After learning about the success of the program, Friend was determined to bring the model to Orange County, CA, where more than 32,000 children are struggling with homelessness.

Friend herself experienced homelessness, and was particularly drawn to the program because of its inclusion of youth up to age 24. Friend understood the intense uptick in support that students require once they advance on to college if they are to persist and complete their degree.

The Newport-Mesa Unified School District Promotor Pathway operates out of Newport Harbor High School and will support up to 50 homeless youth from the time they are a freshman in high school until they reach age 24. The office is located in a more secluded area of the school so that students can maintain anonymity when coming in, while still being in close proximity so that transportation is not an issue. The program is funded and staffed by the Project Hope Alliance.

The program recruits students who can benefit from their services through referrals from teachers and school staff. As more students have felt the positive effects Promotores have had on their lives, they have brought friends and family members who they think could benefit from the program, too.

In addition, the church across from Newport Harbor High School houses a drop-in center, and has begun to refer students to the Promotor Pathway office at Newport Mesa, as well. Joining together with the faith community has had strong positive impacts. The church community provides students with the anonymity they wish, as well as a safe space. The opportunity for Project Hope Alliance to have a physical presence at the church allows them to leverage the resources of the faith community in addition to the resources of the school district. These types of school/community partnerships also provide Project Hope staff with the benefit of having only one physical office (at Newport High School) while still maintaining a presence at other brick and mortar spaces, such as churches. This allows Project Hope to invest money in resources and services rather than physical space.

Project Hope Alliance knew that LAYC's model of intentional case management and youth advocacy would bring necessary change to how homeless students are supported in Newport-Mesa Unified School District. Project Hope Alliance has worked to educate the school community on the prevalence of student homelessness in their district, and unify them around addressing the problems these students face. As Friend said, "People are not rallied to solve a problem that they don't know exists." Showing the broader community that their children attend school alongside students experiencing homelessness has helped to change the culture across the district to be more understanding towards homeless students.

Project Hope Alliance currently focuses on rapidly rehousing families into stable places. Once rehoused, they use this housing as a hub to engage families in education, mentoring, and advocacy activities to focus on ending the cycle of homelessness through the children they are serving today. The Project Hope Alliance is excited to see how the evolution of the Promotor Pathway Program will fit into this focus as it moves forward.

- When given a list of different segments of the homeless youth population, many of whom belong to marginalized communities or have severe mental health needs, liaisons rate unaccompanied youth as the most difficult to connect to services—**half of liaisons consider this a challenge, and nearly 90 percent report working with unaccompanied youth**.
- Both youth and liaisons describe to us the specific challenges—many of them legal hurdles—that unaccompanied minors often encounter when attempting to obtain services. These include difficulty accessing services, such as safe housing, without the consent of a legal guardian, as well as logistical challenges around traveling to obtain services on their own.

"It was difficult because I didn't have a legal guardian and my legal address wasn't in the school district. Took me forever to get into a new school."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"Safe housing and transportation (outside of the school day) for unaccompanied middle- and high- school youth is a continual challenge and need."

—DISTRICT LIAISON

Obstacles to Education

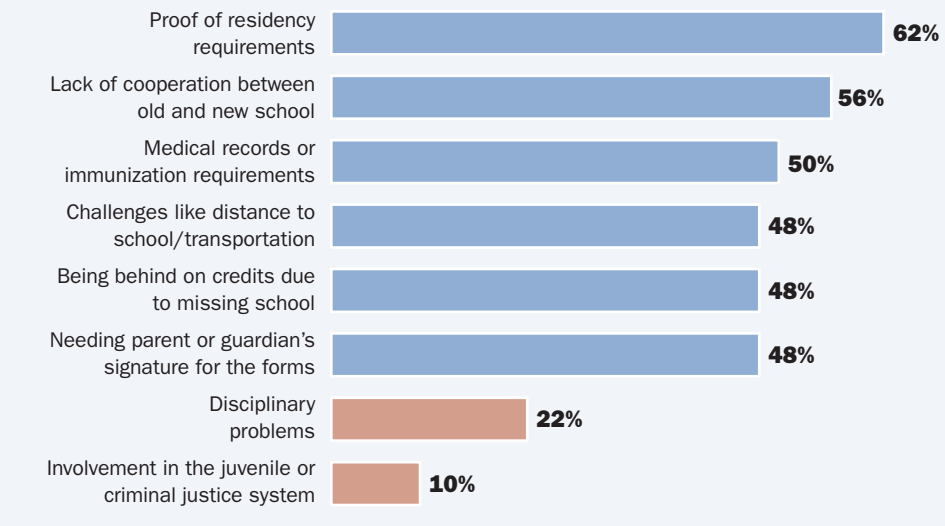
This research also helps to shine a light on a number of barriers that make it more difficult for homeless students to be able to fully participate and succeed in school.

Homelessness puts students in a state of constant transition, meaning that they may have to navigate the process of changing schools multiple times as their housing shifts. Of youth participating in this research, half had to change schools, and many did so multiple times. In our research, **sixty-two percent of youth who had to change schools during their homelessness report that this process was difficult to navigate, given the various logistical and legal barriers they experienced**.

These logistical and legal barriers to changing schools may make it more likely that a student will drop out. And while McKinney-Vento mandates that schools waive requirements such as proof of residency for homeless students, in some cases it seems that schools failed to fully comply with McKinney-Vento law.

Challenges to Changing Schools and Enrolling in a New School

Youth: Please select any of these that made the process of changing schools or enrolling in a new school difficult for you while you were homeless or had very unstable housing.



PART 4: GAPS IN PERCEPTION AND PRACTICE

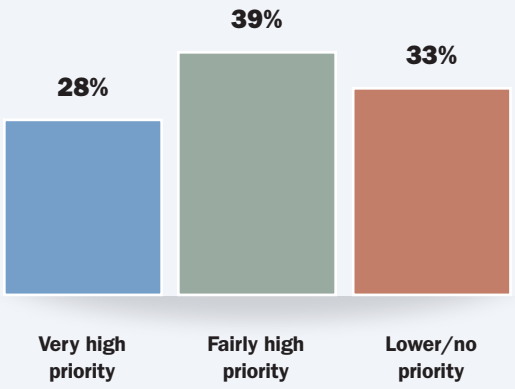
Youth and liaisons both identify the same sets of supports and services as important to keeping homeless students in school and engaged in learning. But despite general agreement on what homeless students most need to stay connected to school, this research also illuminates several areas where there are gaps between perceptions of what should be done, or what is working, and practice within schools.

Overall, liaisons believe their schools are doing a fairly good job of addressing the problem of youth homelessness. Eight in 10 liaisons (82 percent) say their schools are doing a good or fair job of addressing youth homelessness.

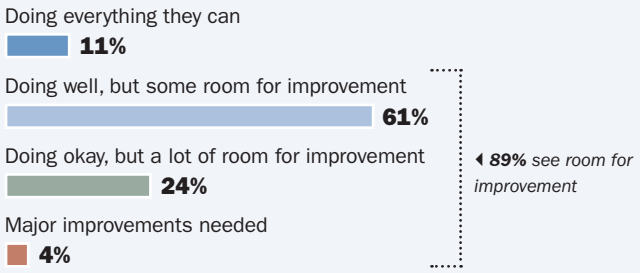
However, fully one-third (33 percent) of liaisons believe their school district does not place a high priority on the problem of youth homelessness, and nine out of 10 (89 percent) saw room for improvement in the job their schools and other organizations are doing addressing this issue.

Room for Improvement at the School and Community Level

Liaisons: How much of a priority does your school district place on addressing youth homelessness?



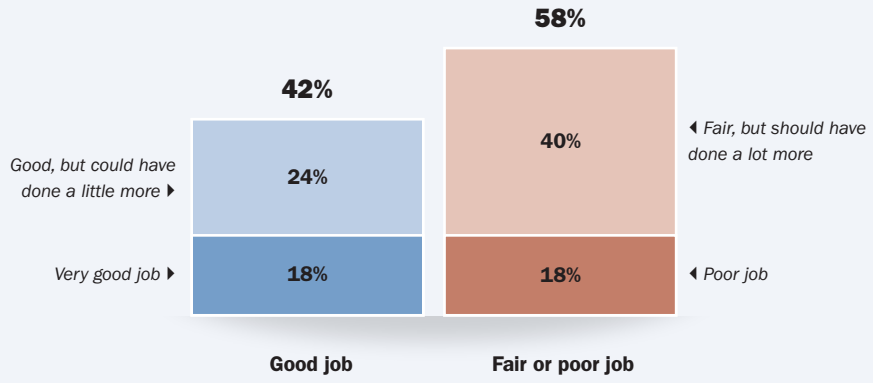
Liaisons: What is your view of the job that the schools and other organizations you work with are currently doing to help homeless students fulfill their full potential to graduate from high school college- and career-ready?



In addition, a majority of the young people included in this research report that their schools could have done a better job of supporting them and helping them succeed in school. Nearly six in 10 youth say that their schools did only a fair job (40 percent) or a poor job (18 percent) in this regard.

Need for Increased Support in Schools

Youth: During the time(s) you were homeless or in a very unstable housing situation, what kind of job did the education system or the schools you attended do in supporting you and helping you to stay in school and succeed in school?



"[They could have been] more understanding of my situation and age and what it took for me to get up every day and pursue my education in spite of all of the barriers I was up against. I felt scrutinized and ostracized, especially by the principal. She was not trying to be accommodating at all. There are emotional traumas. Mental. Physical effects. Teachers should have trainings to give them the tools so that they know the signs."

—YOUTH

"[The school] could have been more supportive to students and people attending school. There were times I felt so worthless and didn't know what I was doing there and the teachers' attitudes did not make it better. I had to get my life together and stay positive in spite of school staff."

—YOUTH

Students and liaisons agree that, by far, the most significant challenge is in connecting homeless youth to housing. While both youth and liaisons identify safe, stable housing as imperative to these young peoples' success in school, **only 25 percent of youth and 29 percent of liaisons believe their schools are doing a good job on this vexing issue.** This issue is only compounded by what we know are near-ubiquitous constraints in supply and availability.

