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## School Counselors' Perspectives on Preparing Students Experiencing Homelessness for College

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# School Counselors' Perspectives on Preparing Students Experiencing Homelessness for College



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to investigate school counselors' support of youth experiencing homelessness going to college. Using survey methods, school counselors reported their knowledge, perceived competence, advocacy, and actions related to supporting students experiencing homelessness in their college preparation. The results suggested that training and the number of students experiencing homelessness on counselors' caseloads were significantly related to their knowledge and competence. Knowledge, competence, and advocacy all impacted the number of interventions utilized by participants. The implications of these results for school counselors and counselor educators are discussed.

**Keywords:** homelessness, college readiness, school counseling

Preparing for college is a complicated process by itself. For students experiencing homelessness, however, college preparation presents additional complexities that may require support from a skilled and knowledgeable school counselor. While high school students who experience inconsistent housing are fully capable of going to college and a college degree may be a necessary step to break the cycle of homelessness (SchoolHouse Connection, 2022), they often experience barriers to becoming college-ready, and as such, they are less likely to go to

college than their peers with consistent housing (Chapin Hall, 2019). These challenges include trouble concentrating in school, often due to the lack of having their basic needs met (i.e., food, clothing, and shelter) (Stevens, 2023). Additionally, without a private bedroom or a quiet study space outside of school, along with limited access to academic materials or necessary technology at home (e.g., Wi-Fi, laptop, or art supplies), it can be difficult to complete assignments and homework (Mohan & Shields, 2014). Students experiencing homelessness are also often highly transient, which can lead to higher numbers of absences, and, in turn, their academic achievement is negatively impacted (Chapin Hall, 2019; Tobin, 2014). This makes it especially difficult to keep up with the academic work necessary to pursue postsecondary education.

With challenges often beginning in elementary school, by the time students experiencing homelessness get to high school, they may face pervasive academic gaps that make it difficult to stay in school. One study, for example, which examined academic outcomes for high school students experiencing homelessness, found that only 55% of the participants in the study graduated

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within four years, with results indicating that one out of five dropped out of high school altogether (Erb-Downward, 2018). To avoid these outcomes and successfully graduate from high school, students experiencing homelessness may need additional academic support and resources, as well as supportive and knowledgeable staff. Supportive teachers and friend groups in particular help high school students experiencing homelessness to graduate (Edwards, 2023). Despite the barriers they face, students experiencing homelessness are fully capable of graduating from high school and becoming college-ready. Research indicates, however, that one out of five youths experiencing homelessness report not receiving educational interventions and resources from service providers, suggesting that they may not be getting the services they need to be set up for success (Chapin Hall, 2019).

School counselors are often the first line of support at a school who can provide interventions and resources to students in unstable housing situations (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2018; Havlik et al., 2018). They have essential roles in advocating for all students to remove barriers that may hinder their ability to be successful in school (Haskins & Singh, 2016). School counselors must be knowledgeable about the needs of students experiencing homelessness and adept at determining which interventions they may need (e.g., individual and small group counseling, academic advising, and teacher and family consultation). Therefore,

the purpose of this study was to investigate how school counselors support the preparation for and transition to college for students experiencing homelessness.

### **The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Defining Homelessness**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is federal legislation that authorizes the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY) under Title VII-B (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], n.d). To be identified as homeless and to qualify to receive support under EHCY, children and youth must lack a “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 5). This includes:

*Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations, living in emergency or transitional shelters, or abandoned in hospitals; having 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; living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; or migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above* (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 5).

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According to the NCHE (2021b), over 350,000 high school students (grades nine through 12) in 2019-2020 were identified as homeless. To support this large number of students, EHCY requires public schools to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success for students experiencing homelessness. Under EHCY, students experiencing homelessness have the right to remain at their school of origin—even if they move out of the district due to homelessness, enroll in a new school immediately while waiting on required enrollment paperwork (e.g., immunization records, academic reports, etc.), receive transportation to and from school, and access services (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Schools are also required to identify a local liaison who ensures that the guidance is being followed. Liaisons report that school counselors are one of the most important stakeholders in the school who can help them to identify youth experiencing homelessness (Ingram et al., 2017).

