

EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Summary of Research

2015-2022



Abstract

Over one million children and youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in public schools in the United States. They face many educational challenges due to high mobility, poverty, and trauma. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) is in place to remove barriers to attending school and receiving supportive services. State and local educational agencies are responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Act. This National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) research summary provides the field with updated information about recent research and reporting in the field of homeless education in an effort to help educators and others implement the McKinney-Vento Act and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. Educators—primarily those in state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) who may not necessarily have a research background—will be able to take away data, talking points, and evidence-based practices to inform their work and future policy discussions. Research covered in this summary includes a selection of peer-reviewed articles on the impacts of homelessness on education, subpopulations of students who are uniquely affected by homelessness, evidence-based practices for supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness as well as how educational administrators, teachers, and school support personnel are well-positioned to support children and youth experiencing homelessness. Recommendations for further research are briefly discussed.

Glossary of terms

Doubled-up

Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason

“Homelessness” as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act

Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes:

- children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals

- children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- migratory children ... who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances previously described

Local homeless liaison

The McKinney-Vento Act requires school districts to designate an appropriate staff person, who also may be a coordinator for other Federal programs, as a local homeless education liaison. The local liaison serves as the key homeless education contact for the district and must carry out the duties of the position as outlined in the Act. These duties include identifying youth and children experiencing homelessness, assisting with immediate school enrollment, referring students for services, collecting data regarding the enrollment and success of McKinney-Vento students, providing professional development to other district staff, and mediating disputes.

The McKinney-Vento Act

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.) is a Federal law that addresses the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness by guaranteeing students experiencing homelessness the right to enroll in and attend school, and providing supports needed for school success

Unaccompanied Youth

A child or youth experiencing homelessness not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian

About the National Center for Homeless Education

With funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro provides critical information to those who seek to remove educational barriers and improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Issue

In the school year 2020–2021, over one million children and youth experiencing homelessness were enrolled in public schools in the United States (NCHE, 2022). Children and youth experiencing homelessness face many educational challenges due to high mobility, poverty, and trauma resulting from their homelessness. Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act and referred to typically as the McKinney-Vento Act), is the federal law that removes barriers to enable children and youth experiencing homelessness to attend school and receive supportive services. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, the U.S. Department of Education provides Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) grants to state educational associations (SEAs), which in turn award subgrants to local educational associations (LEAs, which are often referred to as school districts). Regardless of whether the school district receives an EHCY subgrant, every school district must appoint a local homeless education liaison (referred to in this report as a “local liaison”) who ensures children and youth experiencing homelessness receive the services they need. Research contributes greatly to understanding how homelessness impacts children and youth and of ways that states, school districts, and schools can improve services to increase the educational success of these children and youth. The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) commissioned this research summary to provide educators at SEAs and LEAs with resources, talking points, and evidence-based practices to inform their work and future policy discussions.

Methodology

The research summarized in this report is a sample of peer-reviewed research studies and articles from 2015–2022 related to youth homelessness and education. It is not intended to be an exhaustive review. The studies were selected to represent a wide range of topics related to the education of youth experiencing homelessness. In this summary they are broken into four subtopics:

The impacts of homelessness on education. Children and youth experiencing homelessness face many educational challenges due to poverty, high mobility, and trauma. However, no child or youth experiences homelessness in the same way. The highly contextual aspects of homelessness, such as the type of

temporary living situation or duration of homelessness, can greatly impact a child’s or youth’s ability to concentrate and perform well in school.

Subpopulations uniquely affected by homelessness. “Homelessness” is a general term that often obfuscates the unique circumstances and experiences of children and youth in subpopulations, whether they are children of color, English learners, from rural areas, or very young. A greater understanding of children and youth in subpopulations and ways they experience homelessness can result in services, including educational services, that are customized to their needs.

Evidence-based practices for supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness. Research on academic strategies and supportive services for students experiencing homelessness enables educational administrators, teachers, local liaisons, and other youth services personnel to target resources in effective ways to ensure these students can be successful in school. In addition, a greater understanding of ways LEAs implement provisions in the McKinney-Vento Act can help schools and school districts effectively use the law to leverage services for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The critical role of educators and youth services personnel in supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness. Interviews with youth with lived experience of homelessness often feature comments about how individual teachers, local liaisons, or school social workers played a critical role in these students’ school success and their decision to stay in school. Studies that focus on specific LEA role groups, in particular the local liaisons, reinforce the importance of creating greater understanding of homelessness and the McKinney-Vento Act among school personnel, and the importance of building the types of relationships that are most supportive for students experiencing homelessness.

Each subtopic section that follows contains summaries of a selection of articles that cover the themes of the subtopic, outlining:

- an overview of the study
- the methodology of the author(s)
- limitations of the study
- applications of the study

Additionally, in Appendix A and Appendix B, the authors of this report include short summaries of several additional articles and reports that provide further information for readers who may want more information to inform their thinking and practice.

How to Use This Research

This collection of articles touches on various topics of child and youth homelessness that, together, provide a general grounding in the issues and provide context for future research and study. The articles in this report come from a wide range of researchers who approach homelessness in different ways. The summaries below reflect the researchers' views and findings. We encourage readers to explore these studies in more detail as well as the additional research in the field.

The articles and studies in this summary are peer-reviewed¹ and explore the intersection of homelessness and education. However, homelessness is highly contextual, both in the way that young people might experience it (e.g., young people in rural regions might experience homelessness differently than young people in urban areas) and how homelessness may affect them. Many of the studies analyze small sample sizes for drawing qualitative or quantitative conclusions about youth experiencing homelessness. Therefore, the conclusions of these studies should be thoughtfully considered against your own educational context. Limitations of the research (those identified by the author[s] or otherwise) are noted under each study.

SUMMARIES: THE IMPACTS OF HOMELESSNESS ON EDUCATION

Introduction

Homelessness is highly contextual, and the ways in which young people experience homelessness (e.g., living in a shelter vs. living doubled-up, or in early childhood vs. later in school) could affect their academic and social and emotional outcomes in different ways. Articles in this section cover:

- the effects of experiencing homelessness earlier in life
- the impacts of the duration of an experience of homelessness
- the different impacts of living in shelters, living doubled-up, or being low-income and housed

See Appendix A for more research on this topic.