"We have tremendous needs that have not been addressed and are not being met…you have a lot of students who are completely unsheltered in parts [of the state], just because there aren't any options available."

—STATE COORDINATOR

Hamilton Family Center

In November 2014, Hamilton Family Center entered into a partnership with the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) to address family homelessness. The partnership was created as a two-year pilot program and funded through a $1 million grant from Google.org with the goal of serving 100 homeless or at risk families by October 31, 2016.

Through the pilot program, HFC set up a hotline for the SFUSD. When a counselor, social worker, or nurse learns that a family is about to be homeless or has recently become homeless, they contact HFC through this hotline. Within three business days, HFC then sends staff to the school to meet with the family, complete a needs assessment, and enroll them in HFC's homelessness prevention program or rapid rehousing rent assistance program.

Through the partnership, HFC has had the opportunity to train SFUSD staff on how to better identify, address, and prevent family homelessness. HFC provided SFUSD staff with in-person workshops, a one-page reference sheet on ending family homelessness, and three training videos on identifying and helping homeless families or families facing eviction.

After one year of the initiative, the partnership has seen strong results. So far, HFC has met with 89 families. Of the 89 families, 29 evictions were prevented, 22 families were rapidly re-housed, and 24 families were referred to other programs. The partnership has also led to a significant reduction in the length of time families were homeless prior to being served. The average length of time families are homeless before being served through the HFC-SFUSD partnership is 6.5 months, a full 8.2 months less than families served outside of the pilot project.[40]

NCHE's Homeless Education Listserv and Hotline

The Homeless Education Listserv hosted by the National Center for Homeless Education provides advocates, educators, and service providers in communities across the country with a forum to communicate about emerging issues in the field, including the application of the McKinney-Vento Act and best practices in educating and protecting the rights of homeless students. NCHE also offers a Homeless Education Hotline to offer fast assistance and information to parents, school personnel, and service providers on a host of issues affecting homeless and highly mobile students in their communities.

Gaps in Perception Between Youth and Liaisons

Youth: How good a job did your school do for you in this area when you were homeless?

Liaisons: How good a job is your school/district doing in providing/connecting homeless students to this?

Importance		Youth saying school did a good job	Liaisons rating school as doing a good job*
TIER 1	**Enough food to eat**	**56%**	**73%**
	Transportation to and from school	**54%**	**84%**
	Safe, stable housing	25%	29%
	Emotional/motivational support or mentorship	45%	55%
TIER 2	**Clothing and school supplies**	**36%**	**82%**
	Mental health or counseling	39%	43%
	Help with college prep, applications/financial aid	**42%**	**65%**
	Academic tutoring and support	**46%**	**73%**
TIER 3	After- or before-school programs and activities	54%	57%
	Medical and/or dental care	35%	47%
	Legal services	25%	24%

* 7-10 ratings on a zero-to-10 scale, 10 = very good job, 0 = falling far short

And while youth and liaisons are largely aligned on the supports and services believed to be most important and impactful for student success, **we found gaps in perception** between youth and liaisons regarding the job schools are doing connecting youth to these important services and supports. When it comes to a number of specific services and supports, liaisons give their schools credit for doing a good job at higher rates than young people do (in some cases, at significantly higher rates):

Youth give their schools the most credit for doing a good job around enough food to eat, transportation, and access to before- and after-school programs. Importantly however, only just over half indicate that their schools did a good job providing or connecting them to each of these services.

- Enough food to eat (56 percent).
- Transportation to and from school (54 percent).
- Access to after- or before-school programs (54 percent).

By contrast, liaisons give their schools more credit for doing a good job connecting youth to two of those same services:

- Enough food to eat (73 percent).
- Transportation to and from school (84 percent).

There are also very significant differences between the perceptions of homeless youth versus liaisons regarding the job schools are doing connecting homeless youth to several additional supports that students tell us are critical to their continued engagement in school:

- Clothing and school supplies: 36 percent of youth, but 82 percent of liaisons said schools are doing a good job.
- Academic tutoring and support: 46 percent of youth, but 73 percent of liaisons said schools are doing a good job.
- Help with college preparation: 42 percent of youth, but 65 percent of liaisons said schools are doing a good job.

Helping Homeless Students Access Higher Education

Many of the youth surveyed expressed dreams of graduating from high school and someday attaining a college diploma. However, homeless youth face many barriers to accessing higher education.

To assist homeless youth in navigating this process, the National Center for Homeless Education offers many resources both for students as well as high schools and colleges. These resources include an eligibility tool for financial aid administrators and other issue briefs exploring how colleges are best supporting homeless students financially and academically.[41]

In addition, the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) offers several higher education resources to assist homeless students seeking higher education. These resources include a Higher Education Helpline that provides assistance to students having difficulty in accessing higher education, toolkits for educators and service providers on helping homeless students access and succeed in college, and briefs to help unaccompanied youth access college financial aid.[42]

Seattle Education Access

The Seattle Education Access (SEA) assists marginalized youth and young adults in gaining entry into colleges and completing degrees. Their mission is to provide higher education advocacy and opportunity to young people struggling to overcome poverty and adversity throughout King County. SEA is open to all low-income individuals under the age of 30, regardless of legal issues, parenting status, sexual orientation or immigration status, and has two linked programs to serve youth.

- **College Prep Program:** The College Prep Program helps youth prepare for higher education and employment. The goal of the program is for each student to enroll in a post-secondary program with the resources and skills necessary to succeed. SEA staff members work with each student to create a career and academic achievement plan based on their individual gifts and personal goals.
- **College Success Program:** The College Success Program provides youth with community support through retention services designed to maximize graduation rates, including assistance with the transfer process following the completion of associate degrees and helping former students apply to graduate school. In addition, SEA awards students enrolled in the College Success Program with scholarships that may be used for tuition, textbooks, bus passes, and other basic needs to supplement financial aid. This allows students to have enough money to afford safe and stable housing.

PART 5: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Schools are the center of much of family and community life, and as such are critical access points to identify homeless students in need of help, and connect them to a wide range of resources both inside and outside school walls. However, schools themselves have limited time and dollars to put towards this demographic of students. Our research illuminated many deeply challenging issues for youth, and the school systems that they encounter.

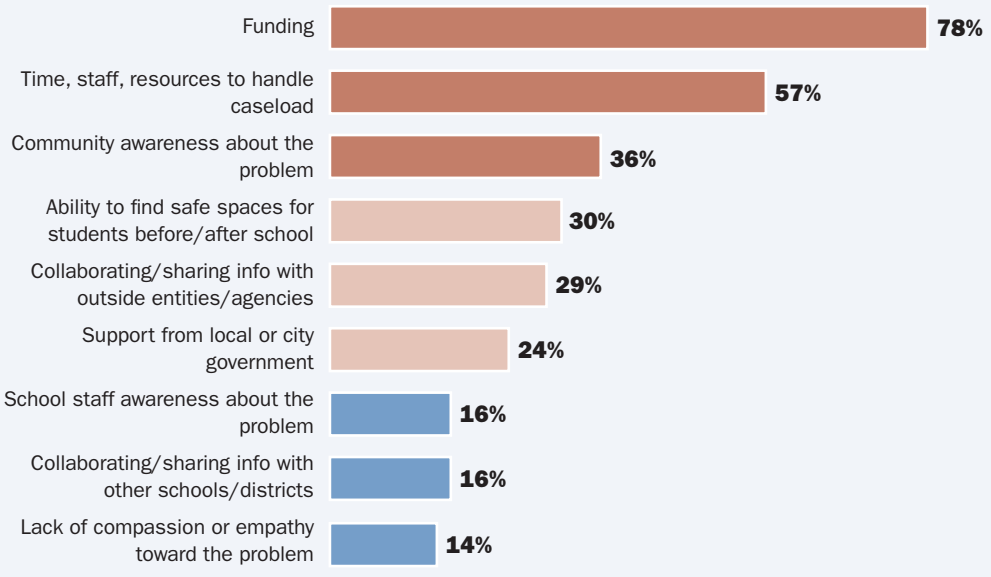
Challenges for Liaisons: Time, Resources and Community Awareness

We asked liaisons to discuss the barriers they face day to day that make it most difficult to effectively support homeless students in their districts. Liaisons tell us that the challenge at the heart of addressing youth homelessness is that, while the problem has intensified, the resources available to address it have not kept up. In addition, **over 90 percent of liaisons report that they work in another official capacity other than as homeless liaison within their school district, and 89 percent say they spend half of their time or less on their responsibilities as homeless liaison.**

- In focus groups, when asked to identify the biggest obstacles they face, liaisons point to a lack of government and community resources in general—programs, shelters, service providers. The biggest obstacle, of course, is a lack of affordable housing.
- In the survey, when asked to identify the top three biggest obstacles to providing students and families with the services and supports they need, 78 percent of liaisons say funding, 57 percent say time, staff, and resources, and 36 percent say community awareness about the problem.

Core Challenges for Liaisons

Liaisons: Based on your experiences, which THREE of these are your biggest obstacles in providing the students and families you work with the services and supports they need?



"We are a great support system within our schools because we identify the students, but then, it's almost like the position could do so much more. If we had the time, money, resources—and it was just a full-time position—we could be meeting with families, we could be holding night classes, helping them with immigration issues…we could really help more than just at the school level. Using the school as a primary link to helping some bigger, societal issues there."

—LOCAL LIAISON

The recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) addresses many of these critical issues by requiring that liaisons be able to carry out their duties. The challenge will be ensuring that school districts accurately assess the size of their homeless student population and provide liaisons and coordinators with the appropriate amount of time and the budget to do so.