### **School Counseling for Students Experiencing Homelessness**

School counselors are key stakeholders who can partner with students experiencing homelessness to address their diverse needs by providing services across academic, social/emotional, and career domains (ASCA, 2019a). They facilitate an array of indirect and direct services across pre-K through 12th-grade settings (ASCA, 2019b). Direct services include individual and group counseling, as well as classroom lessons to meet the developmental needs of students across their

caseload. They support the mission of their school and provide fundamental, evidence-based support by collaborating with stakeholders across the school, family, and community. School counselors in secondary settings play key roles in advising students in their college and career planning and ensuring that they are ready to transition seamlessly into fulfilling post-secondary pathways (ASCA, 2019b). They design interventions that encourage students to have the mindset “that postsecondary education and lifelong learning are necessary for long-term success” (Category 1: M.6; ASCA, 2021).

Specific to their roles with students experiencing homelessness, school counselors collaborate with other stakeholders to remove barriers. They advocate for students experiencing homelessness to ensure they are getting their needs under McKinney-Vento met, including removing barriers to school attendance and enrollment, and ensuring appropriate placement in classes (ASCA, 2018). They also provide information to other stakeholders about McKinney-Vento and establish preventative programs for youth experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2018). In their college counseling roles with students experiencing homelessness, school counselors report providing individualized support to youth planning for college and advocating for admissions decisions by building relationships with offices of admissions and financial aid, as well as assisting in other important ways to remove barriers (e.g., coordinating transportation to college visits and helping students seeking fee waivers;

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Havlik & Duckhorn, 2020). School counselors have such an important role in supporting the college preparation of homeless youth that they are specifically highlighted in the EHCY program (section 722(g)(1)(K)) as being responsible, in part, for providing tailored support for youth experiencing homelessness going to college. Through collaborating with liaisons, they provide “individualized counseling regarding college readiness, college selection, the application process, financial aid, and the availability of on-campus supports” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 51).

Recent qualitative research suggests that school counselors are meeting these college preparatory roles, by supporting youth experiencing homelessness through interventions designed to enhance their college access (Havlik et al., 2021). Havlik et al.’s (2021) research found that school counselors align with EHCY by providing individualized college-going support for students, including career exploration, and assisting students one-on-one to complete financial aid paperwork and verify their homeless status. While this research is promising in that it highlights the important work of school counselors supporting youth experiencing homelessness, contradictory evidence suggests that two-thirds of students experiencing homelessness report not feeling comfortable talking to individuals at their school about the barriers and challenges of homelessness (Ingram et al., 2017). Only 42% of students experiencing homelessness in one study reported feeling like their schools

effectively prepared them for college (Ingram et al., 2017). Furthermore, school counselors report feeling helpless and ill-prepared to work with students experiencing homelessness (Havlik et al., 2018), suggesting that they do not feel competent to engage in this necessary work.

### Purpose of the Study

With very few studies having been conducted that examine school counselors’ work with students experiencing homelessness regarding college (Havlik et al., 2021), more expansive data is needed on school counselors’ knowledge of homelessness and perceptions of how they engage in college preparation work with students experiencing homelessness. This information will guide future preparation of school counselors to enhance their college counseling work with students experiencing homelessness. Thus, this study aims to investigate the preparation, knowledge, and interventions of school counselors supporting youth experiencing homelessness in preparing for and transitioning to college. The research questions addressed in this study include:

RQ1. What is the type and frequency of interventions that school counselors utilize to support the college transition for students experiencing homelessness?

RQ2. What are the relationships between demographic variables, years of experience, number of students experiencing homelessness and training and school

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counselors' perceived competence, level of advocacy, knowledge, and perceptions of preparation to support students experiencing homelessness going to college?

RQ3. How are school counselors' perceived competence, level of advocacy, knowledge, and perceptions of preparation related to frequency of interventions that high school counselors engage in to support students experiencing homelessness going to college?