Annotated Research Summaries

¹ Peer-reviewed journal articles "have gone through an evaluation process in which journal editors and other expert scholars critically assess the quality and scientific merit of the article and its research." ([National Institutes of Health](#))

Brumley, B., Fantuzzo, J., Perlman, S., & Zager, M. L. (2015). The unique relations between early homelessness and educational well-being: An empirical test of the continuum of risk hypothesis. *Children and Youth Services Review, 48*, 31–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.11.012>

Overview. Brumley et al. investigated the prevalence of risk factors among children with a history of emergency housing utilization prior to the end of 1st grade compared to low-income housed peers, and the extent to which children with a history of emergency housing utilization prior to the end of 1st grade exhibit worse school readiness (including lower academic and social and emotional outcomes) compared with their low-income, housed peers.

Methodology. The study used data from an integrated data system in a large urban area in the Northeastern United States. Participants in the study included all the children enrolled in 1st grade in a large urban public school district both born to mothers living in the municipality and receiving free and reduced lunch (n = 4,594). The sample was divided into students who had a homeless shelter experience before the end of 1st grade (n = 481) and students without a homeless shelter experience (n = 4,113). The authors used statistical analysis models to assess the relationship between early homelessness and educational outcomes.

Results. Brumley et al. found that

- Children with an experience of homelessness living in low-income households experience higher rates of co-occurring risks than housed peers from low-income households.
- Children with an experience of homelessness from low-income families evidence worse academic and social engagement problems compared to their housed, low-income peers.
- Controlling for co-occurring risks, homelessness in this sample of children was uniquely associated with poor classroom social engagement, while poor academic engagement was associated with other risk factors.

Limitations. Two limitations might affect the accuracy of the findings from this study. First, the data used only captured homelessness as shelter stay. Other forms of homelessness (e.g., being doubled-up) are not accounted for and therefore the results may not be generalizable to students experiencing homelessness in other ways. Also, the study used only five publicly monitored risk factors associated with homelessness and educational well-being while more may actually be at play.

Applications. The results of this study suggest that for young children experiencing homelessness, early intervention targeted at social and emotional learning is important to foster social development and support academic engagement.

De Gregorio, S., Dhaliwal, T. K., Owens, A., & Painter, G. (2022). Timing and duration of student homelessness and educational outcomes in Los Angeles. *Educational Researcher*, 51(6), 376–386. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X221091232>

Overview. De Gregorio et al. studied the relationship between homeless status and academic and behavioral outcomes, and particularly, how this relationship differs by the timing and duration of homelessness experienced. They built on prior research that suggested a strong relationship between homelessness and negative academic and behavioral outcomes, as well as more minimal research on differences in outcomes due to the timing and duration of homelessness (e.g., previous research that suggests the effects of homelessness persist in the future even if homelessness does not).

Methodology. The study used Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) administrative data sets from the 2008–2009 to 2016–2017 school years for students enrolled in kindergarten through 8th grade, and paired this data with publicly available census tract-level data from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The study sample (n = 54,905) focused on two cohorts of LAUSD students who were in the 8th grade during the 2015–2016 or 2016–2017 school year and enrolled in 3rd grade in the 2010–2011 to 2011–2012 school year, and who had outcome data in both 3rd and 8th grade and who had not experienced homelessness before 4th grade. These data were statistically analyzed to assess the relationship between student outcomes (standardized math scores and days attended school), whether a student was ever homeless between 4th and 8th grade, whether the experience was transitory or persistent, and whether the experience was in the past or at present.

Results. De Gregorio et al. found that

- Being homeless at least once between 4th and 8th grade, in this sample of students, was associated with lower math test scores and was also associated with 5.8 fewer days of school attended than never having experienced homelessness.
- Being currently homeless in 8th grade had a larger negative association with math scores than being homeless in the past (between 4th and 7th grade).

- Both transitory homelessness (experiencing homelessness in one year) and persistent homelessness (experiencing homelessness in two or more years) have statistically significant negative associations with math scores and attendance, though transitory homelessness appeared to have larger negative associations than persistent homelessness.

Limitations. The authors noted they cannot draw causal conclusions from their analysis because they cannot rule out the possibility that unobservable characteristic differences between students experiencing homelessness and housed students may bias the results (though they do estimate additional models to test the robustness of the results). Also, the sample was drawn from a large urban school district (LAUSD) so the results may not be generalizable to other regional contexts.

Applications. De Gregorio et al. emphasize the need to increase the accuracy and timeliness of homeless student identification, as well as the supports provided for students experiencing homelessness and who have had experiences of homelessness in the past, as it may have implications for how the timing and duration of such experiences shape educational outcomes currently and beyond.

Low, J. A., Hallett, R. E., & Mo, E. (2017). Doubled-up homeless: Comparing educational outcomes with low-income students. *Education and Urban Society, 49*(9), 795–813.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516659525>

Overview. Low et al. investigated the unique and understudied experiences of students living doubled-up, and whether living doubled-up has educational impacts beyond living in poverty. Low et al. noted that previous research has argued how young people’s experiences with homelessness frame how they can and do engage with educational systems. However, despite the expansive definition of homelessness outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act, most studies either exclude the doubled-up population or include doubled-up students in a catch-all categorization of “homelessness.” The authors noted more and more students and families are living doubled-up due to limited affordable housing and foreclosure crises during recessions.

Method. The data used in this study came from a school district located in a Northern California metropolitan area that had seen a surge in the number of students identified as homeless after the district learned about the expansive federal definition of homelessness. The district serves 13,000 students and approximately 1,900 had been identified as “homeless” over the past five years. Two groups of participants’ data were used in this study: 6,088 7th–12th graders during the 2013–2014 school year

and 4,612 12th graders from the 2009–2010 to 2013–2014 school year. Measures used included academic achievement (most recent grade point average [GPA]), school discipline (detentions, suspensions, or expulsions), truancy (attendance reviews based on consistent absenteeism), and on time graduation. Authors statistically analyzed the relationship between living doubled-up, being housed but low-income, and academic achievement.

Results. Low et al. found that

- Doubled-up students in the sample earned significantly lower GPAs than students in permanent housing, and among doubled-up students, those who transitioned from permanent housing to living doubled-up during the year had lower GPAs than those who had been doubled-up the entire year. The same relationship existed for truancy of students living doubled-up.
- While both male and female doubled-up students demonstrated significantly lower GPAs than students in permanent housing, female students living doubled-up experienced lower GPAs on average than their male counterparts.
- Doubled-up students were more likely than students in permanent housing to not graduate on their first attempt at 12th grade (over a 5-year period).
- Hispanic, American Indian and Black students were more likely to be living doubled-up than Asian, Pacific Islander and White students, and students from families with migrant workers (the majority of whom were Hispanic) were more likely to be doubled-up than students from non-migrant families.
- Doubled-up status was not significantly related to behavioral data.