Effective Approaches

In terms of improving the entire process, from identifying homeless youth to connecting them with the services and supports they need, liaisons describe a number of efforts that they believe would be helpful:

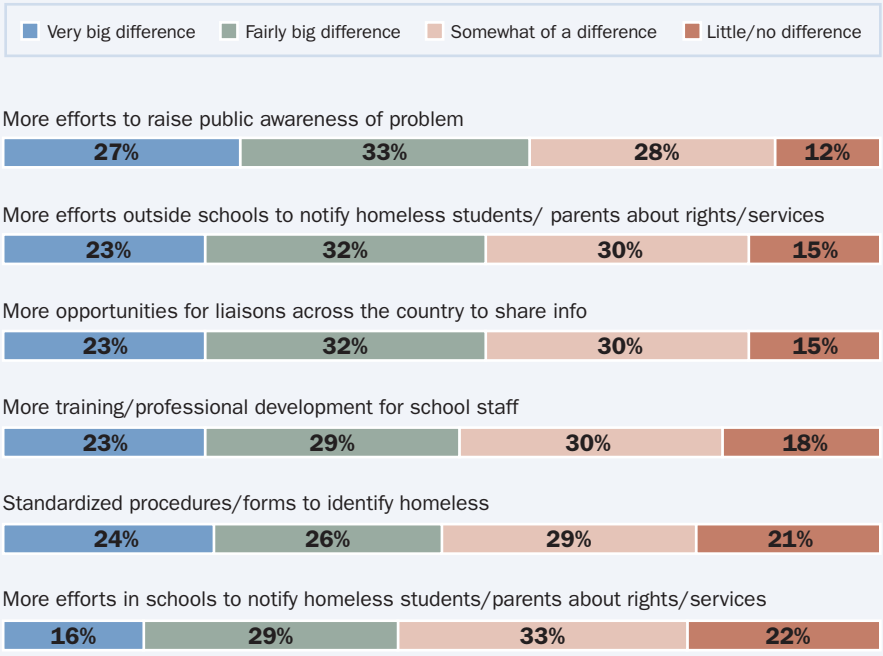
"The community as a whole does not understand the growing population of homeless families in our immediate attendance area."

—LOCAL LIAISON

- Six in 10 liaisons say that enhanced public awareness efforts would make a big difference, and emphasize **awareness, compassion, and breaking down stigmas**, both in schools and throughout communities, as ways to better help their students.
- Majorities also point to efforts *outside* schools to notify homeless youth and families of available services (55 percent), more information sharing among liaisons and those in the field (55 percent), and increased professional development (52 percent) as ways to improve the process.
- Significant proportions agree that standardized identification procedures (50 percent) and efforts *within* schools (45 percent) would make an impact.
- When asked to share some of the specific approaches they are taking that are particularly effective for them, liaisons mention: conducting regular needs assessments; keeping updated lists of resources and contacts available for those who need services; collecting students' residency information regularly throughout the year; building relationships and networking throughout the community; equipping all school staff with the tools to recognize homelessness and intervene; leveraging the generosity of others in the community; and working hard to foster trusting, ongoing relationships with families.

Action Steps for Positive Impacts

Liaisons: How much difference would this make in improving the process for identifying homeless youth and connecting them with services and supports?



"Aside from providing safe, stable, long-term shelter or housing, I would perceive a lack of awareness as a barrier to homeless students' success. Public service announcements regarding the living status of homeless students could be used to generate both support and funds which could be used to support housing."

—LOCAL LIAISON

"I provide outreach and training to community organizations such as local food pantries, faith-based organizations, other social service agencies. I hang posters about homelessness in the schools and in the community. I include information on homelessness in the school bulletin that goes home to parents and guardians."

—LOCAL LIAISON

"By creating standards for identification and making all school staff aware of those standards, we have been able to identify more students as homeless under McKinney-Vento. This enables us to better serve them."

—LOCAL LIAISON

"With the couch surfers I have purchased burn phones for them to use temporarily so we can stay in contact and they have a way to reach out in an emergency. So far, it has not been abused and phones have been returned to me for others once no longer needed."

—LOCAL LIAISON

"I meet with my fellow liaisons within my county (seven of us) monthly, and we do our best to support each other, share ideas, and case manage those nomadic families that move within our county, as well as invite speakers from community resources. It has been an extremely helpful support, and I recommend all counties do this."

—LOCAL LIAISON

Areas for improvement

Liaisons identify several areas where improvements could be made to make identification of homeless students more accurate and efficient.

INCREASED STAFF TRAINING

One of these areas is increased staff training. In addition to guidance counselors, school social workers, and school clerical staff, over half of liaisons identify *teachers* as among the most important and valuable school staff in helping to identify homeless youth. **Yet, only 62% of liaisons report that teachers in their school districts receive training.**

"It's the teachers: it's the first face that they see in the morning that has the strongest communication bond with the students …Forming that strong relationship is fundamental. When a teacher really knows their students, they know when something is wrong."

—LOCAL LIAISON

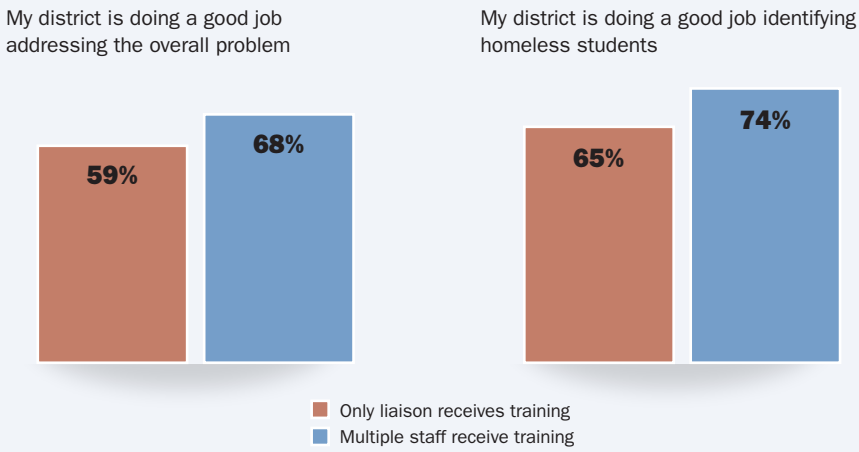
The value of providing training to staff members beyond just the McKinney-Vento liaisons was pointed out by many coordinators and liaisons, who advocate that providing training to more adults in schools could only improve the likelihood of quickly identifying homeless students, and connecting them to the help they need.

"From your bus driver, to your crossing guard, to your cook, to your custodian: I think everybody needs to be involved."

—LOCAL LIAISON

In fact, liaisons in districts that provide training and professional development to multiple types of staff members—beyond just homeless liaisons—**report greater performance in identifying homeless students and in combating the problem of youth homelessness overall**.

Value of Training Multiple Staff Members



* 8-10 ratings on a zero-to-10 scale, 10 = doing a very good job, 0 = falling far short

Youth support this concept of having many well-informed adults in schools through their real-world examples of when staff members noticed something was amiss, and intervened.

"When my mom used to put me out, it started out for a week I wouldn't come home, then after a week it went to two weeks, and after two weeks it went to like a month, then a month went to a month and a half, so there would be times I wouldn't come home. Like, period. But my older brother would just see me in school. So, one day, we were in the hallway talking, and I guess the principal must have heard us, and he was like, 'well, you guys need to come to my office and talk.'"

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

IMPROVED ADMINISTRATIVE TACTICS

On the administrative front, many liaisons point out that relying on enrollment forms and residency questions administered only at the beginning of each school year is insufficient, and that continual and creative efforts at identification are important *throughout* the entire year.

We asked youth who dropped out of school during their time of homelessness what schools could have done to make it easier for them to continue with their education. Beyond emotional supports and various tangible services discussed, many youth offered things schools could have done to make it easier for them to stay in school. They suggest that schools:

- Be more proactive in keeping them engaged in school and school work.
- Be more flexible and accommodating around policies such as attendance and timeliness of assignments in a manner that recognizes their unstable circumstances.
- Not be overly punitive during these hard times.
- Provide more individualized, one-on-one learning than they were receiving.

"We moved over three dozen times by the time I was 12. Usually my mom would go to the local office supply store and buy a lease form and forge it with a local address. Sometimes she wouldn't, though, and it would have been nice to be able to stay in school anyway. Also, having flexibility with attendance requirements. Having bad parents meant frequently lacking a ride too school. Twice I wound up having to drop out because my parents wouldn't let me get to school."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"Teachers and counselors could have been more one-on-one with students in class, more lax with rules like clothing and having an ID, and checking in to see what might be wrong."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"I have credits but the start of my junior year I didn't get credits for the first semester because my foster parents said I had to move. That can really put you behind."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

Need for Community Engagement

"I want to see a breakdown of some of the silos that we have in the services to these families…the domestic violence people sometimes stay in their little corner, and the early childhood people stay in their little corner, higher ed people are in their little spot, housing people are in another one. If we could come up with some way where all of these services were working together, I think it would really ease some burden on families in accessing what they need."

—STATE COORDINATOR

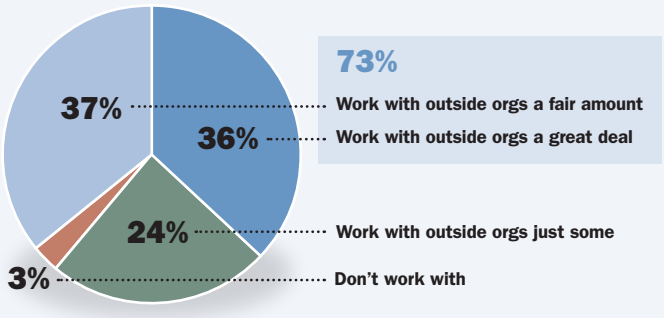
Liaisons emphasize that schools cannot do this work alone or in a silo – support from entities outside the school is critical. This includes nonprofits, local businesses, faith-based organizations, local government, service providers, and other community-based agencies and programs. Liaisons tell us the key to success here is building relationships broadly within their communities, and convening regularly with community stakeholders who can fill in the gaps in services that schools cannot provide.

Even though they acknowledge and emphasize the importance of collaboration with these outside entities, **only 36 percent of liaisons report that they work "a great deal" with community organizations, agencies, or businesses to help provide services and supports.** Another 37 percent work with these groups a fair amount, while 27 percent do so just some, or not at all.

Those liaisons who work more frequently with outside entities give their districts much higher ratings on addressing the problem of youth homelessness overall, and on providing students with the services and supports they need.

Prevalence of Community Engagement and Collaboration

Liaisons: How much do you work with organizations, agencies, businesses, other entities outside the school system to help provide services/supports to homeless students/families you work with?



