

NCHE Spotlight

The Newsletter of the National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE
Vol. 2, Summer 2006

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at the SERVE Center at UNCG is an information and technical assistance center funded by the Student Achievement and School Accountability programs, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education. The Center equips educators and other service providers to remove educational barriers and improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

A Note from the Director



Greetings! It is a privilege to provide you with the second edition of *The NCHE Spotlight*, the annual newsletter of the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). In this newsletter, you will find an overview of services and publications from NCHE as well as an update on issues in homeless education.

Because school is such a critical source of safety, stability, and educational support for children and youth whose lives are disrupted by homelessness, NCHE strives to ensure that homeless children and youth have access to and success in educational opportunities. We assist schools and communities in implementing the McKinney-Vento Act, which guarantees rights for these children and youth.

This year NCHE, along with school districts and communities across the nation, has faced unprecedented challenges in providing educational continuity and support for children and youth in families displaced by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes. These disasters have brought to light the devastation and trauma families face after losing their homes. The McKinney-Vento Act played a critical role in guiding school districts and communities in enrolling children immediately in school, even without records, and providing services ranging from academic support to counseling as part of the continuum of assistance for families and children. NCHE applauds the tireless efforts of all who contributed to meeting the demands presented by this horrific crisis.

Of the many lessons learned from the Gulf Coast hurricanes, the most critical one was the need for national, state, and community agencies to collaborate in order to prepare for the unexpected. The barriers that prevent agencies from communicating, sharing information, and aligning policies must be eliminated.

If you are not familiar with educational support for homeless children and youth, I urge you to read about the services and resources available from NCHE in this edition of the *Spotlight* and to share this information with your clients and stakeholders. If you have any questions about what NCHE offers or how to collaborate more effectively with the homeless education program in your state or school district, please contact me. Our communities must be ever ready to welcome and assist homeless families and children and unaccompanied youth with a range of comprehensive and integrated services, no matter what circumstances have brought these families to us.

NCHE is available to provide you with information and assist you in your efforts to serve homeless children and youth and their families.

Sincerely,

Diana Bowman

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National Center for Homeless Education at the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
www.serve.org/nche · 800-308-2145 · homeless@serve.org

You received this newsletter because you are on the National Center for Homeless Education's national mailing list.
To discontinue receiving this annual newsletter, please e-mail homeless@serve.org.

Federal Education Law: Who Is Homeless?

Students qualify for the protections provided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act if they **lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**. This includes students:

- ⇒ Living doubled-up with others due to economic hardship or loss of housing
- ⇒ Living in hotels, motels, campgrounds, or inadequate trailer homes
- ⇒ Living in emergency, transitional, or runaway shelters
- ⇒ Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or public spaces not intended for human habitation
- ⇒ Abandoned in hospitals
- ⇒ Awaiting foster care placement

Title X, Part C, No Child Left Behind Act

For more information, visit www.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_eligibility.php or www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/legislation.html.



The McKinney-Vento Act: The Basics

The McKinney-Vento Act guarantees children and youth experiencing homelessness the following:

- ⇒ The right to immediate enrollment in school, even if lacking paperwork normally required for enrollment
- ⇒ The right to attend school in the school of origin (if this is requested by the parent and is in the student's best interest) or in the local attendance area school
- ⇒ The right to receive transportation to the school of origin
- ⇒ The right to services comparable to those received by housed schoolmates
- ⇒ The right to attend school with children not experiencing homelessness; segregation based on a student's status as homeless is prohibited
- ⇒ The posting of homeless students' rights in all schools and other places around the community

For more information, visit www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php.

The NCHE Website

NCHE is a clearinghouse of information for the homeless education field. One of NCHE's primary methods of disseminating valuable information to the field is through its website.

Log on to NCHE's continually updated website at

www.serve.org/nche

and see how the resources found there can make your job easier.

Disaster Planning and Response

• Are You Ready?

The 2005 hurricane season was an abrupt wake-up call for many communities. Thousands of displaced students and families needing schooling and housing poured into neighboring states and even spread to the outer corners of the country. The McKinney-Vento Act suddenly took center stage in many local and even national news broadcasts and print media. Local homeless education liaisons and State Coordinators for Homeless Education were suddenly receiving anxious voicemail messages and phone calls asking for help in addressing the needs of children and families displaced by the hurricanes. For heavily-impacted districts, the task at hand was daunting.