Limitations. Authors noted that control variables were not used in the analysis so causal relationships cannot be drawn. Furthermore, using discipline data as educational outcomes captures only externalizing behaviors (those that would result in detention, suspension, or expulsion and are often targeted towards students of color) and not internalizing behaviors that often accompany experiencing homelessness and have significant impacts on students (e.g., depression, anxiety, or social withdrawal). Further research should examine these behaviors.

Applications. This study suggests students living doubled-up should not be discounted when providing support to students experiencing homelessness. They are not living doubled-up out of choice (a frequent misconception) and lack of stable housing can be associated with a negative impact on educational outcomes.

Pavlakis, A. E. (2018). Spaces, places, and policies: Contextualizing student homelessness. *Educational Researcher*, 47(2), 134–141. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44971894>

Overview. In this study, Pavlakis outlined the residential spaces, geographic places, and schooling implications relevant to the daily lives of children and their families experiencing homelessness. She focused on how residential space (e.g., living in a shelter, doubled-up, or in relatively independent accommodations) and geographic context (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural) shape the opportunities and experiences children and youth have when experiencing homelessness.

Methodology. Pavlakis draws conclusions from a large study she conducted in a medium-sized Midwestern city that explored the intersections of homelessness and education. She and her colleagues conducted 132 interviews with school personnel, community providers, and families experiencing homelessness. The families were living in different residential settings at the time of the interview (shelters and housing first programs) and also reflected back on previous living arrangements that were mostly doubling-up situations. Pavlakis also conducted 42 semistructured interviews with school and community leaders in a relatively affluent, rapidly growing Midwestern suburb.

Results. Pavlakis found that

- Families living in different situations of housing instability faced unique challenges. While families in shelters benefitted from shelter caseworkers and other support that supplemented their children’s schooling, they also experienced stress related to time limits on shelter stays, a lack of space, and a lack of sense of routine. However, living doubled-up created stressful situations regarding living with another family who might ask them to leave at any moment. Living doubled-up also meant there was no caseworker. The schools in the region Pavlakis studied tended to offer less attention to their students living doubled-up than those living in shelters.
- Urban areas tend to have more and higher quality afterschool programs and centers than rural areas that can support young people experiencing homelessness . Urban areas also tend to have better access to shelters and social service housing than rural areas, though even so, many students still end up living doubled-up.

Limitations. The conclusions Pavlakis drew may only be applicable to the particular places where she conducted the interviews and should not be taken as generalizable. She also relied on families’ recollections of living in doubled-up situations.

Applications. The way homelessness can impact students is highly contextual. Schools, districts, and regions should take into account the access and quality of living situations for students who are unstably housed.

SUMMARIES: SUBPOPULATIONS UNIQUELY AFFECTED BY HOMELESSNESS

Introduction

Many aspects of homelessness are highly contextual: the likelihood of experiencing it, the way one experiences it, and the effects of experiencing it. Some students experience homelessness differently than others. Recent research has highlighted how and why this happens, as well as strategies to support these students. Articles in this section cover:

- Black students experiencing homelessness
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more (LGBTQ+) students experiencing homelessness
- rural vs. urban students experiencing homelessness
- students in early childhood experiencing homelessness

Annotated Research Summaries

Edwards, E. J. (2020). Young, black, successful, and homeless: Examining the unique academic challenges of black students who experienced homelessness. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, 26(2), 125–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2020.1776688>

Overview. Edwards cited research that found Black families represent 54% of families living in homeless shelters, despite representing only 15% of families in the United States. Edwards argued that homeless policy and research on child and youth homelessness often neglect the impact of race on experiencing homelessness, and presents structural racism as a useful tool for understanding the experiences of Black students experiencing homelessness. The author examined the narratives of Black high school graduates who experienced homelessness in Los Angeles (LA) County while attending high school. The author investigated the challenges these graduates encountered in school as a result of their race and housing instability as well as the extent to which being Black and experiencing homelessness could present challenges in accessing resources provided by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Methodology. Edwards recruited participants (n = 8) from LA County public school districts who received a high school diploma between 2010–2019 in a city in LA County, who experienced homelessness (by the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition) during high school, and who racially identified as Black. Each participant engaged in a 90–180 minute in-depth interview. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Edwards communicated several times with participants throughout the data collection, analysis, and drafting process. The author cross-checked the interview coding process with five education scholars.

Results. Drawing from participants’ perspectives, Edwards found that institutions implementing racially neutral policy perpetuate the marginalization of Black students experiencing homelessness. In particular, he found that

- Hostile racial climates at participants’ schools created a disconnect between Black students experiencing homelessness and local liaisons; young people were not being identified as homeless and thus were not receiving the McKinney-Vento Act support. This racial hostility also seemed to contribute to low academic expectations and high discipline rates.
- For some of the students in the study, experiencing homelessness exacerbated their chances of attending an underperforming school that was racially segregated.
- McKinney-Vento policies were effective at identifying Black students experiencing homelessness in this study only when coupled with a positive school racial climate that empowered Black students.

Limitations. Two limitations might affect the accuracy of the findings from this study. First, the results in this study are not highly generalizable given the extremely small sample size and lack of geographic representation. However, even a well-constructed study with a small sample size such as this one can raise important questions for future research. Also, the scope of this paper focused on the participants’ abilities to access the McKinney-Vento Act supports and services, regardless of the effectiveness of those supports.

Applications. Racial hostility endured at the high school level compromised the effectiveness of the McKinney-Vento Act support for the majority of Black students experiencing homelessness in this study. However, racially-affirming school climates seemed to amplify the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. While more research is needed on how Black students specifically experience homelessness, focusing on cultivating and maintaining a positive school racial climate can have positive effects for all students, but particularly Black students, experiencing homelessness.

Maccio, E. M., & Ferguson, K. M. (2016). Services to LGBTQ runaway and homeless youth: Gaps and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review, 63*, 47–57.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.02.008>

Overview. Researchers Maccio and Ferguson interviewed program staff and agency directors at LGBTQ+-serving homeless agencies to identify gaps in services to students who are experiencing homelessness or have run away and identify as LGBTQ+. The interview themes touch on gaps in housing services, educational services, employment services, family services, LGBTQ+-affirming services, cultural competency training, and advocacy and organizing. Maccio and Ferguson provide recommendations to address these gaps.