Outside entities I have worked with:

79%	Food pantries/soup kitchens
71%	Faith-based/religious organizations
69%	Mental/physical healthcare providers
69%	Shelters/transitional housing facilities
69%	Local/city gov't agencies/programs
45%	Area businesses/companies
41%	Youth outreach orgs/drop-in centers
28%	Foundations
25%	Legal services
16%	Host homes

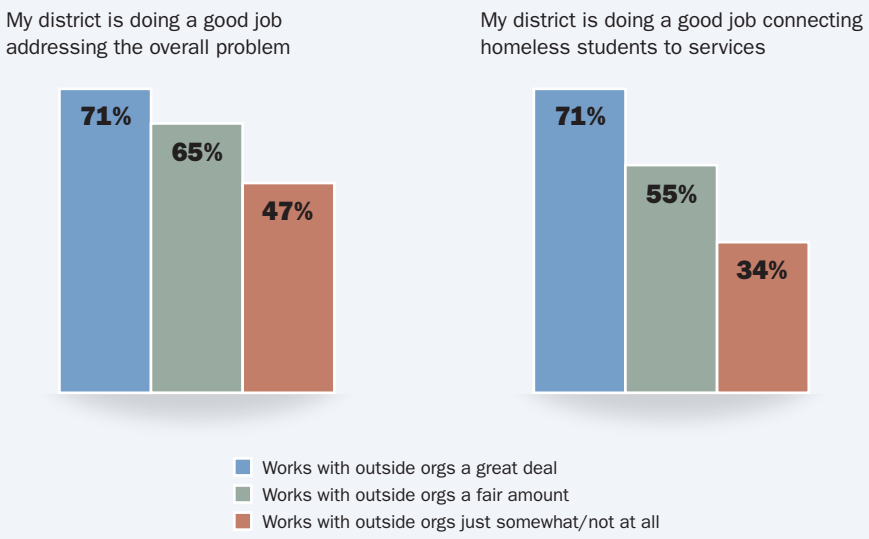
"I regularly attend meetings with our county's United Community Action Network, and the Homeless Task Force. Members from all kinds of businesses and organizations that help those in poverty attend these meetings, so I am able to connect with other community resources that could provide help for our students. This has been an immense help in getting students and families into housing more quickly, or getting them assistance with things like weatherproofing their home, getting food stamps, etc."

—DISTRICT LIAISON

Seventy-one percent of liaisons who connect with outside entities "a great deal" give their district a good rating on addressing the problem of youth homelessness *overall*, compared to 65 percent of those who work with outside organizations just "a fair amount," and 47 percent of those who work outside the school system "just some" or "not at all."

Similarly, seventy-one percent of those who connect with outside entities "a great deal" give their district a good rating on *providing students with the services they need*, compared to 55 percent of those who work with outside entities just "a fair amount," and only 34 percent of those who work outside the school system "just some" or "not at all."

Value of Collaborating with Outside Organizations



"The district has developed great partnerships with community agencies that help to provide additional supports and services to all youth, not just homeless youth. Through these partnerships we have been able to provide youth with meals, clothing, counseling, and tutoring into the evening hours, ensuring that they are in a safe and comfortable environment for as long as possible."

—LOCAL LIAISON

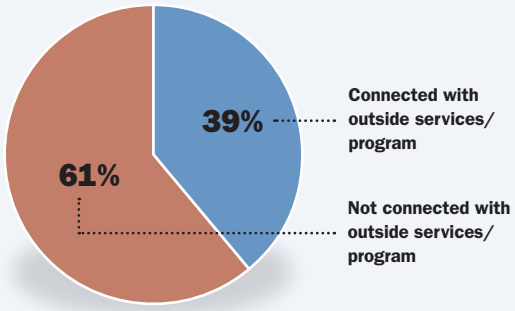
These connections with organizations and individuals outside of schools are invaluable to youth personally. However, **young people tell us that these connections were not made nearly as frequently as they were needed.**

- Roughly six in 10 (61 percent) of the young people we surveyed **were never connected with any outside organization or entity during their homelessness,** while 87 percent of those who *were* connected report that these connections were important and valuable to them.
- Many were connected to churches, youth outreach programs, community centers, and groups like the Boys and Girls Club, and shared with us how valuable these connections were in terms of improving their outcomes.

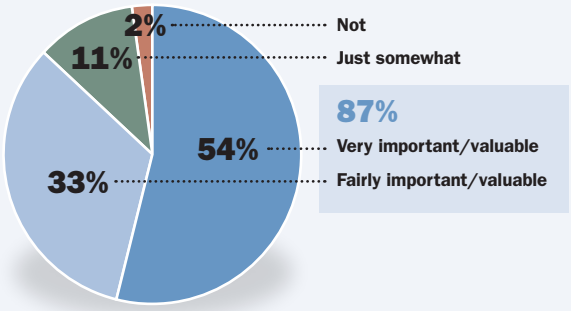
- In addition, three-fourths of youth who were accompanied at some point say that **other members of their families besides themselves were never connected to services by the school system**.

Frequency of and Importance of Connections Beyond School

Youth: When you were homeless or in very unstable housing, were you connected with any services or programs outside school?



Youth: How important and valuable were those connections to your general happiness and ability to stay in school and focused?



"The most important services that I attended were the church services. They always prayed for me and my situation, and helped me get clothes and meals."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"I had been in a performing arts group that performed nightly at a local theater. I made friends there with adults and children who not only inspired me but kept my head held high."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"[Two youth outreach organizations] are the only two places I will really go for little things, like, now I need help getting my driver's license and they are going to help me get my driver's license. Housing, food stamps, they help you get your I.D., your birth certificate, your Social Security card…you rarely find these things, like, you don't find that many people that are openly willing to help you."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"Often times these students are alone and the role models around them, or the friends they are around, are not always very encouraging. Having stable and positive relationships with people outside of school would really help encourage students in poor living situations to try to do better and be around people who are going to encourage them."

—LOCAL LIAISON

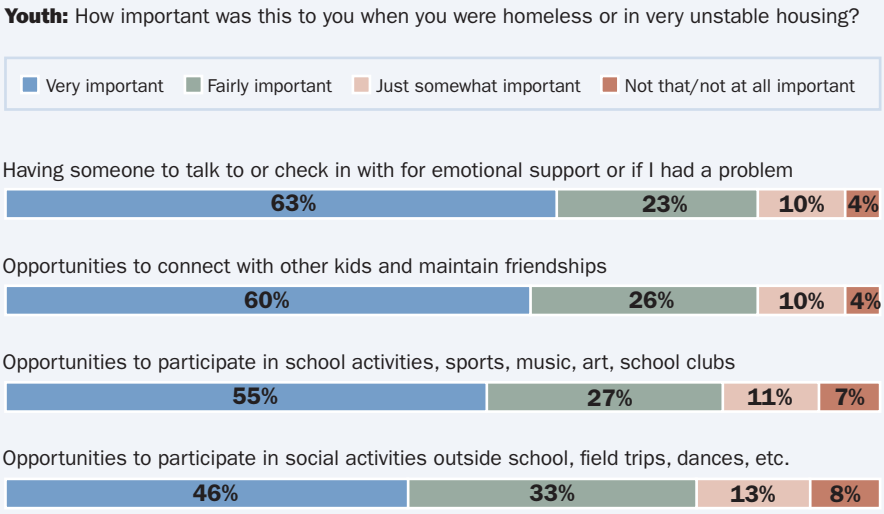
Need for Social and Emotional Connections

Youth who are or have been homeless emphasize the importance of personal relationships to their wellbeing. Many tell us that receiving motivation and encouragement; forming a close, trusting relationship with someone at school; having "normal" friendships and peer support; and having a personal mentor (either inside or outside of school) is or was a major factor in their ability to stay engaged and interested in school.

- Greater than six in 10 (63 percent) of youth say that having someone to talk to or check in with for emotional support was very important as they navigated the difficulties of homelessness.

- Youth also identify the opportunity to maintain friendships with their peers (60 percent), participate in school activities such as sports, music, and art (55 percent), and other social activities outside school such as field trips and dances (46 percent) as very important during this time in their lives.

Importance of Social and Emotional Connections for Youth



"I think I should have a better support system…I don't think that the stuff that I'm going through is appropriate for a 16-year old to go through. Like somebody I could talk to, like a counselor, every day at the school."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"Individual teachers and faculty played an important role as mentors, safety nets, and supports. I would not have known how to survive without them in my life."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

"My school continued to motivate me even though I was going through a VERY difficult time in my life with constant reassurance that they (staff and teachers) were there to support me no matter what happened."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

LOOKING FORWARD: POLICIES AND ACTION STEPS

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) addresses many concerns that were raised by currently and formerly homeless students, as well as state coordinators and district liaisons (a full comparison of ESSA and the concerns of students and educators raised in this report can be found in Appendix I). Given that the new provisions align so closely with what we heard from students and adults on the front lines of this issue, **it is essential that states, schools, and districts focus on fully implementing the measures regarding homeless students that ESSA has laid out.**

The following recommendations highlight paths forward through ESSA implementation, and go beyond the scope of the new law.

In Schools

1. **Refine and standardize systems for identifying homeless students** *(ESSA contains five separate amendments designed to increase the identification of homeless children and youth – see Appendix I for a full list).*

   - Ensure that *all* school staff, not just McKinney-Vento liaisons and coordinators, receive adequate training so that they can assist in identifying and supporting homeless students.
   - Gather residency information from students and families at *multiple* points throughout the year, not just at the beginning, and conduct regular reassessments to ensure the student is receiving the appropriate supports.
   - Provide training to staff to ensure that classrooms and schools are trauma sensitive, so that students feel more supported and comfortable to come forward and self-identify.
   - Expand outreach beyond shelters to include juvenile justice and child welfare touch-points, including law enforcement and child protective services.

2. **Focus on outreach efforts to inform homeless students and their families of their rights** *(ESSA requires that liaisons disseminate public notice of McKinney-Vento rights in locations frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth, in a manner and form understandable to parents, guardians, and youth).*

   - Significant proportions of liaisons believe that enhanced efforts to inform homeless students and parents about their rights and the services and supports available to them—both *inside* schools (45 percent) and *outside* schools (55 percent)—would make a significant difference in their willingness to actively seek help and support.