### Method

This study was approved by a university institutional review board. Through survey methods, we examined relationships between school counselor variables in supporting students experiencing homelessness going to college. Web surveys were sent out to school counselors across the United States through multiple means.

### Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a Qualtrics web survey. With the target population being school counselors who are working with students experiencing homelessness preparing for college, the researchers recruited broadly to capture a representative sample. This was accomplished by using non-probability, convenience sampling via several different means (Etikan et al., 2016). Convenience sampling was chosen for this study because it is difficult to identify which school counselors had students experiencing homelessness on their caseloads and have provided college preparation work

with them, thus, the researchers broadly sent the recruitment materials out through various means to locate targeted participants.

Emails with the consent form and survey link were first sent to approximately 1,000 individuals who were identified as high school counselors in the ASCA directory (which is accessible to members), as well as to known contacts. Next, the research team emailed the survey request to contacts of state school counseling associations to request that they share the survey with their members. Approximately five state association representatives responded that they would send out the email to their members. A Google search was also conducted to identify email addresses of school counselors who lived in areas that had high numbers of students experiencing homelessness. With cities having higher numbers of public students experiencing homelessness (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), the research team targeted large metropolitan areas (e.g., Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York) and conducted Google searches to identify email addresses of school counselors who lived in those areas. Lastly, the link was posted to the researchers' social media pages (e.g., LinkedIn and Twitter) and shared amongst their colleagues and contacts. Researchers estimate that the survey was available to well over 5,000 school counselors; however, the response rate is unknown due to not knowing exactly how many prospective participants received the email. Out of the group who did receive it, it was not possible to know how many of them were qualified to

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take the survey (i.e., having worked with homeless students on college preparation).

### Participants

With more than 111,000 school counselors nationwide (Sullivan, 2019) the researchers estimated that there are approximately 37,000 high school counselors across the country. At a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, that suggests that an ideal representative sample size for all high school counselors would be 381. Since not all high schools have students experiencing homelessness on their caseloads and there is no data publicly available indicating the exact number of counselors who do, the estimated sample size number is estimated to be lower than 381.

The survey respondents included 162 school counselors working in the United States. Reported gender identities included female (n = 129, 80%), male (n = 30, 19%), and other (n = 2, 1%). One participant chose not to respond regarding gender identity. Ethnicity included 148 participants indicating they are non-Hispanic/Latine and 14 participants indicating they identify as Hispanic or Latine. Self-reported race of the participants included: White/Caucasian (n = 115, 71%), Black or African American (n = 30, 18.5%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (n = 6, 3.7%), Asian (n = 4, 2.5%), and another race (n = 7, 4.3%). Participants were situated across all four regions of the United States, as identified in the U.S. Census: Northeast, Midwest, West, and South.

The average years of experience reported was 12 years. Participants were asked to provide the number of students experiencing homelessness on their caseload; however, with the item being open-ended, it was difficult to calculate an exact mean. Several participants wrote that they “did not know” or provided a range. For those who provided a number, the average number of students experiencing homelessness on participant caseloads was 14.83. Approximately 23% of the participants reported that they did not receive any training on homelessness (n = 38). Among those participants who reported receiving training, participants (who could mark multiple formats) noted having received training in graduate school (n = 10), in-service training while at work (n = 52), required professional development (n = 29), voluntary professional development (n = 22), and “other” (n = 13).

### Instruments

The survey used in this study consisted of 61 items, divided into five sections. The first section included four items from the Perceived Competence Scale. This scale assesses a participants’ feelings of competence and can be tailored to any given topic—in this case, items focused on perceived competence of providing college readiness support (Williams et al., 1998). Possible scores range from 4-28, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived competence. An example item on the Perceived Competence scale was, “I feel confident in my ability to help students experiencing homelessness

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prepare to be successful in college.” For the current sample, the range was 4-28 and the mean response score was 19.30 ( $\alpha = .949$ ,  $SD = 4.6$ ).