Methodology. Maccio and Ferguson interviewed 24 executive directors (or other staff members who played a significant role in the organization) at 19 social service organizations that provide support to LGBTQ+ students who are experiencing homelessness or have run away (either exclusively or as one part of their general services). Participants differed in roles (14 were in central administrative positions and 10 were in direct-service positions), in regions of the United States, and in region size (e.g., small cities vs. large urban areas). The one-hour telephone interviews with these staff served as the basis for the research analysis.

Results. The researchers found

- The 24 staff interviewed for the study surfaced common gaps in existing services for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness across seven areas: housing services, educational services, employment services, family services, LGBTQ+-affirming services, cultural competency training, and advocacy and organizing.
- Interviewees commonly identified that LGBTQ+ students experiencing homelessness or who have run away require individualized support during three particular stages of their education. During secondary schooling, LGBTQ+ students might be exploring their identity and may experience family and/or peer rejection as a result, and this might disrupt their education. At the end of their secondary schooling, LGBTQ+ students experiencing homelessness may not have family support (financially or emotionally) to navigate the college preparation process. During postsecondary schooling, LGBTQ+ students experiencing homelessness require college/university policies that support students who may not have other homes.

Limitations. Maccio and Ferguson noted that their sample of staff at organizations supporting LGBTQ+ students experiencing homelessness may be limited because they identified organizations based on Internet searches and word of mouth. Newly formed organizations and those not on the Internet would have been excluded. In addition, the researchers note that organizations supporting this population of students in rural areas is likely underrepresented in the sample.

Applications. The findings from this study suggest there are significant gaps in the support LGBTQ+ students experiencing homelessness can receive from organizations supporting this population of students, which might amplify the challenges these students already face in succeeding in school. The researchers recommend to focus on building capacity in agency staff in a culturally-competent way, as well as filling in the educational gaps that affect LGBTQ+ students experiencing homelessness particularly, in order to fully support their well-being and educational success.

Mullins, M. H., Wilkins, B. T., Mahan, A., & Bouldin, J. B. (2016). Homeless liaisons' perceptions of McKinney-Vento Act implementation: Examining geographical trends and differences. *Social Work in Public Health, 31*(5), 358–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2015.1137516>

Overview. Mullins et al. explored how homeless liaisons in different states might have differing awareness about the implementation of McKinney-Vento Act policy in their school districts. They also explored whether differences in geographical population densities (i.e., urban, suburban, small town, and rural areas) affect differing awareness about McKinney Vento Act policy implementation. While this study investigates several geographical contexts, it provides useful conclusions about rural areas and youth homelessness.

Method. The authors invited all the identified homeless liaisons in all the school systems in Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina to participate in an online survey that consisted of a demographic questionnaire and a measurement instrument assessing McKinney-Vento Act implementation. Of the 369 individuals invited to participate, 119 participants completed the survey.

Results. Mullins et al. found that

- Rural respondents to the survey reported having lower levels of resources in their region compared to urban and suburban respondents, and particularly a lack of available shelters.

- Rural, suburban, and urban respondents all reported similar levels of collaboration with teachers about issues related to youth experiencing homelessness, as well as collaboration with school administration.
- Only 13.4% of respondents indicated homeless liaison as their primary job title, and 16.8% of respondents indicated that they “never” interact with students experiencing homelessness, suggesting that liaisons may be overworked and have competing priorities.

Limitations. The authors noted the participants in the study were only sampled across three states and may not represent liaisons across the United States. In addition, the participants who did complete the survey may have some additional commonality that would make them dissimilar to the rest of the liaisons in the sample and to the larger population of liaisons in the country. Finally, asking individuals about their perceptions is a highly subjective way to measure implementation of policy.

Applications. The researchers encourage deeper awareness at the local level around the needs of youth and families experiencing homelessness in rural areas. The proportion of youth experiencing homelessness might be similar across urban and rural communities, but, as this study indicates, there are often fewer resources to support these students and their families in rural areas.

Perlman, S.M., Shaw, S.H., Kieffer, C.H., Whitney, G.A.C., Bires, C. (2017). Access to early childhood services for young children experiencing homelessness. In: Haskett, M. (Eds) *Child and Family Well-Being and Homelessness*. SpringerBriefs in Psychology(). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50886-3_5

Overview. Perlman et al. investigated the factors that facilitate and impede access to services for young children experiencing homelessness. They specifically looked at whether providers and parents are aware of and receive support for such services, the factors that impede access to these services, the factors that facilitate access to the services, the ways cross-systems collaboration can facilitate participation, and emerging practices to help families experiencing homelessness access early childhood services.

Methodology. Perlman et al. used both quantitative and qualitative survey data for a mixed-methods analysis. The authors used National Association for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) survey data from 970 providers of services to children experiencing homelessness (46% were local liaisons, 27% were Early Head Start/Head Start professionals, 12% were childcare providers, 11%

were homeless housing providers, and the remaining respondents were from LEA preschool programs). Qualitative data came from a qualitative small research project sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), drawing on interviews with parents from 28 households in Atlanta, Georgia and New Haven, Connecticut. Perlman et al. used these two data sets to analyze barriers and facilitators to accessing early childhood services for families experiencing homelessness.

Results. The authors of the study found that

- Barriers to accessing early childhood education services included transportation. Despite transportation being provided to and from preschool, families reported general difficulty with transportation (e.g., to doctor visits).
- Other barriers were lack of available and affordable slots in preschool, mobility and communication, and competing demands which might deprioritize preschool.

Limitations. Perlman et al. noted that the data sources are exploratory in nature (the NAEHCY survey was a convenience sample, which might have excluded a more representative population), and the sample size of the qualitative study was small. However, the authors noted a high degree of corroboration between the two data sets.

Applications. The findings from this study suggest that both providers and parents might benefit from becoming more aware of the availability of early childhood resources, particularly when they are new to joining a community. Policies and practices that break down barriers to access, streamline entry into childhood services, and ensure provision through a cross-sector lens could help this important population who experience homelessness differently from families with older children.

SUMMARIES: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Introduction

This section highlights research that provides evidence-based practices schools, districts, and states can use to support students experiencing homelessness. Articles in this section cover:

- the school and district-based factors that affect the efficacy of the McKinney-Vento Act
- the effectiveness of cross-collaboration between schools, their districts, and the community

- the positive role of school climate
- the role that youth can play in supporting students experiencing homelessness

See Appendix A for more research on this topic.