Despite the size of the undertaking, school districts responded well to the challenge and enrolled displaced students promptly. Communities and school districts learned an important lesson about the immense value of preparing before the disaster arrives.

One of the most effective ways for a community to prepare for a disaster is through the development of a disaster preparedness plan. Although the 2005 hurricanes thrust the issue to the forefront, no community is immune. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, avalanches, floods, chemical spills, and fires mean that every state in the union is susceptible. Thinking through the challenges that may arise in the event of one of these disasters will enable communities to respond quickly with a well thought-out plan rather than shooting from the hip in the often chaotic aftermath.

▶ Doing Your Part

If your agency is already part of your community's disaster plan, ensure that local schools are represented on your community's preparation and response committee and are included in the plan. While the needs of a family displaced by disaster are many, the stability and normalcy provided to children by the school environment can play a significant role in the family's rebuilding.

If your community does not have a disaster plan, or if your agency is not involved, contact your local government officials to offer to assist in the development of a plan. Be sure that school districts are involved in the development of the plan because, as mental health experts agree, providing normalcy, safety, and the socialization of a school setting to children displaced by disasters is critical to their healing process. Learn who the local homeless education liaison in your school district is, and discuss the ways school districts can facilitate immediate enrollment and provision of services.

Although developing a plan does require work on the front end, it will save your community much time and disruption as it responds to the short- and long-term needs caused by disaster. Strong partnerships should be in place before a crisis occurs.

Want more information? Learn about the U.S. Department of Education and NCHE's resources for disaster planning and response on page 7. ◀

New Training Options

Online Training

As part of an ongoing effort to provide valuable and easily accessible technical assistance, NCHE has created several online trainings that may be accessed via the web 24/7. These trainings use audio and visual technologies to provide brief yet informative summaries of important homeless education issues. The trainings will assist states, school districts, and community agencies in providing staff training without having to undertake the expense and logistical complications associated with onsite training. Currently available trainings include:

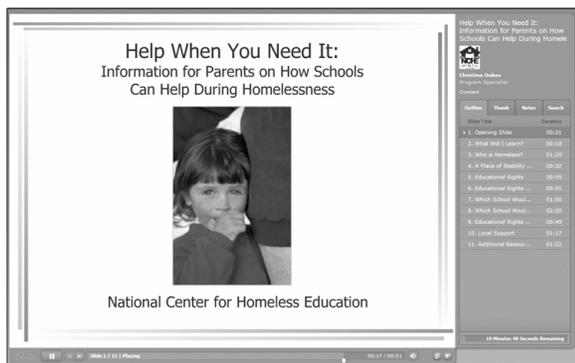
*Help When You Need It:
Information for Parents on How Schools
Can Help During Homelessness*

*Homeless Education and Title I:
Collaboration and Compliance*

*Homeless with Homework:
An Introduction to Homeless Education*

*Providing Equal Access:
Enrolling Children and Youth
Experiencing Homelessness*

Trainings on additional topics are under development. Access these valuable resources at www.serve.org/nche/training.php.



Training via Teleconference

For only the cost of a long distance call, over 250 people have participated in recent trainings offered by NCHE via teleconference. Topics have included an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act, identifying and enrolling unaccompanied youth, and collaboration between Title I and homeless education programs.

These sessions will be repeated in the upcoming months. Additional sessions on topics such as special education for homeless children and youth are forthcoming. The dates and times of future sessions will be announced via e-mail and NCHE's homeless education listserv and will be posted on the NCHE website.



It's That Easy?!

Want to help? Consider these simple collaboration steps:

- Post a link on your website to the NCHE website.
(www.serve.org/nche)
- Order and post educational rights posters from NCHE and encourage other agencies to do so, as well.
- Contact your local homeless education liaison to discuss possibilities for collaboration.
- Share this newsletter with others.
- Visit the NCHE website to learn about the vast array of resources there that you can use to help homeless children, their families, and unaccompanied youth.
- Let us know about resources you have and strategies you use that we can share with others by e-mailing homeless@serve.org.