3. **Actively work with students to help them stay in school** *(ESSA addresses many issues of enrollment, academic records, and credit accrual – see Appendix I for a full list):* Beyond emotional supports and the tangible services discussed, many youth report that there were things schools could have done to make it easier for them to stay in school.

   - Be flexible with academic requirements when students struggle due to their lack of housing. This includes offering extensions for students who may not be able to access computers or the Internet after school hours, or giving students some leeway around late arrivals or absences due to homelessness. Additionally, provide alternative ways for students to access homework assignments or receive academic support when they have to miss school.

The King County Housing Authority

In Washington State, King County Housing Authority (KCHA) seeks to provide quality affordable housing opportunities and build community through partnerships, with the goal of helping low-income and homeless children to improve their academic and life prospects. To support this goal, KCHA works with families and a host of community partners to create more successful outcomes.

KCHA's housing programs provide 20,000 children with a place to call home. These young people live in some of the region's poorest, most at-risk households, where annual incomes average just $18,000. Many were born to immigrant and refugee parents, and nearly half live in homes where the primary language is not English. Prior to receiving KCHA housing assistance, more than 50 percent of these children and their families were homeless.

KCHA has been consistently recognized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a high performing housing authority. With HUD's designation of KCHA as a "Moving to Work" (MTW) agency in 2003, KCHA was afforded a high level of flexibility to redesign its federally-funded programs to respond to local circumstances. The MTW designation also allows KCHA to pilot innovative housing programs and test ways to increase the cost-effectiveness of federal housing programs, increase housing choices for low-income families, and encourage greater economic self-sufficiency of assisted housing residents. With its combination of housing, community facilities, and MTW flexibility, KCHA is uniquely positioned to provide housing and the delivery of services that help children achieve success in school. Data sharing between partners enables KCHA to track cohort outcomes, and informs changes to policies and program design.

The Student and Family Stability Initiative

KCHA launched the Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) during the 2013-14 school year in partnership with Highline Public Schools and Neighborhood House. The partnership arose from KCHA's close relationship with Highline Schools and Neighborhood House's knowledge of the local housing landscape and history of successful outcomes with rapid re-housing programs.

SFSI assists homeless families with elementary age children to find and secure housing. This includes flexible financial move-in assistance, short-term rental assistance (up to six months) and employment navigation services that help families to sustain their housing. SFSI has four primary goals:

1. Rapidly re-house homeless families.
2. Reduce the number of times a family moves during the school year.
3. Connect families with other services, such as employment.
4. Target transportation interventions so Highline Public Schools can redirect cost savings into other services.

KCHA currently targets elementary students and families who are McKinney-Vento eligible.

McKinney-Vento liaisons in the school district identify families eligible for SFSI and refer them to KCHA for baseline eligibility screening. Once the family passes the initial eligibility screening process, they are connected to Neighborhood House, a nonprofit agency that works with the family to determine their ability to take over rent payments once the short-term rental assistance has ended. SFSI works with families to find housing within their child's school attendance area.

Currently in its third school year of operation, the SFSI program is showing promising evidence of success:

- SFSI has reduced the length of time that families in the program were homeless by rehousing **97 formerly homeless families (389 total individuals, 249 of which are children).**
- 78 percent of households that have exited the program did so after receiving four months or less of rental assistance.
- Of households who exited SFSI**, 82 percent were stably housed six months after program exit.**
- **Monthly incomes for families exiting SFSI in the first two years of the program were 57% higher** than at entry, growing from $1,150 to $1,800 per month.

Looking forward, Senior Director of Housing Initiatives, Kristy Johnson, believes that more homeless children could be included in the initiative's long-term plan if additional funding can be secured to expand the program to additional school districts and pay for the employment navigator services, and also hopes that the program can incorporate an intervention targeted to serve unaccompanied youth at some point. In addition, Johnson shared lessons that KCHA has learned in implementing SFSI. She believes that at the onset of the program, it is essential to get more buy-in at the individual school level, which is something that they were trying to make up for during the third school year.

- Provide safe and secure spaces for students to study before and after school.
- Offer varied methods of earning credits, such as high-quality alternative education or online classes. These options can allow students to recover credits lost, and catch up more quickly so they can stay on track for graduation.
- Improve cooperation and communication between schools to ease the process of transferring credits and test scores. (ESSA requires that youth be able to transfer appropriate full or partial credit from coursework done at their previous school. Ensuring that the law is implemented fully will mean increased cooperation between schools, vigilance on the part of schools and communities, and strong oversight from the U.S. Department of Education.)
- Help homeless students navigate legal issues such as obtaining parental consent to reenroll, or participating in school activities. This is especially important for students who have difficult or strained relationships with parents or guardians.

4. **Create connections for homeless students to outside supports:** Connections with caring adults beyond the walls of the school are invaluable to youth personally. However, **young people tell us that these connections were not made nearly as frequently as they were needed.** And while they acknowledge and emphasize the importance of collaboration with outside entities, only 36 percent of liaisons report that they work "a great deal" with community organizations, agencies, or businesses to help provide services and supports. Another 37 percent work with these groups a fair amount, while 27 percent do so just some, or not at all. However, **those liaisons who work more frequently with outside entities give their districts much higher ratings on providing students with the services and supports they need.**
5. **Leverage early warnings systems to prevent student homelessness:** Early warning systems that track student attendance, behavior, and course performance can be leveraged to identify not only students who are falling behind academically, but also those students who may show these same warning signs due to housing struggles. Identifying students who are at risk for becoming homeless through these early warning systems can allow schools to preventatively connect them to the right supports before their housing situation becomes critical.

In Communities

Schools cannot manage the challenges of student homelessness alone – they must be able to collaborate with the stakeholders in their community who bring a wealth of supports and resources that we know homeless students so desperately need. Housing agencies, nonprofits, advocacy organizations, business leaders, youth services agencies, communities of faith, and others must become more aware of this issue, and reach out to form a network of support for students and schools to combat student homelessness.

1. **Build connections to local schools:** Liaisons emphasized that schools cannot do this work alone – support from outside entities is critical. This includes housing agencies, nonprofits, local businesses, faith-based organizations, local government, service providers, and other community-based agencies and programs that can fill in the gaps in services and supports that schools cannot provide.
2. **Work to raise awareness across the community and the nation:** Liaisons and students told us that in many cases, this problem remains invisible due to stigma, embarrassment, and fear. Community nonprofits and advocacy groups can help remove some of these barriers by raising awareness among the public that this problem is prevalent and rising, even in communities where it might not seem possible.

   Such public awareness campaigns can:

   - Lift up the voices of homeless youth and their families, and gather their ideas to address the issue in schools and communities.
   - Actively seek to engage a broader field of stakeholders, to include mentoring organizations, legal aid groups, domestic violence prevention organizations, and community-based education and social and emotional learning organizations.
   - Expand awareness of the problem in schools and communities, among policymakers and community influencers, and identify barriers to collaboration between these groups.
   - Raise awareness of the trauma and mental health issues that often accompany homelessness, and reach out to organizations equipped to provide support around these issues.
   - Focus attention on especially vulnerable populations, and coordinate with organizations best equipped to serve those students. For example: pregnant or parenting students; younger students; foreign students and immigrants; and LGBTQ students.

3. **Set community goals and use data to drive progress:** Many communities currently engage in collective impact efforts, and use data across a variety of social, economic, and educational measures to track progress. These communities should also disaggregate data by homelessness, and work towards achieving equal outcomes for homeless students.

Housing + High School = Success, A Toolkit by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)

In 2009, NAEHCY released Housing + High School = Success, a toolkit designed to offer community leaders a guide to implementing temporary housing models in their communities. The 2009 release described four temporary housing models – host homes, group homes, independent living, and emergency shelters – for unaccompanied youth, provided a detailed list of 10 steps to consider when creating a youth housing program, and offered profiles of seven successful programs throughout the country, including the Roadmap to Graduation program. NAEHCY updated the guide in 2012 to share new challenges and successes, as well as the stories of three new programs. In addition to the publication, NAEHCY's website contains links to useful documents from the example programs, including youth and family host home applications, power of attorney and parental consent forms, job descriptions, data collection tools, and other supportive resources. NAEHCY also maintains a listserv for people who are interested in the topic of how schools and communities can work together to provide housing for homeless youth.

TRUE COLORS FUND ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS EFFORTS

The True Colors Fund works to end homelessness among young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Founded in 2008, True Colors Fund has launched a series of initiatives to raise awareness and advocate for homeless LGBT youth, and provide resources to assist providers. Initiatives include:

- **#40toNoneDay:** A national day to raise public awareness about LGBT youth homelessness and to provide supporters with simple ways to make a difference.
- **Forty to None Network:** A national membership network for professionals who are working to address LGBT youth homelessness and reduce the disproportionate number of homeless youth who identify as LGBT from 40 percent to none. Forty to None Network members have exclusive access to resource directories, discussion groups, and the True U online learning platform.
- **True Inclusion Assessment:** A 360-degree agency assessment that allows providers to assess the culture and inclusiveness of their organization in a non-judgmental manner, and provides technical support to help those organizations create and implement a work plan to move towards creating a more inclusive environment.
- **The LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative** was launched in 2015 in partnership with five federal partners (U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness). This pilot program includes NEST: Collaborative to Prevent LBGTQ Youth Homelessness in Houston, TX, and the Safe and Supported Community Plan to Prevent Homelessness for LGBTQ Youth in Hamilton County, OH. Both pilot sites are working to develop strategies and prevention plans to ensure that no young person becomes homeless due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In States and the Nation

With the 2015 passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there is now a stronger federal mandate for homeless students to have access to the supports they need to remain in their home schools. The law also includes provisions for tracking outcomes for homeless students, opening the door to create accountability and set national goals around keeping these students in school and on track. With numbers of homeless students on the rise, the time is now to ask state and federal levels of government to double down on this issue.

1. **Work to ensure ESSA is fully implemented:** Enactment of laws is often only the beginning of an effort to change practice. Schools and districts must be educated on the new requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act under ESSA, and we must ensure that those requirements are fully carried out and funded as required by law.