Annotated Research Summaries

Ausikaitis, A. E., Wynne, M. E., Persaud, S., Pitt, R., Hosek, A., Reker, K., Turner, C., Flores, S., & Flores, S. (2015). Staying in school: The efficacy of the McKinney–Vento Act for homeless youth. *Youth & Society, 47*(5), 707–726. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X14564138>

Overview. Ausikaitis et al. captured the perspectives of young people experiencing homelessness during high school and their lack of awareness of the rights and supports provided under the McKinney-Vento Act. The authors used a social justice theoretical framework to explore the efficacy of the McKinney-Vento Act from the viewpoint of students themselves, in order to expand what they noted as limited literature on the attempts of students experiencing homelessness to attain educational equity and maintain school stability. The authors’ goal was to inform best practices for school staff serving this population.

Methodology. Participants for this study were living in a transitional living program (TLP) in a large urban area that serves youth ages 17–22 with a history of chronic homelessness. Three separate focus groups (n = 18) were held at one TLP where the participants had experienced homelessness for varying lengths of time prior to entry into the program. Four were high-school aged and attending traditional high schools, alternative high schools, or JobCorps; six were participating in GED classes; and eight were participating in college, technical school, or vocational school. The focus group transcripts were analyzed by the authors.

Results. Ausikaitis et al. found that

- The majority of young people in the study did not disclose their homeless status with school staff, fearing stigmatization, and experienced many negative consequences as a result. One consequence was not being identified as experiencing homelessness and therefore not receiving the McKinney-Vento Act supports. They also did not receive transportation support, and faced challenges with getting to school.
- The majority of young people were unaware of their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act and the services available to them.
- Students reported that staff could either be critical to their school success (especially when they did disclose their homeless status and received the McKinney-Vento Act supports) or pivotal in

their dropping out (particularly when they did not disclose homeless status, and were disciplined for truancy).

- Students reported the significant challenges they faced outside of school when dealing with homelessness, and the desire to finish school despite dropping out.

Limitations. Authors noted two major limitations of the study. First, the study’s sample size is very small, reflecting only one large metropolitan area and one TLP. Therefore the conclusions are ungeneralizable to all young people experiencing homelessness and particularly those in rural areas. Second, participants self-selected into the study and therefore may have some other shared characteristics that influenced their responses. A random sample would have ensured more generalizability.

Applications. Given the findings from the young people interviewed in this study, Ausikaitis et al. provide recommendations for practices that could support this population. They note educational professionals are in a prime position to advocate for unaccompanied youth in schools since they work with students and parents in collaboration with other staff and administrators. School districts can support unaccompanied youth by using universal screeners to identify students who need the McKinney-Vento Act services, and also coach teachers on strategies that will increase educational opportunities for these students. Finally, more awareness for educational professionals about the definition of homelessness and the rights and services guaranteed by the McKinney-Vento Act would support young people experiencing homelessness.

Miller, P. M., Pavlakis, A., Samartino, L., & Bourgeois, A. (2015). Brokering educational opportunity for homeless students and their families. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(6), 730–749. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2015.1017860>

Overview. Miller et al. drew from notions of organizational brokerage as they examined how schools connect students experiencing homelessness and high mobility and their families to resources, relationships, and broader opportunities to achieve education-related success. In particular, the authors looked within and across schools and their neighboring community organizations to ask how brokering orientations are nurtured and maintained, how and to what extent multifaceted information is shared, and how networks of diverse relationships are cultivated and sustained by and for students experiencing homelessness.

Methodology. Miller et al. used data collected on a larger multiyear study examining matters of schooling and homelessness in a mid-sized city of about 250,000 residents in the Midwestern U.S. At the time of this study, this town had experienced a significant increase in homelessness in recent years. The authors conducted 132 semi-structured interviews with wide-ranging stakeholders in student homelessness (parents, school district personnel, community agency employees, etc.), examined district-level data on homeless student identification, and analyzed documents that describe support for students experiencing homelessness and their families.

Results. The authors found that

- Schools brokered educational opportunities for students experiencing homelessness through both district- and school-level practices, working through collaboration (diverse stakeholders working together to connect students and families to in- and out-of-school resources), and referral (information passed along to help families experiencing homelessness learn about new opportunities).
- How brokerage occurred was affected by a range of factors including school levels, internal school dynamics, and neighborhood characteristics.
- School social workers were typically the leaders in coordinating school-level action and making connections for families, although they were joined and affected by others including teachers, front office staff, administrators, and bilingual resource teachers.
- There was a “human side of brokerage:” educational professionals, especially social workers, did not have a certain professional detachment, but rather approached their work with immediacy, passion, and emotion, and understood that while homelessness has strong systemic roots, it is an everyday crisis for the people they directly serve.

Limitations. This study may not be generalizable to contexts other than that of this Midwestern town, such as rural areas or larger urban areas outside of the Midwest. Furthermore, the authors chose this town because they have increased and prioritized their response to homelessness in the district. The strategies the authors surface may not be applicable to areas where homelessness response is at its beginning stages of growth.

Applications. Miller et al. found that, in this town, prioritizing connections to education-related resources and relationships significantly supports students experiencing homelessness. The authors offer lessons based on these findings. First, school district central office guidance and support and a “hands-on”

approach are critical and signal a commitment to the issue of homelessness. Second, central office brokerage seems to be optimized when schools cultivate responsive collaborative networks themselves, and don't just rely on single positions to carry out all homeless-related duties. Third, taking the opposite of a "one-size-fits-all" approach and integrating those who have relationships with landlords, police, community housing developers, and so forth, into regular student support teams ensures a more individualized and holistic response to homelessness in a school.

Moore, H., Benbenishty, R., Astor, R. A., & Rice, E. (2017). The positive role of school climate on school victimization, depression, and suicidal ideation among school-attending homeless youth. *Journal of School Violence, 17*(3), 298–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2017.1322518>

Overview. Moore et al. evaluated associations between multiple components of school climate, homelessness, and school violence at the individual level, and evaluated the effects of school climate on victimization among both students experiencing homelessness and students stably housed at the individual level. The authors also examined associations between school demographics and background variables and school victimization at the school level, and examined the role of school climate in school violence at the school level.

Methodology. Authors used data from the ongoing large-scale California Healthy Kids Survey conducted by WestEd, a research organization, particularly the module of the survey that focuses on assessing student perceptions and experiences related to school climate and engagement, learning support, and health-related, nonacademic learning barriers. Survey data from 389,569 high school students in 811 schools from a representative California statewide sample during the academic years 2011–2013 were statistically analyzed to examine the difference between the subgroups of students experiencing homelessness as compared to their housed peers.

