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# Advocating for the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act: The Role of Professional Counselors

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## Introduction

“There is a lot that happens around the world we cannot control. We cannot stop earthquakes, we cannot prevent droughts, and we cannot prevent all conflict, but when we know where the hungry, the homeless and the sick exist, then we can help”. This quote by Jan Schakowsky (Quin, 2012), the U.S. Representative for Illinois’s 9th congressional district, speaks about an issue that has become prevalent in today’s society. Mrs. Schakowsky is correct; we cannot prevent the natural disasters that affect our country, our cities, and our towns. In those situations we are forced to be reactive and assist when and where disaster strikes. However, in the case of the homeless, hungry, and sick, we, as a civilized society must take great effort to alleviate the suffering. We must all be proactive in our personal and professional lives to bring relief to the situation.

In the education arena, the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act (MCKV) was developed to eliminate the discrimination of homeless students by protecting their rights and ensuring they receive the same quality education as all other students.

The definition of “homeless student” has garnered much debate through the years. Is the student homeless if they appear well dressed and attends school on a regular basis? What about if the student chose to leave home or was “kicked out”? Is the student homeless if they live with another family? A variety of factors must be considered when identifying homeless students and providing appropriate services. Data

## Abstract

Homeless youth in the United States is rapidly increasing with more children living in unstable or temporary environments. They may encounter difficulties meeting enrollment requirements, have poor attendance, low academic performance, and experience behavioral and emotional issues. The reauthorization of McKinney-Vento Act (MCKV) in 2002 was created to overcome these obstacles. However, many school districts are not implementing these regulations and very little research exists on the effectiveness of MCKV, which this paper will explore.

is very scarce regarding how effective MCKV is in truly aiding homeless students. An extensive review of the literature was conducted with very little true data being presented.

This paper advocates for MCKV and other supportive services to strengthen its intention to ensure academic success of homeless children despite their extenuating circumstances. It will discuss the role of educators, specifically professional counselors, in ensuring homeless students have equal and supportive access to a successful education. Finally, the paper will call for more empirical studies to aid in the evaluation of MCKV's implementation and effect on academic achievement of students identified as homeless.

### **Literature Review**

Several authors cited increases in homelessness throughout the United States, with children and youth homelessness on the rise (Cunningham, Harwood, & Hall, 2010; Duffield, 2001; Hendricks & Barkley, 2012; Gargiulo, 2006; Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, & Knight, 2011; Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; James & Lopez, 2003; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Petersburg, 2008). Homelessness is caused primarily by a lack of affordable housing and low family incomes (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). Cunningham et al. (2010) further revealed low-income families are more prone to residential instability (e.g., frequently moving), which is associated with poor academic outcomes among children. When looking at data from the National KIDS COUNT Program, 23% of children experienced poverty in the United States in 2011. In Georgia, 26% of children experienced poverty, slightly above the national average. Five years ago only 18% of children experienced poverty in the United States, and 20% in Georgia (National KIDS COUNT Program, 2006). Thus revealing a 5% increase in national poverty and 6% increase in state poverty within a 5 year span; this data relates to what many authors have cited, an increase in poverty and homelessness among children is visibly noted and continues to rise.

The McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act was created and reauthorized in response to residential instability, in order to increase academic performance by assisting with transportation and school enrollment (Cunningham et al., 2010; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; James & Lopez, 2003). According to this Act, homelessness is defined by "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (Department of Education, 2002). Once identified as homelessness, residency and documentation requirements are waived, in order to ensure immediate school enrollment; homeless students have access to all programs and services as their non-homeless peers; and students may continue to attend their school of origin, or school of choice, as transportation is provided. With the reauthorization of MCKV, policymakers and advocates hoped to see increases in academic performance and outcome by assisting homeless families with transportation, thus creating stability in the school environment.

When reviewing the literature for academic outcomes based on MCKV assistance, very little is found. However, research on how MCKV aided in higher attendance

rates based on school mobility/transportation assistance is found (Cunningham et al., 2010; James & Lopez, 2003; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). These studies revealed an increase in school attendance based on transportation assistance. Other articles on MCKV highlight the severe lack of the identification of homeless students in order to receive such aid (Duffield, 2001; Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; James & Lopez, 2003; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Petersburg, 2008); yet none was found on how to better identify and track homeless students. Instead, articles providing recommendations for homeless liaisons (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; James & Lopez, 2003; Petersburg, 2008), for educators and community members (Gargiulo, 2006; Grothaus et al., 2011; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Knowlton, 2006) is available on how to better assist homeless families.