New Resources

NCHE continues to develop new resources designed to meet the evolving needs of the homeless education community. New resources are available for downloading or ordering in hard copy at www.serve.org/nche/products.php and include:

Homeless Education Issue Briefs

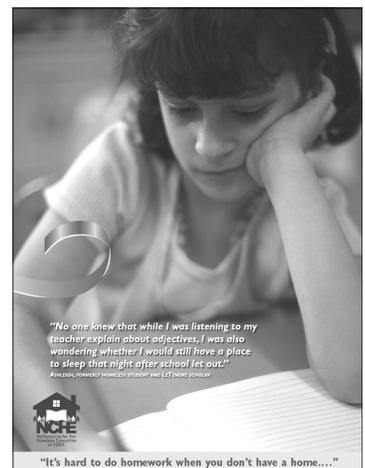
- *Housing Agency and School District Collaborations to Serve Homeless and Highly Mobile Students*: A housing agency that collaborates with the local school district creates opportunities for families to drastically reduce their frequency of moves and for children to enjoy school stability. In this brief, successful partners share what agencies can expect when they collaborate to serve homeless families and children.
- *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection*: This brief identifies the key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act dealing with homeless students' right to attend either the school of origin or the local attendance area school. It also includes a helpful checklist to use when making the school selection decision.
- *Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students without Records*: This brief, part of NCHE's new *Best Practices in Homeless Education* series, provides educators with valuable tools and information to assist in making sound educational decisions for the immediate placement of homeless children and youth in appropriate classroom settings.
- *Title I and Homelessness*: This brief identifies the key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act dealing with the provision of services to homeless children and youth under Title I, Part A, and offers strategies for implementation. Updated in April 2006, the brief addresses issues that have developed since the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- *Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*: This brief identifies the key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act dealing with unaccompanied homeless youth and offers strategies for implementation. Updated in April 2006, the brief addresses issues that have developed since the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- *When Legal Guardians Are Not Present: Enrolling Students on Their Own*: This brief identifies the key provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act dealing with the enrollment of students whose legal guardians are not present and offers strategies for implementation.

Unaccompanied and Homeless Youth Review of Literature (1995-2005)

This review, based on literature published between 1995 and 2005, provides an overview of the challenges that homeless unaccompanied youth face and includes research about why they leave their homes, how they live after leaving, and what interventions are being used to assist them.

Homeless Education Awareness Folder

This sturdy, laminated pocket folder provides an attractive way to inform colleagues and potential donors about the issues central to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Customize the information presented by filling the folder with the resources most pertinent to your audience.



Order the homeless education awareness folder at www.serve.org/nche/products.php

2006 Report to Congress

The Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) program is authorized under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Under the Act, the program was required to submit a report on the status of the education of homeless students in the country and on the effectiveness of the program in removing barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless students in school within four years of the Act's reauthorization. In fulfillment of the law, the EHCY program submitted this report to Congress and the President in Spring 2006.

The report provides detailed information on activities undertaken to address the educational needs of homeless children and youth. According to the report, the reauthorized legislation has enabled states and local educational agencies to focus more on the needs of homeless students and has also been an invaluable tool for assisting students who were left homeless by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes. The report outlines progress made and challenges still being faced. Data provided in this report are based on actual counts and records of homeless students enrolled in school—not estimates—resulting in data that are verifiable. The data included information on homeless children and youth enrolled in school and on the primary nighttime residences of these students. Data from school districts with McKinney-Vento subgrants include information on the numbers of homeless preschool-aged children, unaccompanied youth, and homeless migrant students; services received; barriers experienced; numbers of homeless students included in state assessment systems; and numbers achieving at their state's proficiency level. The report is available for downloading at www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/rpt2006.doc.

The NCHE HelpLine

800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org

The NCHE HelpLine is available to assist local homeless education liaisons, State Coordinators for Homeless Education, parents, unaccompanied youth, and others interested in issues affecting the education of children and youth in homeless situations.