Next, the School Counselor Advocacy Assessment (Haskins & Singh, 2016) instrument was utilized to measure school counselors’ perceived competence in advocacy. This scale has 19 items, with possible total scores ranging from 19-95, with higher scores indicating a greater level of perceived level of engagement in advocacy work. Example items from this scale included, “I join with allies to change oppressive structure in schools” and “I develop plans of action for confronting barriers.” For the current sample,  $\alpha = .910$ , with a range of scores from 36-94, and a mean score of 67.61 ( $SD = 10.41$ ).

The third section was the Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Scale (KSHSS; Havlik & Bryan, 2015). Several items were modified to focus on college preparation. There are 12 total items on the scale, with a possible range of scores from 12-60, with higher scores indicating a greater level of knowledge and preparation. Sample items included, “I can identify the students who are homeless on my caseload” and “I had sufficient training to work with students who are homeless.” For the current sample,  $\alpha = .643$ , with a range of scores from 27-58, and a mean score of 42.17 ( $SD = 5.39$ ).

Finally, the survey included items focusing on specific interventions ( $n = 16$ ; see Table 1 on page 15) and then demographics ( $n = 14$ ), including age, gender identity, years of experience as a school counselor, years in current position, number of students on their caseload who are experiencing homelessness, and training to work with students experiencing homelessness.

### Data Analysis

The researchers utilized a nonexperimental, correlational survey design. Research question one (RQ1) was analyzed using descriptive statistics, to understand the type and frequency of interventions participants engage in to support students experiencing homelessness. The researchers ran three multiple regressions to investigate research question two (RQ2). This is fitting because multiple regressions explore the relationship between one continuous dependent variable and several independent variables. School counselor characteristics were the independent variables for the multiple regression analyses, and the dependent variables were the three scales: (a) perceived competence, (b) level of advocacy, and (c) knowledge and perceptions of preparation. Finally, research question three (RQ3) was investigated with three Pearson product-moment coefficients, to display the relationship between the three constructs and frequency of interventions to support students experiencing homelessness. IBM SPSS (Version 23) was used for statistical analyses.

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### Results

The aim of this study was to examine how school counselors are supporting the preparation for and transition to college for students experiencing homelessness. To address RQ1, descriptive statistics provided information on the type and frequency of various interventions that participants engage in to support the college transition for students experiencing homelessness. Table 1 on page 15 contains frequency data for the 16 intervention items. Each intervention has been utilized by some of the participants to varying degrees. The three most common interventions were: a) academic counseling/advising (95.7%); b) individual college counseling/advising (93.3%); and c) community partnerships (89%). The three least commonly used interventions were: a) providing workshops and training for administrators (51.2% of the sample never utilizing); b) providing workshops and training for teachers (51.9% never); and c) providing funding to meet basic needs (37.7% never).

Next, to investigate RQ2, the researchers ran three multiple regressions to assess the impact of school counselor variables on three outcome variables: (a) perceived competence for learning, (b) level of advocacy, and (c) knowledge and perceptions of preparation for working with students experiencing homelessness. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedastic for each

of the three multiple regressions.

The first regression explored the impact of school counselor variables on perceived competence for learning, as measured by the Perceived Competence Scale. The overall model was statistically significant ( $F(6, 154) = 3.756, p < .01, R^2 = .128$ ) and accounted for 12.8% of the variance in school counselor perceived competence. Number of students experiencing homelessness ( $\beta = .169, p < .05$ ), training ( $\beta = -.229, p < .01$ ), and gender of school counselor (i.e., with men reporting higher perceived competence than women) ( $\beta = .161, p < .05$ ) were statistically significant predictors of perceived competence for learning. Years of experience in school counseling, years of experience in current position, and race/ethnicity were not statistically significant predictors. Results of the multiple regression are presented in Table 2 on page 16.

The second regression explored the impact of school counselor variables on advocacy, as measured by the School Counselor Advocacy Assessment (Haskins & Singh, 2016). The overall model was not statistically significant,  $F(6, 154) = 1.428, p = .207$ .