On the other hand, an evaluation directed by the Planning and Evaluation Services of the United States Department of Education (U.S. DOE, 2002) revealed gradual, consistent progress from most states after surveying MCKV state coordinators and conducting site visits to local school districts. These states made changes and adjustments to their policies and procedures addressing some of the obstacles impeding on the equal educational rights of homeless children. The study also found more efforts are necessary and significant barriers to education of homeless children still exist. These barriers include costs relating to transportation of homeless children to and from their schools of origin, enrollment obstacles due to lack of proper verification of guardianship, school and immunization records, and a continued lack of understanding from school personnel in reference to the educational needs of homeless children (Cunningham et al., 2010). The above mentioned evaluation by the U.S. DOE points out homeless students also face continued challenges accessing federal and state education programs such as gifted and talented, Head Start, special education, and bilingual/ESL (U.S. DOE, 2002).

This paper advocates for MCKV and other supportive services to strengthen its intention to ensure academic success of homeless children despite their extenuating circumstances. It will discuss the role of educators, specifically professional counselors, in ensuring homeless students have equal and supportive access to a successful education.



One of the primary goals of MCKV is to improve academic achievement by removing barriers to equal educational opportunities for homeless students. Prior to the reauthorization of MCKV in 2002, data in the area of academic performance of homeless children was lacking due to states and districts not collecting and providing disaggregated student achievement data of homeless students. According to findings of the U.S. DOE (2002), the lack of reporting was due to states not identifying homeless students in their database systems, therefore, not being able to measure their performance and track their progress over time.

In 2002, these data reporting issues improved greatly with the reauthorization of MCKV. States are now required to submit “verifiable” and “school-based” data on homeless children and include them in local and state accountability systems (U.S. DOE, 2006). This strict federal data collection and reporting requirement applies to all states beginning with the 2006-2007 school year and allows for a more accurate picture of the state of homeless education. Data now includes the number of homeless students targeted under MCKV, the specific types of services provided by subgrantees, any obstacles to education, and student achievement reports in reading and mathematics. In addition to the required data collection and reporting of homeless education, the reauthorization legislation mandates all school districts designate a local liaison, traditionally the school social worker, to oversee the implementation of the Act, ensure enrollment of homeless students, and

to raise awareness of issues relating to homelessness and homeless education (U.S. DOE, 2006).

According to a report by the National Center for Homeless Education (2012) for the school year 2010-11, 52% of homeless students enrolled in grades 3-5 who took the state reading test, met or exceeded proficiency standards in reading. Forty-nine percent of homeless students in high school who took the state reading test met or exceeded the proficiency standards in reading. In mathematics 51% of students in grades 3-5 and 44% of high school students who took the state mathematics test met or exceeded proficiency standards. This data represents big increases from prior years, but it also represents the continued need to address academic achievement of homeless students.

The McKinney-Vento Act has been around for over two decades. In order to find accurate evidence of increased academic performance two things must occur: (1) better identification and tracking of homeless children and youth, and (2) studies of academic performance and outcomes for students receiving MCKV aid. As James and Lopez (2003) stated, “this lack of data presents major obstacles for researchers attempting to determine the extent to which districts are carrying out the law and the extent to which the provision impacts student performance” (p. 138).

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## Advocating for the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act: The Role of Professional Counselors

Many researchers and advocates focused their studies on the prevalence of homelessness in the American population and its negative consequences on individuals and families. Burt and Aron (2000) reported 3.5 million people will experience homelessness annually. Consistent to this theory, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2012) revealed more than 3 million people reported as homeless each year. While this number may appear to be low given the total population of the United States, it is important to acknowledge homelessness may be underreported in general as many individuals often counted live in shelters, receive government assistance or participate in the national census. However, many individuals do not meet the aforementioned criteria. For example, a homeless individual may be homeless temporarily, may not apply for services, or may not be living in a shelter but rather living with friends, family or on the street.