Results. Moore et al. found that in this sample

- Students experiencing homelessness were more likely to experience behavioral victimization, discriminatory bullying, and weapon involvement in school compared to their housed peers and, at the school level, a positive school climate was associated with decreased school violence outcome rates.
- Multiple components of school climate were significantly related to discriminatory bullying and behavioral victimization, including sense of connectedness, positive relationships with adults in school, and perceptions of safety, but the strongest associations were between school violence

outcome rates and sense of connectedness and safety. This suggests that while relationships are important, overall school climate might have a stronger effect on students experiencing homelessness when it comes to the violence they may experience.

Limitations. Authors note that the cross-sectional nature of the study prevented them from making causal claims. Also, they used secondary data for which the definition of homelessness may have been different from the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homelessness. Finally, the measures for violence were not categorized beyond nonviolence and strong violence; further differentiation may have produced different results.

Applications. The authors of this study found that overall, a positive school climate can mitigate against the risk of experiencing violence in school for students experiencing homelessness. Moore et al. suggest that for states and districts, a focus on the school experiences of these students could benefit them as well as all other students in a school. At the school level, practices that would improve the safety and sense of connectedness would be beneficial to all students, and particularly those experiencing homelessness.

Schoenfeld, E. A., Bennett, K., Manganella, K., & Kemp, G. (2018). More than just a seat at the table: The power of youth voice in ending youth homelessness in the United States. *Child Care in Practice, 25*(1), 112–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2018.1521376>

Overview. Schoenfeld et al. built on the limited research about how to effectively provide meaningful roles for youth within organizations and other decision-making bodies as they describe the lessons learned and challenges encountered by one Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) site in Austin, Texas in its effort to amplify youth voice at the community level. The Austin Youth Collective (AYC) to end youth homelessness is a committee of 18–26 year olds who have lived experiences of homelessness.

Methodology. Lessons learned and recommendations for practice were derived by triangulating themes that emerged from a focused review of (1) organizational documentation of YHDP and AYC activities (e.g. meeting notes, recruitment materials), and (2) the authors’ experiences working over a year-long period with the Austin YHDP team and the AYC (a member of which co-authored this paper).

Results. Schoenfeld et al. developed six recommendations:

1. Create a formal visioning process. Clarity of purpose is critical, especially in settings where there is a power differential between adults and youth, and decision-making is heavily bureaucratic (i.e., in the field of youth homelessness). When the AYC created a formal visioning process, the group was able to engage more intentionally with YHDP.
2. Provide training to young people. Providing trainings prevents young people from feeling overwhelmed or intimidated when asked to engage with other community members, with the intention of leveling the playing field between youth and their adult partners.
3. Hire an adult facilitator. Hiring an adult facilitator can help to create a safe space in which youth can openly share their ideas and make decisions. In the AYC, the facilitator functioned largely as an assistant.
4. Formalize youth roles. Formalizing youth roles legitimize and contextualize members' roles in the group. In the AYC, members' roles are outlined in written job descriptions and youth are paid a living wage for their participation.
5. Ensure minimal staff turnover. Ensuring that there is minimal staff turnover and group attrition, as well as having regularly scheduled meetings at a consistent location means young people can benefit from stable relationships and structure.
6. Ensure flexibility around schedules. Ensuring flexibility around youths' schedules and responsiveness to their communicative needs helps normalize the iterative learning process.

Limitations. This is an overview of lessons learned from only one district out of ten who received YHDP funding in the year this study was written and covers learnings from only one year of programming. Any application of these findings should take this into account.

Applications. The authors found that incorporating youth voice in systems planning requires an investment of financial and human resources, with large payoffs. By treating youth as equal partners in the effort to prevent and end youth homelessness, the Austin YHDP team has enabled youth to create change within a system that has historically failed them.

SUMMARIES: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF EDUCATORS AND YOUTH SERVICES PERSONNEL IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Introduction

This section highlights the unique role that educational administrators, teachers, and student support personnel play in supporting students who experience homelessness, and how they can leverage these roles to increase support. Roles featured in these studies include:

- teachers
- local liaisons
- school psychologists
- school staff

See Appendix A for more research on this topic.

Annotated Research Summaries

Griffin, A. M., Sulkowski, M. L., Bámaca-Colbert, M. Y., & Cleveland, H. H. (2019). Daily social and affective lives of homeless youth: What is the role of teacher and peer social support? *Journal of School Psychology, 77*, 110–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.09.004>

Overview. Griffin et al. investigated the protective influence of teacher and peer social support for students living doubled-up. They used a daily diary approach to investigate the process in which young people living doubled-up maintained emotional well-being on a daily timescale (i.e., how social support on a daily basis affected their emotional well-being) that more closely corresponds to the timing which this population of young people must adapt to their experiences.

Methodology. The parameters for partaking in the study were that a young person must be currently enrolled in high school, currently living with a non-parent, and classified as homeless according to the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homelessness. The authors provided 98 young people meeting this criteria with a smartphone and training for surveys that they were instructed to complete over a period of ten days. Participants were compensated for each survey completed, resulting in as much as \$70 for full participation. These daily surveys served as “daily diaries” that were the basis for the data analysis.

Results. Griffin et al. found that

- For the students living doubled-up in the sample, in-school social support, positive affect, and negative affect fluctuated substantially on a day-to-day basis.
- Social support was associated with higher positive affect and lower negative affect, suggesting that social support promotes positive emotional responses and mitigates negative ones.
- These students' early-day teacher social support was carried into later in the day and contributed to their positive emotional states. Peer support and its effect on students was less clear, but the findings suggest there is a distinct impact of early-day and baseline peer support on later-day negative affect.
- Receiving social support from peers in school can foster positive affect and buffer against negative affect, whereas receiving social support from teachers may only foster positive affect, and can contribute to better academic and social functioning.

Limitations. The authors noted that participants were prompted to complete two sets of surveys during the day, one after the school day at 3:30 p.m., and one at 9:00 p.m. It is possible that positive and negative affect may need to be assessed immediately after youth experiencing homelessness receive social support, so there may have needed to be more intensive daily assessments to determine real-time responses. Also, reactivity bias may have occurred, as youth were required to repeatedly evaluate their lives and may have modified their attention to the social support they received. Due to the sample size (<100) and nature of the study, results are only generalizable to young people living doubled-up with similar characteristics as in this sample. Finally, this study does not account for long-term academic or social outcomes of peer support on students experiencing homelessness.

Applications. This study highlights the importance of social support as a key approach to supporting youth experiencing homelessness. Teacher relationships may be a particularly overlooked protective factor for students experiencing homelessness, but this study suggests that improving teacher-student relationships and targeting the interpersonal relationships of youth experiencing homelessness could be powerful interventions.