The third regression explored the impact of school counselor variables on perceived knowledge and perceptions of preparation as measured by Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Scale (Havlik & Bryan, 2015). The overall model was statistically significant ( $F(6, 154) = 10.385, p < 0.001, R^2 = .288$ ) and accounted for 28.8% of the

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Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics on Participant (n = 162) Intervention Engagement

Intervention	No	Yes
Parent Consultation and Education	23 (14.2%)	139 (85.8%)
Partnerships across secondary and postsecondary settings	22 (13.6%)	140 (86.4%)
Community Partnerships	18 (11.1%)	144 (88.9%)
Mentoring programs	43 (26.5%)	119 (73.5%)
Bridge programs	46 (28.4%)	116 (71.6%)
Academic counseling and advising	7 (4.3%)	155 (95.7%)
Individualized college counseling and advising	11 (6.8%)	151 (93.2%)
Small group college counseling and advising	37 (22.8%)	125 (77.2%)
Large group college counseling and advising	34 (21%)	128 (79%)
Tutoring services	46 (28.4%)	116 (71.6%)
Providing workshops and trainings for teachers	78 (48.1%)	84 (51.9%)
Providing workshops and trainings for administrators	83 (51.2%)	79 (48.8%)
Connecting students to internships/apprenticeships	38 (23.5%)	124 (76.5%)
Providing housing support	45 (27.8%)	117 (72.2%)
Providing funding to meet basic needs	61 (37.7%)	101 (62.3%)
Providing donated professional clothing	47 (29%)	115 (71%)

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Table 2  
Regression with Perceived Competence Scale as the Outcome

Predictor variables	B	t	sr
Gender identity	.161	2.124*	.16
Race	-.018	-.239	-.018
Years experience, current position	.005	.051	.004
Years experience, total	.148	1.536	.116
Number of students	.169	2.222*	.167
Received training	-.229	-3.027**	-.228
Model R	.357		
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.128**		
Model Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.094**		

Note. sr = partial correlation.

\*p < .05

\*\*p < .01

variance in school counselor knowledge and perceptions of preparation. Two variables showed significance of the outcome, which was training (beta =  $-.503$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and number of students experiencing homelessness (beta =  $.145$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Years of experience in school counseling, years of experience in current position, gender identity, and race/ethnicity were not statistically significant predictors. Results of the multiple regression are presented in Table 3 on page 17.

Finally, to answer RQ3, three correlations are presented. The relationship between perceived competence (as measured by the Perceived Competence Scale) and the number

of interventions used (out of 16 total possible interventions for students experiencing homelessness) was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. There was a medium, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .389$ ,  $n = 162$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a higher level of perceived competence associated with higher numbers of interventions utilized.

After assessing preliminary analyses, another correlation was run to examine the relationship between perceived knowledge and perceptions of preparation (as measured

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Table 3

Regression with Perceived Knowledge and Preparation as the Outcome

Predictor variables	B	t	sr
Gender identity	.018	.266	.018
Race	-.018	-.262	-.018
Years experience, current position	.018	.204	.014
Years experience, total	.067	.770	.052
Number of students experiencing homelessness	.145	2.113*	.144
Received training	-.503	-7.354**	-.500
Model R	.537		
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.288**		
Model Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.260**		

Note. sr = partial correlation.

\*p<.05,

\*\*p<.01

by Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Scale) and number of interventions used. There was a medium to strong, positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .490$ ,  $n = 162$ ,  $p < .001$ . This resulted in a higher level of perceived knowledge and perceptions of preparation associated with higher numbers of interventions utilized.

A final correlational analysis examined the relationship between perceived level of advocacy and number of interventions. After checking preliminary analyses, a medium to strong, positive correlation between the two variables was found,  $r = .490$ ,  $n = 162$ ,  $p < .001$ , with higher level of perceived advocacy

associated with higher numbers of interventions utilized.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how school counselors support the preparation for and transition to college for students experiencing homelessness. We examined the frequency of interventions and relationships between participants' preparation, knowledge, perceived competence, and advocacy skills when working with students experiencing homelessness. The results indicated that practicing school counselors engage in a

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multitude of direct and indirect counseling interventions to varying degrees and revealed several significant relationships between school counselor demographic variables, preparation, knowledge, perceived competence, and frequency of interventions.