According to recent research, the rate of homelessness increased since the 1980s. In the past, the majority of the homelessness was considered to be men or people living in urban cities. However, current statistics show an increase in children, women, and families becoming homeless. In 2012, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty revealed 1.3 million children reported as homeless and one third of the homeless population consisted of families. Homelessness seems to be a growing epidemic with implications for cost of living, healthcare and lack of affordable housing. In relation, severe poverty and lack of affordable housing are the two main contributors to homelessness (Duffield, Heybach, & Julianelle, 2009). Possible contributors are increasing housing costs, lower or constant wages, and unemployment. Increasing housing costs are impacted by supply and demand, where prices increase based on greater demands for housing than supply available.

Homelessness impacts children at high rates; out of 41% of those living in extreme poverty, 36% are homeless families (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2000). With more children reported as homeless and not succeeding in schools, Congress created the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987 to help homeless students achieve academically in schools (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). The Act was amended and renamed the McKinney-Vento Act (MCKV) in 2002 to expand the definition of homelessness and to ensure access to education and other supportive services is given to homeless children and youth. The amended reauthorization of MCKV focuses on identifying performance barriers to homeless students’ education and outlines the services or rights educators are obligated to provide to this population (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

In order to determine who qualifies for services under MCKV, Congress defined homeless children and youth to include students who do not have a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (Department of Education [DOE], 2004).

According to Title VII-B of MCKV (DOE, 2004), the definition of homelessness expands to include children living in the following conditions:

- a) sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- b) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- c) living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- d) abandoned hospitals;
- e) or awaiting foster care placements;
- f) children and youth 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;
- g) or children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- h) and migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

While MCKV focuses on the needs of the homeless population in general, Title VII-B focuses solely on the education of children and youth. It waives enrollment requirements to ensure immediate access to education and other supportive services for homeless students. It also requires state educational agencies (SEAs) provide homeless children and youth with the same education provided to non-homeless children and youth. This education must be free, appropriate and adequate, so homeless children and youth are able to meet State achievement standards. Homeless children and youth are not to be segregated from the mainstream school environment; services should be based on their needs, not their residential status. More specifically, Title VII-B expresses the following requirements:

- (a) homeless students may not be segregated from other students in the school population by being sent to another school or placed in a separate program within the school due to them being homeless;
- (b) transportation must be provided to homeless students to and from their school of origin as requested by the parent or guardian;
- (c) homeless children and youth should be enrolled in school immediately pending resolution of any dispute the guardian may have with the school;
- (d) local education agencies (LEAs) must make school placements for children based on the best interest of the child and must attempt to keep children in their school of origin unless this is against the wishes of the guardian;
- (e) all school districts or LEAs are required to have a local liaison for homeless children and youth even if they do not receive a sub-grant from MCKV;
- (f) any state receiving allocations greater than the state minimum allotment must competitively sub-grant to LEAs at least 75% of its allocation.

A state that receives the minimum state allotment must competitively sub-grant to LEAs at least 50% of its allocation.

### **Program Implementation**

McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act was created to eliminate discrimination of homeless students by protecting their rights and ensuring they receive the same quality education as all other students. To achieve successful implementation, schools must follow certain protocols to identify such students in order to provide needed services to the students and their families, and to maximize grant effectiveness. Grant requirements ask each state to have an Office of State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth that oversees grant implementation, while “providing technical assistance, resources, coordination, data collection and overseeing compliance” (Duffield et al., 2009). The state office must also guarantee all school districts, within the state, are implementing MCKV effectively (Duffield, 2001). In addition to the state office, local educational agencies (LEAs) or school districts must have a homeless liaison. The main responsibility of the liaison is to ensure homeless students are identified, enrolled, and attending school (Duffield et al., 2009). The district liaison should be well educated on the provisions of the Act, the definition of homelessness under the Act, and possible indicators of homelessness. This information should be disseminated through trainings to all schools within the district ensuring

administrators, counselors, office staff and teachers have all been educated. Increasing awareness of MCKV will strengthen its implementation and increase accurate identification of homeless students.

Determining whether a student is living in a homeless situation can be difficult. Duffield et al., (2009) encourages educators to look for the following signs:

- (a) changes in a student’s behavior and appearance, such as wearing the same outfit several days consecutively or appearing unclean;
- (b) the student appears hungry and no longer brings a snack or lunch, in addition to having little or no lunch money even after parent(s) has been notified;
- (c) increased tiredness beginning to affect academics and/or behavior;
- (d) noticeable changes in attendance or tardiness in school.