Havlik, S. A., Schultheis, K., Schneider, K., & Neason, E. (2020). Local liaisons: Roles, challenges, and training in serving children and youth experiencing homelessness. *Urban Education, 55*(8–9), 1172–1202.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916668954>

Overview. Havlik et al. aimed to fill a gap in the research on how local liaisons fulfill their responsibilities by uncovering deeper insight in a qualitative way, providing the voice of local liaisons serving in and around an urbanized area on their roles in meeting students' needs, challenges, and training in supporting students experiencing homelessness.

Methodology. The authors interviewed ten local liaisons who work in a large urbanized area in the Northeastern U.S. The sample of local liaisons responded to an email or in-person request to be a part of the study. The liaisons had a variety of backgrounds, years of experience, and number of schools assigned (ranging from five to more than 200), and overall the ten participants represented almost 400 schools. The authors coded and analyzed the interview data.

Results. Havlik et al. found that

- Although the McKinney-Vento Act defines the role of local liaison as largely administrative, participants fulfilled their roles in a personal way as they connected with students, families, and services and as they were invested in their responsibilities. Local liaisons built systems of support, advocated for student success, and committed to serving their students.
- Participants reported varying degrees of training and noted value in it, but their responses suggested that on-the-job learning was the key element to their success.
- Participants reported common barriers in addressing students' needs. Their main challenges included the meeting of students' basic needs for academic success and identification.

Limitations. The authors noted that due to the nature of the study, there was limited opportunity for prolonged engagement with the participants in order to fully dive into their perceptions and experiences. The sample size of this study was very small, so the results are likely not generalizable to the experience of all local liaisons (e.g., those working in different regions or areas). Finally, participants interviewed varied in their liaison roles, as some were part-time and some were full-time. This could affect their perceptions and experiences.

Applications. The findings of Havlik et al. suggest that the roles of local liaisons are complex and require a deep commitment to serving students and their families. The liaisons face considerable barriers to fulfilling their responsibilities. Building partnerships across all systems could enhance and support their role, and schools and districts can support liaisons by providing more formal training and a supportive contact or mentor.

Sulkowski, M. L. (2016). The student homelessness crisis and the role of school psychology: Missed opportunities, room for improvement, and future directions. *Psychology in the Schools, 53*(7), 760–771. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21936>

Overview. In this article, Sulkowski aimed to fill a gap in the research on student homelessness in school psychology literature as he discussed barriers to the academic success of students experiencing homelessness and ways to reduce these barriers. He reviewed protective factors, resilience, and ways to overcome homelessness-related stigma, as well as ways that school psychologists can become key stakeholders in efforts to help support the academic and life success of students experiencing homelessness.

Methodology. Sulkowski conducted a synthesis on the research of the role of school psychology in supporting students experiencing homelessness.

Results. Sulkowski’s review of research revealed that

- The field of school psychology has lagged behind other fields in initiatives toward addressing student homelessness. The field can reframe its efforts using a social justice mindset to support reducing barriers to educational access by working with local liaisons, mitigate risk factors by providing psychological support, and support resilience by providing social support and school connectedness.
- School psychologists may need additional training for supporting students experiencing homelessness.

Limitations. This article was not an experimental or analytical study with data collection, and Sulkowski did not provide a methodology for the inclusion of articles. There may be other research not captured in this study that offers other perspectives.

Applications. This review encourages school psychologists to become more active with efforts to support students experiencing homelessness. The article provides guidelines for accomplishing this aim through reducing barriers to educational access, mitigating risk factors, supporting resilience, and improving training and education on student homelessness.

Wagaman, M. A., Gattis, M. N., Watts, K. J., Yabar, M. P., Blair, D., Haynes, T. S., & Williams, E. G. (2022). The role of schools in supporting students experiencing homelessness: Perceptions of school staff. *Children & Schools, 44*(2), 70–78. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdac002>

Overview. In this study, Wagaman et al. identified strategies for improving school-based responses to ensure educational access for students experiencing homelessness with their families. They explored school staff’s perceptions about their role and the school’s role in supporting these students.

Methodology. The data used for the study (a secondary data analysis) were collected from school staff across three districts in a metro area of a mid-Atlantic state (n = 133). All participants worked directly in a school district, with the majority working in high schools. Participants responded to questions in a survey about demographics, their role, their perceptions of their school, and what additional support they would like. The authors analyzed the survey data.

Results. Wagaman et al. found that

- Nearly all participants felt their school should be involved in efforts to address homelessness, but only around half reported they had referred a student experiencing homelessness to resources outside of the school. In general, participants reported facing barriers to helping students experiencing homelessness.
- Participants felt they needed more training to work with students experiencing homelessness but many did not know what kind of training they needed. Authors found similar thoughts around what additional resources their schools need to help students facing homelessness.
- Many participants reported feeling that teachers and staff are mostly unaware of the prevalence and experiences of students experiencing homelessness. Participants felt the sensitive nature of the subject meant it is not often discussed.

Limitations. The authors noted that the study used secondary data analysis of data collected through a community-based research study, so the findings cannot result in any claims about differences found between groups within the sample or generalize the findings to other school districts or geographical contexts. The original study did not ask about knowledge among school staff of the unique barriers faced by Black and Latinx youth experiencing homelessness, who are often more susceptible to facing homelessness.

Applications. School staff can play a large role in supporting students experiencing homelessness, and this study shows while they may feel strongly about doing so, school staff also may be unaware of how to do so. Awareness-raising campaigns to educate the whole school on policies and resources that exist to support students experiencing homelessness could be helpful.

FINAL TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The articles described in this summary provide a sampling of important peer-reviewed and vetted research that outlines the context of the issues in education and homelessness. Together, these articles demonstrate the highly contextual nature of homelessness and the complexity of its effects on education.

There are, however, gaps in the research that indicate direction for future study. Topics that are understudied include

- rural homelessness
- children and youth in underserved populations experiencing homelessness
- different types of homelessness (e.g., students living doubled-up)
- youth voice and action in supporting students experiencing homelessness
- the benefits of cross-collaboration and triangulation of supportive services
- systems navigation

Exploring these topics could provide further context on the issues of homelessness and education.

Methodologically, many of these studies use small sample sizes, and often focus on one geographical area or region. Larger-scale and longitudinal studies that create more generalizable results would benefit this field.

APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL RESEARCH ON SUBTOPICS

The set of articles summarized above were selected to represent a range of topics and approaches to research in the area of homeless education. Full summaries of those articles provide an overview of research in the field that is both robust and of manageable length. Here in Appendix A and Appendix B, the authors of this report include short summaries of several additional articles and reports that provide further information for readers who may want more information to inform their thinking and practice.