The participants reported providing college preparation support in myriad ways. For instance, they reported engaging in many of the important interventions that are aligned with the expected roles of school counselors (ASCA, 2019a) in their work with students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2018). For instance, they rated themselves highly on frequently delivering direct services through individual and small-group counseling. The most frequently reported service included individual direct interventions; academic counseling and advising. The participants' self-report of individual interventions with students is positive, but Ingram (2017) found students often do not feel comfortable speaking to school staff about their homelessness. Thus, there is a chance students are not opening up about issues specific to homelessness with their school counselors in these sessions.

With McKinney-Vento recommending that counselors provide tailored college readiness support, this suggests that they are, to some extent, providing individualized support (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). A high number of participants also report collaborating with guardians and other school personnel, as well as engaging in preventative partnerships (e.g., bridge or mentorship

programs) to support youth going to college, which aligns with best practices for supporting youth experiencing homelessness (NCHE, 2021a) and the ASCA (2018) position statement on the role of school counselors and homelessness. Engaging in such partnerships echoes previous research indicating the important role of school counselors in building relationships with colleges and community partners to remove barriers for students experiencing homelessness in their journey to postsecondary education (Havlik & Duckhorn, 2020).

The three least utilized interventions included: (a) providing workshops and training for administrators, (b) providing workshops and training for teachers, and (c) providing funding to meet basic needs. The role of school counselors in working with youth experiencing homelessness requires them to be knowledgeable about homelessness so that they can educate others (ASCA, 2018). Thus, this is an area where they seem to be falling short. Providing professional development to other school staff aligns with collaborating with school personnel to benefit students (ASCA, 2018). This finding may be explained by other research suggesting school staff generally do not receive sufficient training to support students experiencing homelessness (Ingram et al., 2017). Thus, the participants may not feel competent to provide such training. Finally, students experiencing homelessness face barriers in addressing their basic needs (Havlik et al., 2018), which fall under the social determinants of health. Social

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determinants of health are the living conditions and the wider set of forces and systems that influence daily life, such as economic stability, including housing security and food security (World Health Organization, 2020). School counselors are qualified to address social determinants of health in their work, and thus, can make this a priority (Johnson & Brookover, 2021).

Through identifying community resources and building partnerships, they can ensure students' needs are identified and met.

Next, the researchers examined the impact of school counselor variables on three outcome variables: (a) perceived competence for learning, (b) knowledge and perceptions of preparation for working with students experiencing homelessness, and (c)

level of advocacy. Findings showed school counselors who received training to work with students experiencing homelessness and those with higher numbers of students experiencing homelessness, rated themselves higher on perceived competence. Years of experiences was notably not significant. This result suggests that the more training in supporting students experiencing homelessness going to college a school counselor participates in and the higher

numbers of students experiencing homelessness on their caseloads, the more confident and knowledgeable they are in their work with these students, supporting the need for specialized training in this topic. This is an important result, as school counselors are often the first line of support for equitable college readiness resources, but report feeling helpless and ill-prepared to work with

students experiencing homelessness (Havlik et al., 2018), further highlighting the need for training.

Second, this finding suggests that school counselors who have exposure to higher numbers of students on their caseload who are homeless have higher levels feelings of competence, hence higher self-efficacy and self-perceived ability in this work. The finding aligns

with self-efficacy research, in that experiential learning (in this case, working directly with youth with inconsistent housing) can lead to increased self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 1996); so, while time spent in the school counseling field or in a particular position was not significant, the results suggest that training and exposure are important for school counselors confidence in their work with youth experiencing homelessness.



**“Findings showed school counselors who received training to work with students experiencing homelessness and those with higher numbers of students experiencing homelessness, rated themselves higher on perceived competence.”**

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The participants who received more training on homelessness also rated themselves higher on perceived knowledge and perceptions of preparation. This can be interpreted as, those participants who received specific training on working with students experiencing homelessness were more likely to rate their education and training on the topic “sufficient” than those who did not.