These examples may all be signs of possible changes in a student’s living situation. If one of these indicators is





Overall, MCKV has been developed as a system of care to support homeless students and their families by providing resources and knowledge of community agencies, which will hopefully encourage and promote stability.

identified, the district liaison or assistant to the liaison, such as a school social worker, need to be notified of the concern(s) immediately. This liaison may verify whether or not the student qualifies as homeless based on the following provisions of MCKV:

- (a) sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as doubled-up);
- (b) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- (c) living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- (d) abandoned in hospitals;
- (e) awaiting foster care placement;
- (f) 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;
- (g) living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- (h) migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above (McKinney-Vento Act [MCKV], 2002).

These examples of living conditions qualify as homelessness and would allow the opportunity for identified homeless students to receive certain services under this Act.

Liaisons rely heavily upon the help of school staff in identifying possible homeless students, although they must also educate the community to maximize the effectiveness of this Act. Liaisons must post information about MCKV and the U.S. DOE's definition of homelessness in schools and throughout community agencies. Such agencies include shelters, soup kitchens, housing departments, and any other community providers that may help in the identification of these students (Moore, 2005). With the help of local school

systems and the community, the liaison is able to qualify students and provide services such as

- (a) immediate enrollment in school, even if the family cannot provide all required enrollment documentation;
- (b) continued school enrollment when disputes arise regarding school selection or enrollment until the dispute process is complete; and
- (c) access to qualified educational services, such as gifted programs, special education, English language learners, vocational education, Title I, and school nutrition programs (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003).

Additional services include transportation to the student's school of origin, procurement of enrollment documentation such as a birth certificate, social security card, or immunization records, clothing and food vouchers, school supplies, medical assistance, tutoring, community resource information, and ongoing education of the grant and its provisions to all involved, especially the families of the homeless students (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). All of these tasks seem impossible for only one MCKV liaison to perform; therefore, many school districts involve their school social workers in the process of assisting the liaison. Such responsibilities of the school social worker may include persistent outreach and support of homeless families, with the goal of helping them achieve housing for the betterment of their family and children's educational stability.

The key to the most successful implementation of MCKV includes education of its provisions and a sufficient staff to carry out all requirements to meet the needs of the homeless student population. Israel, Toro, and Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2003) suggested developing clear and systematic plans to identify homeless students in order to provide support for them and their families. As stated earlier, continued education of MCKV to all school personnel, providing updated information and modifications of the Act, is necessary to prolong effective implementation. Also reaching out to community agencies for support is very beneficial to best meet the needs of homeless students and their families. Overall, MCKV has been developed as a system of care to support homeless students and their families by providing resources and knowledge of community agencies, which will hopefully encourage and promote stability.

### **Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations**

A review of the literature has shown a need for more empirical data on the effect MCKV has on academic achievement and the influence professional counselors have on its effectiveness. We know MCKV has served to increase attendance, provide basic school supplies and appropriate school clothing for students identified as homeless (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). Additionally, since the U.S. DOE's 2006 legislation mandating the identification and data collection of our homeless population, there has been a significant increase in academic achievement for homeless students. This paper calls for professional counselors to evaluate related data to determine MCKV's influence on academic achievement.

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In addition, the efforts of MCKV would be enhanced by the implementation of a crisis intervention protocol in the school enrollment process, which extends beyond identification and classification to the assurance of the dissemination of needed services to improve academic success. This crisis intervention protocol would include an academic needs assessment and guidance toward additional supportive services beyond those provided by MCKV, in order to guarantee access to the same equal educational opportunities as those not qualifying as homeless. The need for a crisis intervention approach is evidenced by the rising prevalence of homelessness due to catastrophic events including natural disasters Hurricane Katrina, Rita and Sandy and a myriad of compounding effects influencing academic progress. The recent economic crisis resulting in increased exposure to trauma, stressed induced mental illness, untreated preexisting mental and physical illnesses (Rosen, Matthieu & Norris, 2009; Pospichel, 2013), learning disabilities and delayed development due to frequent interruptions in education and adjustments to learning new environments, and available resources are among the compounding effects influencing academic progress (Moore & McArthur, 2011).