   - The U.S. Department of Education must provide adequate oversight, guidance, and regulation to ensure the full and effective implementation of the legislation.
   - The U.S. Congress must fully fund the McKinney-Vento Act in order to ensure that school districts have the support necessary to fulfill the new mandates.
   - Private philanthropy and corporate foundations should target grants to school district McKinney-Vento programs to assist schools to offer services that cannot be provided through federal funding.
   - Improve outreach to parents and youth to communicate their rights under McKinney-Vento, and the services and supports available to them, both inside and outside the school.
   - Increase access to and improve legal services for homeless students.

2. **Increase efforts around affordable housing:** The problem of connecting students to housing was identified by liaisons and youth as one of their biggest obstacles, made more difficult by the chronic shortage of affordable housing in so many communities across the United States. Lawmakers must find ways to increase public sector funding to bring innovative housing concepts to scale, and examine restrictive regulations that may prevent unaccompanied youth or families of homeless students from qualifying for existing public funds. Efforts here could include:

   - Make the provision of safe housing available to homeless students, much as school breakfast and school lunch has become available to low-income students. While such an entitlement has costs, the cost to taxpayers and society of homeless students dropping out of school and failing to develop skills and credentials for productive work are far more costly.
   - Examine restrictive regulations that may prevent families of homeless students from qualifying for existing public funds, and find ways to remove or circumvent those restrictions.
   - Increase public sector funding to bring innovative housing concepts to scale, including public/private partnerships between schools, government agencies, and local nonprofits.
   - Provide supplemental state funding for school districts to use on housing at the discretion of the school and family, as done in Washington House Bill 1682.
   - Invest in community infrastructure and outreach, particularly in rural communities where shelters and public services are few and far between.

Washington House Bill 1682: The Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act

In March 2016, the Washington State Legislature passed the Homeless Stability and Opportunity Gap Act. The bill makes Washington the first state in the country to implement a grant program to promote the creation of state-level school-housing partnerships.

HB-1862 will provide much needed aid for homeless students across Washington, such as housing assistance, improved access to healthcare, and in-school supports. Key features of the Homeless Stability and Opportunity Gap Act include:

- State funding to allow the Department of Commerce to administer a grant program that would link homeless students and their families with stable housing near the student's original school district. Housing assistance may take the form of rental assistance, transportation assistance, emergency shelter, or housing case management.
- Under HB-1682, all school districts that have identified over 10 unaccompanied students are required to establish a point of contact in each middle and high school in the district to connect students to the district homeless liaison.
- HB-1682 will allow school nurses, counselors, and McKinney-Vento liaisons to authorize routine healthcare services for students when parents are not available.

3. **Remove barriers to access for unaccompanied youth:** Unaccompanied youth may struggle to access both housing and supportive services due to legal and logistical barriers. Efforts to remove those obstacles could include:

   - Examining restrictive regulations that may prevent unaccompanied youth from qualifying for existing public funds, and find ways to circumvent or remove those restrictions.
   - Increasing public sector funding to scale successful supportive housing models for unaccompanied youth such as host homes.

4. **Set a national high school graduation rate goal for homeless students:** Under the ESSA reauthorization, states are now required to track and report graduation rates for homeless students as they already do for other subgroups (such as low-income, minorities, English Language Learners, etc.) to close the opportunity gap on educational attainment. This is an opportunity to focus the attention of lawmakers, administrators and educators on the frequently poor academic outcomes for homeless students, and use the new data that will be gathered to advocate for smarter interventions and increased support.

   - States and the nation should set the goal of a 90 percent graduation rate for homeless students, and use the new required data to keep schools, districts, and states accountable.
   - Create a state & national report card on the education of homeless students.
   - Make homeless student data smarter and more accessible – this could include increased data sharing between agencies. One example could be allowing school liaisons to insert student data into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

HOST HOME PROGRAM EXAMPLES[43]

Alternative House: Fairfax, VA

Alternative House was founded in 1972 with the goal of providing young people with a safe and nurturing environment, as well as contributing to their educational success and positive future outcomes.

In 2009, Alternative House launched the Homeless Youth Initiative to support the young people they saw within Fairfax County who lacked support from a parent or guardian. The initiative provides these young people with safe and stable housing, allowing them to focus on completing their high school education and obtaining their diploma.

The Homeless Youth Initiative accomplishes this goal through three different models of housing:

- **The Vienna House:** a single-family home for young women enrolled in Fairfax County Public Schools. Supervision is provided 24 hours a day in this home.
- **Private host homes:** Alternative House helps facilitate host homes for young people by working within the community to find individuals willing to provide temporary homes for youth while they complete their high school education. Alternative House helps the teen and host form agreements about house rules, and the Host Home Coordinator supports the match through monthly visits to ensure that all is going smoothly, and helps mediate any conflict that arises.
- **Rental Subsidies:** The rental subsidies component of the initiative helps youth find a place to stay that is close to their school of origin. In many cases, this takes the form of a room in a home located near the school. The subsidies have the added benefits of assisting a family that may be struggling to make mortgage payments with some extra income, and removing the cost to the school of transporting the student from a remote shelter back to the school.

In addition, a mental health assessment is conducted for all young people entering into Alternative House programs.

In all of these housing arrangements, youth participating in the Homeless Youth Initiative receive housing and community support, as well as case management services, individual therapy, life skills education, tutoring, and assistance with emergency food and supplies.

Alternative House tailors their living situations to best fit the needs of each individual student. They have scattered site apartments, as well as the ability to provide rent subsidies to youth who are already stably housed but need some assistance to make payments.

The staff of Alternative House believes that close coordination with the schools is critical. Each week, Fairfax County Public School's McKinney-Vento social workers assign each youth with an Alternative House case manager. This way, the school and Alternative House are aware of any issues that may affect academic performance or if a student's school performance or attendance is slipping as problems arise.

Furthermore, Alternative House finds that after a young person is stably housed, many students are still dealing with other issues that can negatively impact school performance. Language barriers, undiagnosed mental health issues and undiagnosed learning disabilities are all common. For this reason, wrap-around services are crucial to assist in overcoming these barriers and helping students graduate.

Roadmap to Graduation: Adrian, MI

Through the Roadmap to Graduation program, students are linked with mentor families who offer support, housing, and guidance. To be eligible, a student must be attending school and be on track to graduate. While the program primarily deals with high school seniors, Roadmap has accepted some juniors on pace to graduate in the following school year. Adrian Public School's McKinney-Vento office coordinates all referrals to the Roadmap to Graduation and student referrals come from any school district in the county.

From the onset of the program, Roadmap strategically partnered with Catholic Charities due to their experience administering background checks and assessing prospective homes for the foster care system. Prior to approving a match, Roadmap meets with the family and the young person to ensure a good fit.

In addition to pairing homeless students with mentor homes, Roadmap to Graduation provides students with free counseling for the duration of the program and has helped find employment for every unaccompanied youth that has come through the program, primarily through the local United Way affiliate. In some cases, employment can be linked to a credit recovery program through the local intermediate school district, which had previously been set up for students with disabilities inside of the district.

Roadmap to Graduation has partnered with a number of community partners apart from Catholic Charities to bundle funding streams beyond just federal homeless dollars, including suicide prevention funds, LGBTQ groups sponsoring a particular student, dropout prevention dollars, and substance abuse resources.

In the eight years that Roadmap has been in existence, the program has served about 70 students and boasts a 100 percent graduation and employment rate.

Housing Options for Students in Transition (HOST) Program, Mason County, WA

The HOST program offers support to homeless students between the ages of 16 and 21 through community-based host homes or supportive transitional housing. Participants receive financial assistance, life skills development, and educational support to see them through high school graduation or completion of their GED. HOST students may receive services for up to 12 months after graduating high school or receiving their GED.

Prior to signing a host home agreement, students and their prospective host family must undergo a thorough application process, in which:

- Students and families undergo background checks by Washington State Patrol and a child protective services' registry check; and
- The student completes a needs assessment and develops an Education Support Plan.

The HOST program seeks to place students in homes close to their school. However, when this is not possible, students are provided transportation through the district.

HOST also employs youth coordinators who offer a number of supplemental supports to the students, including:

- Coordinating resources for the student;
- Working as a mentor, educational advocate, crisis manager, and partner in problem solving;
- Working with the student to identify family or friends where the student may be able to live or placing the student in a host home;
- Assisting the student through the application process and needs assessment;
- Monitoring the student's school attendance and performance; and
- Working together to set and achieve educational and employment goals.

The Mason County HOST program receives funding from organizations such as several local rotary clubs, the Gates Foundation, the Partnership on Family Homelessness, the Mason County Housing Coalition, and the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound.

The HOST program currently works with over 40 students. Since the program's inception in 2013, eligible participants have a 98 percent high school graduation rate and 85 percent have gone on to post-secondary education or employment within six months.

Spokane County Community Services – Partnership with Public Elementary Schools

The Spokane County Community Services, Housing, and Community Development Department (CSHCD) is dedicated to strengthening communities and helping the region's neediest residents achieve and maintain safer, healthier, and more independent lives.

In 2014, Spokane County CSHCD began to look for creative ways to combine housing services and education to keep homeless students in their schools of origin by providing rental assistance to their families. Spokane County CSHCD knew of other programs that had combined educational requirements and supports with housing assistance, but most were extremely expensive, and wouldn't have been replicable with their budget. Looking at existing funding streams, Spokane County CSHCD decided that adding an educational component to the short-term rental assistance vouchers that it was already providing would allow it to tackle both issues at a very low cost. The addition would add requirements around school attendance and homework completion to the Housing Stability Plans that families completed as part of the rental assistance program. It would also engage teachers to track their students on these metrics, and housing case managers to follow up with families who were falling off track to meet the agreed upon goals. In order to make this combination of housing assistance and education possible, CSHCD knew that it would need to form a strong partnership with the local schools.

Spokane County CSHCD first approached Central Valley School District because of an already close relationship with the McKinney-Vento district liaison, and then from there expanded to two other high-poverty elementary schools: Cheney and Airway Heights. CSHCD reached out to school administrators with the idea of providing short-term rental assistance to needy families, and tying that housing stability plan to their child's attendance at school.