Participants who did receive training also reported higher levels of knowledge surrounding the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and its requirements, as related to their positions, suggesting that training is important in ensuring that school counselors know how to identify and support youth who are homeless. The ASCA (2018) position statement calls for school counselors to attain legal knowledge surrounding homeless parents and children, including the McKinney-Vento Act; importantly, specific training increases the likelihood of this.

Though no school counselor variables were significantly predictive of advocacy levels, the study found that perceived advocacy was positively correlated with the number of interventions used. Thus, school counselors who rated themselves higher on the advocacy scale, reported increased engagement in interventions. With advocacy work being an integral aspect of school counselors’ roles (Haskins & Singh, 2016), it is not surprising that school counselors who are stronger advocates for youth would recognize the need to engage in increased support for youth who are experiencing homelessness.

Lastly, the researchers examined how participants’ self-reported perceived competence, and knowledge/preparation were related to the frequency of the interventions they engaged in to support students experiencing homelessness and college readiness. Both perceptions were positively, significantly correlated with the frequency of interventions. This can be interpreted as, the more a participant perceived themselves as self-efficacious, knowledgeable, and well-trained in supporting students experiencing homelessness about college, the greater number of interventions tailored for this specific population they would facilitate. Given the important role school counselors have in supporting students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2018) and how a college degree can have immense positive impacts on breaking the cycle of homelessness, strengthening factors which promote school counselors’ intentional work in supporting students experiencing homelessness going to college are crucial (SchoolHouse Connection, 2022).

### Implications for School Counselors

This study highlighted the importance of training school counselors to work with students experiencing homelessness. It showed that training and direct work with increased numbers of students experiencing homelessness seems more important than demographic factors such as the number of students experiencing homelessness or years of experience in the school counseling field.

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Thus, school counselors who work with youth experiencing homelessness must seek training to learn more about the McKinney-Vento Act and how they can best support youth experiencing housing insecurity in their schools. They can do this by connecting with their homeless liaison or state coordinator of homeless services, or through connecting to resources such as the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) or the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). Further, with advocacy being correlated with the number of interventions provided, having an advocacy-mindset seems particularly important for school counselors who work with youth experiencing homelessness. School counselors can advocate on the institutional level by ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have equitable access to necessary resources (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020). One way to advocate is by connecting families experiencing homelessness to supportive individuals such as counselors, liaisons, or stakeholders in the community who can provide the necessary interventions to meet students' basic needs (Leibowitz-Nelson et al., 2020).

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations to this study. First, the survey was sent out using different methods, including listservs, which can have any number of recipients. This made it impossible to calculate the response rate. Further, the final number of participants was smaller than desired because, despite using

multiple means, it was difficult to recruit participants. Many survey responses were not included in the final analysis because the participants only partially completed the surveys. Participants who responded tended to have a relatively high number of years of experience (an average of 12 years). As such, it is hypothesized that prospective participants who did not feel qualified to complete the survey due to limited work specifically with youth experiencing homelessness or limited work experience in general may have chosen not to complete it. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling can lead to bias within the sample. Thus, the results may not be representative of the wider population of school counselors (Etikan et al., 2016). Despite the challenges, this study expands on current research and offers important recommendations for future research on school counselors.

In terms of future research, with training being an important indicator of school counselors' involvement with students experiencing homelessness, examining the types of training provided and efficacy of these approaches is an important next step. With school counselors needing regular professional development on an array of topics, future research could explore time-efficient tools for preparing school counselors to work with youth experiencing homelessness. The results also indicated that school counselors reported less frequent engagement in training of staff and parents. Thus, exploring the types of training provided and who is providing this training is another

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area of inquiry. Lastly, gender was shown as a significant variable related to perceived competence, with men reporting higher than women. Because the number of female participants was much higher than male, more research is needed with a better-balanced sample to explore this finding. 

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