The crisis intervention protocol would ensure families identified as homeless are made aware of the available resources and means of accessibility. Care would be given to allow for smoother transitions into classes, extracurricular activities, tutoring, mentoring, etc. regardless of time of enrollment. Homeless students tend to experience higher levels of stressful incidences when compared to their residentially stable peers, therefore in need of stress reduction and coping interventions. They tend to have lower scholastic abilities due to a number of factors from learning disabilities, emotional dysfunctions, lack of stability, and limited access to supportive educational environments. Professional counselors utilizing a crisis intervention model, inclusive of partnerships with other stakeholders, may immediately recognize and service the needs of students identified as homeless with referrals to appropriate resources. Students identified in need of tutoring, therapeutic counseling for existing mental illness or current trauma related stressors, would be appropriately referred. These students would be afforded the opportunity to join extracurricular activities and peer groups to help foster a sense of connectedness (Moore & McArthur, 2011).

Also, professional counselors would have to collaborate with various personnel in a variety areas. Professional counselors would work closely with social workers and parent liaisons to assist parents with alternatives to frequent relocations and transfers from school to school by encouraging a search for within district housing,

educating on the effects of frequent mid-school year relocations. Ideally, parents would be encouraged to obtain stability for the duration of their students' education. Professional counselors would create staff development lessons raising awareness to other educators and the community about the needs of the homeless children and youth, encouraging sensitivity, emphasizing the importance of providing a structured environment and the ability to have flexible expectations meeting the student where they are to bring them to standard (Knowlton, 2006). With the implementation of a crisis intervention protocol aiming to assist MCKV with eliminating obstructions to learning by connecting families identified as homeless to available resources, and the evaluation of the effectiveness MCKV has on academic achievement, this study calls for the professional counselor's role in the process in the identification of best practices.

### Conclusion

Homelessness is a significant problem which can impede student success. In this paper we reviewed the current literature on homeless students and discovered a lack of empirical data regarding the implementation of MCKV. We demonstrated the importance of informing all educators, community members, and stakeholders on the key concepts and services available through MCKV. Many students that can benefit from MCKV services are under-identified and, therefore, may lack free and appropriate education which is a right to all students. We encourage all educators and concerned individuals to become proactive, especially professional counselors, in identifying students in need and strive to provide them the necessary services.

### Conclusion

Homelessness is a significant problem which can impede student success. We encourage all educators and concerned individuals to become proactive, especially professional counselors, in identifying students in need and strive to provide them the necessary services.

The only difference between those who threw in the towel and quit and those who used their energy to rebuild and kept it going is found in the word "HOPE".

~ Author John Maxwell



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## ***An Examination of New Counselor Mentor Programs***

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### **Introduction**

Mentoring is defined as "the process of one person supporting, teaching, leading and serving as a model for another person" (Buell, 2004, p. 56, as cited in Armstrong, Balkin, Long, & Caldwell, 2006, para. 2). This type of guidance is particularly important for beginning school counselors. In some settings, a counselor may begin his/her career without the presence of other counselors in the work place (Armstrong et al., 2006).

These situations may become overwhelming as counselors must adapt to the various aspects of school counseling to be addressed such as classroom guidance, parent communication, teacher collaboration, and meeting administrative expectations (Armstrong et al., 2006). These descriptors are most ideally modeled by a person who has experience in the profession with the willingness and availability to answer questions and address concerns. This manuscript examines the structure of four new counselor mentor programs.

### **Literature Review**

Available literature regarding new counselor mentor programs is limited. Nonetheless, there are similarities throughout the research. In particular, a significant need for programs that provide support for beginning counselors is consistently addressed (Duncan, Svendsen, Bakkedahl, & Sitzman, 2009; Loveless, 2010; Armstrong, et al, 2006). Mentors can be instrumental in assisting new counselors

### **Abstract**

An analysis of current new counselor mentor programs reveals the need for such programs, but information regarding established programs is limited. A review of the literature addresses program characteristics and data obtained from existing mentor program participants. An overview of four programs explaining the framework outlined for mentoring new counselors is provided. Each counselor mentor program uses various strategies to implement their framework. This analysis highlights the benefits of participation in new counselor mentor programs.