After new funding was allocated for calendar year 2016, the program was expanded to include additional school districts, and became known as ***Spokane County's Homeless Student Program.***

Through the Homeless Student Program, families receive assistance with rent, deposits, and application fees for six to nine months, as long as they adhere to their Housing Stability Plan. The Housing Stability Plan is designed to address the focus areas of physical health, substance abuse, mental health, family relationships, housing, employment, financial status, and most importantly – student educational objectives.

Spokane County's Homeless Student Program goal is to provide rental subsidies to homeless families who commit to staying in the school district in which that the child is currently enrolled, thus decreasing homelessness and improving educational outcomes. The families will be given counseling and assistance with locating suitable housing that meets the program participants' needs in terms of size, condition, and affordability. The assistance and supportive services to program participants will be provided by using a progressive engagement approach, helping them maintain current suitable housing and/or avoiding displacement or eviction. Supportive services include linking individuals to other community service providers who may be able to help program participants overcome barriers to obtaining or maintaining housing.

The current program will serve 35 families. Overall approximate cost per family is around $9,000, with 65 percent of the costs going directly to rental/deposit assistance.

The previous program served 11 families, 10 of which successfully completed the program. All 10 of those families stayed in the school district and are still permanently housed, most with little to no subsidies.

Spokane County CSHCD highlighted several best practices:

- **Streamlined funding:** Patrick Stretch, the Community Development Specialist with the Housing Department noted that because CSHCD manages funds for both housing and education, it was fairly simple to tie the two funding streams together and create a program that would address both issues.
- **Low-cost, simple design:** The funds for housing vouchers were already available, and had very low barriers to entry for potential families. In addition, the rental assistance program was already up and running, with housing case managers and a full system in place. Adding the educational component was a fairly light lift for staff.
- **Buy-in from school staff:** The director of Spokane County CSHCD made it a priority for schools to serve as a hub for many other health and wellbeing services. For example, Airway Heights has a community health clinic on site that offers dental and health care, and the after-school program at the school is funded by the city. With schools already accustomed to having other types of services running on their campuses, adding a housing component was an easy sell. Stretch also emphasized the important role that teachers and administrators have in this program. Their buy-in and willingness to be a part of the program has been critical to its early successes. Because school staff viewed this program as enabling parents to move towards steady employment, and students to remain in school and do well, they were willing to go the extra mile to make it possible.

Eventually, CSHCD hopes to be able to conduct a statewide pilot that could explore the use of more flexible funds.

Implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act

The Every Student Succeeds Act signified major policy wins for homeless students and advocates alike. Now that the President has signed the act into law, the challenge turns to ESSA implementation.

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) has created a webpage dedicated to assisting states, communities, and schools in their efforts to implement ESSA through various materials, including training and professional development resources, sample local policies, monitoring checklists, transportations, and other state and local documents.[44] As implementation moves forward, NAEHCY plans to update the site with additional resources. Access this resource at http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/essa.

FEDERAL GOAL TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released Opening Doors, the nation's first comprehensive federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. The plan is focused on four key goals, including ending homelessness for families, children, and youth in 2020. In 2012, USICH released an amendment to Opening Doors, which was developed to specifically address what strategies and supports should be implemented to improve the educational outcomes for children and youth, and the steps that need to be taken to assist unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. The Federal Framework to End Youth Homelessness includes improving data quality and collection methods, as well as building capacity for service delivery. This includes coordinating federal data systems that collect information on youth experiencing homelessness and their receipt of services, developing better strategies for quantifying the number of homeless youth, and launching a national study on the prevalence and characteristics of youth homelessness.[45] Gathering more accurate data is essential to advancing efforts to achieve the goals of Opening Doors. With more accurate data and increased understanding of local challenges, service providers can better target their efforts and resources to identify and serve homeless families and youth and ensure that their experience of homelessness is as brief as possible and does not reoccur.

CONCLUSION

"I just so sincerely believe that, if we can create change for them while they're young, and empower them with the tools to be successful in school, to graduate on time, to understand that they have a right to remain in their school of origin and not have to go to four or five different schools in the school year…those are the small things that may seem insignificant to the layman, but in the end, I believe we're creating change so that our children that are in our schools don't end up being homeless adults."

—STATE COORDINATOR

Student homelessness is a growing problem and has a profound and disruptive impact on the lives of young people. Our communities and country cannot solve problems they do not fully understand, and raising awareness of the challenges of youth homelessness is a critical first step. There is power in listening.

Young people themselves tell us that they understand the value of receiving an education, and see it as their way out of the cycle of homelessness and poverty. But many are fearful of coming forward, or felt ashamed and labeled when they did. We must change that. In turn, local liaisons and state coordinators charged with helping homeless students tell us they are sure these students have the capabilities to succeed if we give them the supports they need, and they provided insights that chart our path forward.

With increased momentum around accountability, access to education, and focus on supports through ESSA, the time to act is now. We must rally our communities, think beyond the traditional circle of stakeholders working on issues of homelessness, and give these youth every opportunity to stay in school and on track. Across sectors, inside and outside of the school system, we must work together to break down the barriers of fear and stigma, and help these students overcome the odds. We cannot ignore this problem, or treat it as something that happens in communities that are not our own. Going forward, we must find every opportunity to collaborate, and support our young people and their schools. We must ensure that they have every opportunity to overcome the hurdles that homelessness puts in their path, and go on to a better and brighter future.

"You feel like you're just by yourself. You've just got to get everything done the best way you can. At first, I used to be like, 'just forget about it, I'm just not going to go to school, I just don't care, just forget about it.' But, I don't want to be that person. I don't want to be like, 'I wish I would have done this, I wish I would have done that.' I'm just going to do it."

—YOUTH INTERVIEW

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We wish to express the utmost gratitude to the young people who participated in interviews and surveys for this report. Their self-awareness, poise, and honesty about their experiences of being in school and homeless were extraordinary and compelling, and this report would not have been possible without their willingness and courage to share their experiences so openly.

A very special thanks to the hundreds of McKinney-Vento state coordinators and district liaisons who shared with us their hopes, fears, daily struggles, and honest thoughts on best practices, challenges, and opportunities around the education of homeless students.

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The views reflected in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Raikes Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, State Farm, Casey Family Programs, or Polk Brothers Foundation.

METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct interviews and surveys among currently and formerly homeless youth to inform this report, Hart Research Associates collaborated with the staff at a variety of youth outreach organizations—both national and regional—as well as a number of youth shelters, drop-in centers, and community organizations around the country. Furthermore, in order to include formerly homeless youth who may be more difficult to reach using traditional survey methods such as online and telephone interviews or are highly mobile, the researchers utilized an intercept methodology at ten diverse locations around the United States. This also allowed for the inclusion of formerly homeless youth who may have never been connected to any such organizations.

Hart Research conducted the following qualitative and quantitative research between October 2015 and February 2016:

1. One telephone focus group with state coordinators, and two telephone focus groups with McKinney-Vento liaisons
2. Quantitative online survey among 504 McKinney-Vento liaisons
3. 44 in-depth interviews with currently homeless youth in diverse locations around the country
4. Quantitative survey of a cross section of 158 18-24 year-olds who experienced homelessness at some point during their middle- and/or high- school careers

Youth Survey respondents were screened at the beginning of the survey to ensure they qualified based on the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless youths.

A note on the scales used in the quantitative research:

- In the youth survey, metrics of importance and performance are based on Likert-type scales with defined response options (e.g., very good job, good job, fair job, or poor job).
- In the liaison survey, metrics of importance and performance are based on 0 to 10 numeric rating scales with defined anchors (e.g., 10 = very good job and 0 = falling far short).

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Paths Forward and ESSA Implementation Comparisons

	Research Findings	ESSA Amendments
Identification of Homeless Students	Seven in 10 liaisons (69 percent) believe their schools are doing a good job identifying homeless youth; however, they also point to major barriers to identification and express concern that they are "missing" many homeless students in their communities. 67 percent of formerly homeless youth say they were uncomfortable (nearly four in 10 were *very* uncomfortable) talking with people at their school about their housing situation and related challenges. In fact, many reported that *no one* at their school was ever aware of their situation.	Identification of homeless children and youth is added to: The activities and services for which state McKinney-Vento grants must be used. The professional development activities for liaisons and other school personnel that states must provide. The list of barriers that SEAs and LEAs must regularly review and revise. The purpose of coordination among liaisons and community and housing agencies. The purpose of LEA subgrants.
Public Notice/Awareness of Rights	Significant proportions of liaisons believe that enhanced efforts to inform homeless students and parents about their rights and the services and supports available to them—both *inside* schools (45 percent) and *outside* schools (55 percent)—would make a big difference.	Local liaisons must disseminate public notice of McKinney-Vento rights in locations frequented by parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth, in a manner and form understandable to parents, guardians, and youth.
Resources	While the problem of student homelessness has intensified, the resources available to address it have not kept up. When asked to identify the biggest obstacles to providing students and families with the services and supports they need, 78 percent of liaisons said funding. When asked to identify the biggest obstacles to providing students and families with the services and supports they need, 57 percent said time, staff, and resources	Raises the authorized funding level for the McKinney-Vento EHCY program to $85 million All LEAs that receive Title I Part A funds must reserve funds to support homeless students. Local Title I plans must describe the services the local educational agency (LEA) will provide to support the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth, including services provided with the Title I homeless reservation, in coordination with the services the LEA provides under the McKinney-Vento Act.
Liaison Capacity	Over 90 percent of liaisons report that they work in another official capacity other than as a homeless liaison within their school district, and 89 percent tell us they spend half of their time or less on their responsibilities as homeless liaisons.	Local liaisons must be able to carry out their duties described in the law