The HelpLine is operational from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. EST and provides assistance in English and Spanish. Staff members assist callers with issues such as determining the eligibility of a student to be served under the McKinney-Vento Act, overcoming enrollment barriers, serving unaccompanied youth, and more.

If you are not sure how the McKinney-Vento Act applies to your situation or role or want information on an issue related to serving homeless children and youth, call the NCHE HelpLine at 800-308-2145 or e-mail homeless@serve.org.



State and Local Contacts

Every state has a State Coordinator for Homeless Education. To find out who the coordinator is in your state, visit www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php.

Every district also has a local homeless education liaison. To find out who the liaison is in your district, consult the district staff directory, contact the district's central office, or contact your State Coordinator.

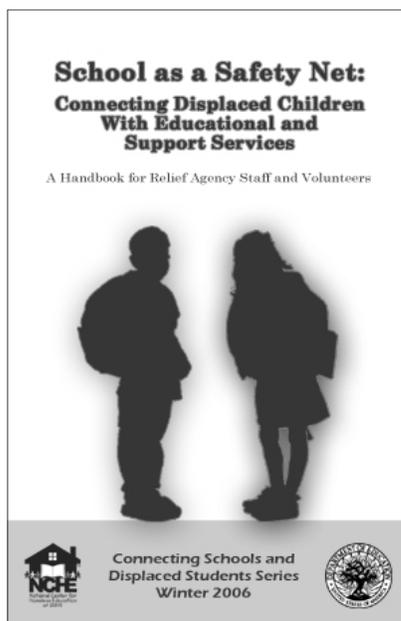
Resources for Disaster Planning and Response

In response to the devastation and homelessness caused by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes, NCHE has developed a new informational series entitled *Connecting Schools and Displaced Students*. This series, which includes briefs and handbooks, explains how the McKinney-Vento Act applies to students displaced by disaster and how the Act can assist these students and their families. Each resource within the series targets information to a specific audience, including parents of displaced children, relief agencies, and educators. Download the briefs at www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php; download or order the handbooks in hard copy at www.serve.org/nche/products.php.

For more information on developing a disaster plan, visit www.serve.org/nche/katrina/dis_plan.php. Visit <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov/index.html> for information on assisting schools in a disaster.

Coming this summer...

Check the NCHE website during the summer for an upcoming publication, compiled from lessons learned across the nation, on disaster planning and the response of schools.



Get the Word Out!

When trying to spread the word about homeless education to educators and parents, remember NCHE's Educational Rights Posters and Parent Pack Pocket Folders.

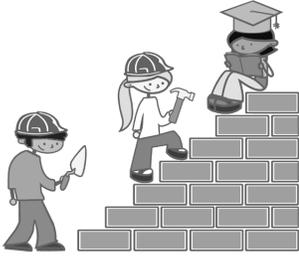


Order up to 25 of each of these products for free at www.serve.org/nche/products.php.

Collaboration: Helpful Strategies

Ever wondered if initiating a collaboration between schools and social service agencies would benefit homeless children and families enough to be worth the effort? To find out, NCHE interviewed representatives in effective collaborations that have solved problems related to homeless children and youth, established mutually supportive policies, and switched their focus from providing only the services at which their own agency is most proficient to securing the services most needed by each child or family. *Collaborations between Schools and Social Service Agencies* includes lessons learned, suggests strategies for adapting ideas effectively to your own situation, and shares some of the true secrets of successful collaboration. Download this resource at www.serve.org/nche/products.php.

Annual Homeless Education Conference



Building Futures Through Education

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) will be hosting its 18th annual national conference in Little Rock, AR, on November 11—14, 2006. The conference theme will be “Building Futures Through Education.” The conference will feature policy updates, effective practices, and networking among federal, state, and local program coordinators, educators, advocates, and service providers.

NAEHCY is a national grassroots membership association that serves as the voice and social conscience for the education of children and youth in homeless situations. For more information about NAEHCY membership or its annual conference, visit www.naehcy.org.



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Homeless Education Listserv

NCHE's Homeless Education Listserv provides colleagues across the nation with a forum for communicating about emerging issues in the field of homeless education, including the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act and strategies for enrolling and serving homeless children and youth. To subscribe, send an e-mail request to homeless@serve.org.