	Research Findings	ESSA Amendments
Training	One-third of liaisons (34 percent) report that they are the only person within their school district who receives training to help identify and intervene with homeless youth and families. Only a minority (44 percent) of liaisons report most staff are aware of the problem and knowledgeable about the signs to look for. Among those liaisons whose school districts do provide training, three in four rate that training as extremely or very helpful. And liaisons from school districts that provide training to multiple staff report that their schools are doing a better job of addressing the problem overall, and specifically of identifying homeless youth.	State Coordinators must develop and implement professional development programs for liaisons and other LEA personnel to improve their identification of homeless children and youth and heighten their awareness of, and capacity to respond to, specific needs in the education of homeless children and youth. Such training must include information on certain specified federal definitions of homelessness. SEAs and LEAs must adopt policies and practices to ensure that school district liaisons participate in professional development and other technical assistance activities, as determined appropriate by the State Coordinator. Local liaisons must ensure that school personnel providing McKinney-Vento services receive professional development and other support.
School Stability	Half of homeless students had to change schools, and many did so multiple times.	In determining the school that is in a child or youth's best interest to attend, LEAs must: Make a best interest determination, with a presumption that staying in the school of origin is in the child or youth's best interest, unless it is against the wishes of the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth. Consider student-centered factors related to the child's or youth's best interest, including factors related to the impact of mobility on the achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youth Give priority to the wishes of the parent or guardian, or the unaccompanied youth.
Enrollment Barriers	Three out of five youth who had to change schools at some point during their homelessness report that this process was difficult to navigate, given the various logistical and legal barriers that they experienced. The majority of youth told us that proof of residency requirements (62 percent) and lack of cooperation between their new and old schools (56 percent) posed a major challenge for them while changing schools	Homeless children and youth must be enrolled in school immediately, even if they are unable to produce records normally required for enrollment, such as previous academic records, records of immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, or other documentation; and even if they have missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness. Enrolling schools must immediately contact the school last attended by the child or youth to obtain relevant academic and other records.
Credit Accrual	Other key challenges cited by homeless students that made changing schools or enrolling in a new school difficult included falling behind on credits due to missing school (48 percent).	States must have procedures to identify and remove barriers that prevent students from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies. Liaisons must implement these procedures for unaccompanied homeless youth

	Research Findings	ESSA Amendments
College Preparation	Only 42 percent of youth, but 65 percent of liaisons say schools are doing a good job.	State plans must describe how homeless youth will receive assistance from school counselors to advise, prepare, and improve their readiness for college. Local liaisons must ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth informed of their status as independent students for college financial aid and may obtain assistance to receive verification for the FAFSA.
Re-enrolling Out of School Youth	The homeless liaisons and youth included in this research report that getting youth who have stopped attending school re-enrolled is particularly challenging. Fully three in four liaisons consider re-enrollment a challenge, with four in 10 saying it is "very" challenging. One-third of liaisons believe their districts are doing a good job reenrolling homeless students who have dropped out of school.	States must have procedures to ensure that youth separated from public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services. McKinney-Vento subgrant funds may be used to attract, engage, and retain homeless children and youth who are not enrolled in school.
Staying Connected to School and Community	86 percent of homeless youth identified the opportunity to maintain friendships with their peers. 82 percent cited participating in school activities such as sports, music, art, or school clubs. 79 percent highlighted engaging in outside school activities, such as field trips and dances during their homelessness.	States must have procedures to ensure that homeless children and youth who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities. SEAs and LEAs must develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention of homeless students in school, including barriers due to fees, fines, and absences. The terms "enroll" and "enrollment" include attending classes and participating fully in school activities.
Making Connections to Housing and Services	Students and liaisons agree that, by far, the most significant challenge is connecting homeless youth to housing. While both youth and liaisons identify safe, stable housing as imperative to these young peoples' success in school, only 25 percent of youth and 29 percent of liaisons believe their schools are doing a good job on this vexing issue. Roughly six in 10 of the young people we surveyed were never connected with any outside organization or entity during their homelessness, while 87 percent of those who *were* report that these connections were important and valuable to them.	Liaisons must refer homeless families and students to housing services, in addition to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services. Local liaisons are authorized to affirm whether children and youth meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness, to qualify them for HUD homeless assistance programs.
Unaccompanied Youth	90 percent of liaisons report that they work with unaccompanied youth, and that this demographic of homeless students are exceptionally difficult both to identify and to serve. Fully half of liaisons report that unaccompanied youth present a major challenge when it comes to connecting them to the services and supports they need.	Local liaisons must ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth: Are enrolled in school. Have opportunities to meet the same State academic achievement standards as the State establishes for other children and youth, including by implementing procedures to remove barriers that prevent homeless youth from receiving credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed at a prior school. Are informed of their status as independent students for college financial aid and may obtain assistance to receive verification for the FAFSA.

Appendix II: Major Wins for Homeless Students in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Last year, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, dramatically altering the nation's K-12 education policies. Among the changes are widespread policy wins for homeless students in communities across the country.

Of the major changes, ESSA increases funding for McKinney-Vento to $85 million per year for fiscal year 2017 through 2020, representing a 21 percent boost from the current level of $70 million. Under the new law, McKinney-Vento subgrants may now be used for emergency assistance needed to allow homeless children and youth to attend and participate fully in school.

In addition to the increased funding levels, ESSA significantly changes the way Title I funds of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are spent. Specifically, ESSA requires that State and Local Title I plans explicitly be laid out in terms of supports and services provided, and all local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving Title 1A funds must set aside a portion of their funds to support the education of homeless students. The new law also allows Title I funds to be used for services typically not covered by Title I, including the salaries of local liaisons and transportation supports. In addition, state report cards are now required to include disaggregated information on the graduation rates and academic achievement of homeless students.

ESSA requires every state to designate a State Coordinator who **has the time necessary to sufficiently carry out their duties.** SEAs and LEAs must also adopt policies and procedures to ensure that liaisons participate in professional development to improve their ability to identify homeless youth.

The new law also requires that school districts designate local liaisons who are able to carry out their duties. Local liaisons are **required to publicly disseminate the rights of homeless students under McKinney-Vento and ensure that school personnel providing McKinney-Vento services receive professional development and other supports.** In addition to educational resources, **liaisons are required to refer homeless families or unaccompanied students to housing services.**

ESSA also offers new procedures when conflicts arise over the school of best interest for the student. The new procedures mandate that LEAs must:

- Make their decision with the presumption that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest for the child or youth unless it is determined to be against the wishes of the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth;
- Provide a written explanation, including the right to appeal, if ruling that the school of origin is not in the student's best interest; and
- Give priority to the wishes of unaccompanied youth (or parents, in the case of homeless youth who are living with their parents) when making determinations.

In the case that students choose to change schools, or are required to change schools because it has been determined not to be in their best interest to stay, states must have procedures in place that ensure:

- Homeless students are enrolled in a new school immediately, regardless of any missed deadlines; and
- Youth are able to transfer appropriate full or partial credit from coursework done at their previous school.

In addition, ESSA stipulates that states must have policies to ensure that both students who changed schools and those who remain in their school of origin do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities.

Additionally, ESSA permits local liaisons the authorization to affirm whether children and youth meet the HUD definition of homelessness, qualifying them for HUD homeless assistance programs.

Appendix III: Frequently Used Terms

District Liaison: Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every LEA is required to designate a district liaison, even if the LEA does not receive a McKinney-Vento subgrant. The district liaison serves as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers, and other service providers. The liaison is responsible for coordinating services to ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically.[46]

The Every Student Succeeds Act: In December 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, dramatically altering the nation's K-12 education policies. ESSA is the newest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which established the federal government's expanded role in funding the nation's public education system, and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. While the federal requirement of annual tests for students in grades three through eight remains, ESSA represents a major shift of power from the federal government to states in terms of holding schools accountable for student achievement. In addition, ESSA amended the existing McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to bolster services for homeless children and youth.

Local Educational Agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools.

McKinney-Vento Definition of Homeless: According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, a person who is homeless refers to:

(1) An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

(2) An individual or family with 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, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;

(3) An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including hotels and motels paid for by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations, congregate shelters, and transitional housing);

(4) An individual who resided in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided;

(5) An individual or family who:

  (A) Will imminently lose their housing, including housing they own, rent, or live in without paying rent, are sharing with others, and rooms in hotels or motels not paid for by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations, as evidenced by:

    (i) A court order resulting from an eviction action that notifies the individual or family that they must leave within 14 days;

    (ii) The individual or family having a primary nighttime residence that is a room in a hotel or motel and where they lack the resources necessary to reside there for more than 14 days; or

    (iii) Credible evidence indicating that the owner or renter of the housing will not allow the individual or family to stay for more than 14 days, and any oral statement from an individual or family seeking homeless assistance that is found to be credible shall be considered credible evidence for purposes of this clause;

  (B) Has no subsequent residence identified; and

  (C) Lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.

(6) Unaccompanied youth and homeless families with children and youth defined as homeless under other Federal statutes who:

  (A) Have experienced a long term period without living independently in permanent housing;

  (B) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period; and

(C) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment.[47]

Homeless Children and Youth: According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the term "homeless children and youths:"

(A) Means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (B) includes:

(i) Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.

(ii) 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.

(iii) Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.

(iv) Migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this part because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).[48]

HUD Definition of Homelessness: An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; as well an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.[49]

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (referred to as McKinney-Vento throughout this report) is a federal law that provides for immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth, and provides federal funding to states and school districts for the purpose of supporting homeless children and youth.

State Educational Agency (SEA): The State board of education or other agency primarily responsible for the supervision of public elementary and secondary schools in a State.

State Coordinator: Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, each state must appoint a State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. The State coordinator's primary responsibilities are to: develop and carry out the State's McKinney-Vento plan; gather valid, reliable, and comprehensive information on the problems faced by homeless children and youth, the progress of State & Local Education Agencies (SEAs & LEAs) in addressing those problems, and the success of McKinney-Vento programs; coordinate services on behalf of the McKinney-Vento program; provide technical assistance to LEAs in coordination with local McKinney-Vento District Liaison; and, upon request, provide the U.S. Department of Education with any information the Department determines necessary to assess the educational needs of homeless children and youth.[50]

Unaccompanied Youth: The term unaccompanied youth refers to a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.[51]

U.S. Department of Education (ED): The agency of the federal government that establishes policy for, administers and coordinates most federal assistance to education.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): The department of the federal government that institutes and administers all federal programs dealing with better housing, urban renewal, home finance, promoting civil rights in housing, and metropolitan planning.

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH): USICH coordinates and catalyzes the federal response to homelessness, working in close partnership with Cabinet Secretaries and other senior leaders across our 19 federal member agencies.

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