The impact of homelessness on education

Stone, S., & Uretsky, M. (2016). School correlates of academic behaviors and performance among McKinney-Vento identified youth. *Urban Education, 51*(6), 600–628.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602540>

This study analyzed data from K–12th-grade students identified as experiencing homelessness in a large urban district in California (n = 2,618) to estimate the extent to which school factors contributed to educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. The authors found that school factors, including school truancy and average school reading and mathematics proficiency rates, contributed to individual student outcomes. English language learners and students receiving special education services performed less well than peers across outcomes considered. Stone and Uretsky argue that the application of a school-effects lens to academic performance for students experiencing homelessness holds promise to identify school-contextual policy levers, which could provide more information about how a school could effectively fulfill the McKinney-Vento Act mandates.

Tobin, K. J. (2016). Homeless students and academic achievement: Evidence from a large urban area. *Urban Education, 51*(2), 197–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914543116>

This study used administrative data (student outcome data, demographic data, and housing status data) from the education department of a large Northeastern city to analyze whether housing status is a predictor of student outcome data, whether the effect is mediated by attendance, and what school-level factors, if any, can predict achievement of students experiencing homelessness. Tobin found that in this large urban city, housing status is not an important predictor of language arts or math achievement, and attendance mediates this only slightly. Tobin suggests that these results may differ from other similar

research because this urban area might have a relatively more sophisticated shelter system. The results, nevertheless, suggest that the policies that support attendance of students experiencing homelessness could have a positive effect on their academic achievement.

Evidence-based practices for supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness

Baharav, H., Leos-Urbel, J., Obradovic, J., & Bardack, S. (2017). *The educational success of homeless and highly mobile students in San Francisco Unified School District*. Stanford, CA. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford Graduate School of Education.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588399.pdf>

Baharav et al. statistically analyzed San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) student data to investigate the size and distribution of students experiencing homelessness in SFUSD (across several demographic characteristics), whether these students' experiences vary in terms of the type of homelessness experienced and other circumstances, and the factors that promote resilience and positive outcomes for these students. The authors found students experiencing homelessness in the district face significant challenges in their educational trajectories. However, practices that the district is implementing in response (focusing on schools with high concentrations of students experiencing homelessness, addressing enrollment barriers, supporting college and career success, working towards collaboration and coordination between service providers, assigning school liaisons to support on site, and focusing on social and emotional learning) might promote positive school outcomes for these students.

Hallett, R. E., Low, J. A., & Skrla, L. (2015). *Beyond backpacks and bus tokens: Next steps for a district homeless student initiative*. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(6), 693–713.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2015.1050898>

Hallett et al. presented a qualitative case study of a Northern California school district, exploring the importance of integrating homeless student initiatives within all aspects of the district functioning; specifically, how the district-level administrators in this district attempted to move their newly found interest in supporting students experiencing homelessness in the organizational hierarchy into school site programming. To identify themes, the authors used interviews of 15 staff and document analysis of the district that serves approximately 13,000 students. Hallett et al. found that supporting students

experiencing homelessness goes well beyond counting them and providing access to school sites. Districts should fully involve the political and professional systems—not just the administrative system—when integrating services for these students. Districts should also tie in support for these students with their mission (political), and provide resources that support more than these students’ educational needs (professional).

Havlik, S. A., & Duckhorn, M. (2020). Supporting high students experiencing homelessness going to college: Perspectives of local liaisons. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 0(0)*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025120980371>

Havlik and Duckhorn explored the perceptions and experiences of local liaisons, particularly what they perceive as the college-going needs of students experiencing homelessness and where the liaisons’ support fits into this. They interviewed 23 local and regional liaisons from across the United States and analyzed the transcripts. The authors found the liaisons interviewed were very involved in addressing students’ three main areas of need: basic needs, social-emotional needs, and college-going related needs such as the belief that they can go to college and graduate. Havlik & Duckhorn found that liaisons play an important role for supporting the college-going needs of students experiencing homelessness, particularly by working collaboratively with a system of stakeholders.

Moore, H., Astor, R. A., & Benbenishty, R. (2020). Role of school-climate in school-based violence among homeless and non-homeless students: Individual- and school-level analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 102*, 104378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104378>

Moore et al. examined the relationship between school climate and school-related victimization, depression tendency, and suicidal ideation among students experiencing homelessness, in order to inform school-based interventions and other services for this population of students. They statistically analyzed data from the large scale California Healthy Kids Survey, particularly the data of students experiencing homelessness (n = 1,169). They found that school-attending young people experiencing homelessness have high rates of school victimization, depression tendency, and suicidal ideation, highlighting the critical role of school environment in the context of these behavioral and mental health risks. The study showed that safety and high expectations had significant association with school victimization, depression tendency, and suicidal ideation. The authors suggest safe schools that promote

positive and supportive relationships as well as employ strong safety procedures are schools where students are less likely to experience violence and peer victimization.

The critical role of educators and youth services personnel in supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness

Kim, J. (2020). Homelessness as difficult knowledge in early childhood education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(6), 815–823. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01045-5>

This study aimed to unpack the current state of homelessness in early childhood education, exploring the implications of how homelessness could be approached with children to achieve a better understanding of children’s lives. Kim focused on teacher candidates, exploring the extent to which teacher candidates consider homelessness difficult knowledge and how teacher candidates experience the perspectives of children and in-service teachers toward homelessness. Kim analyzed multiple case studies that drew from teacher candidate data in a Midwestern and Southeastern state. Kim found that throughout their teacher candidacy, homelessness is rarely discussed, avoided, and often distorted, and that additional training and intentionality of conversations about homelessness can support teachers to help their young students who are facing homelessness.

Wilkins, B. T., Mullins, M. H., Mahan, A., & Canfield, J. P. (2015). Homeless Liaisons' awareness about the implementation of the McKinney–Vento Act. *Children & Schools*, 38(1), 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdv041>

This study examined how local liaisons perceive the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in their service area. One hundred and eighteen (118) practitioners in three Southern states completed surveys focusing on their perceptions of the McKinney-Vento Act implementation. The survey results indicated there are significant differences in the perception of implementation in the level of collaboration with teachers and school administrators, significant differences in liaisons’ job titles, and differences in schools’ receipt of federal EHCY funding. In addition, among the participants surveyed, there was a significant difference in the awareness of homelessness with regards to general awareness, interaction, policy, and needs. Wilkins et al. suggest that, based on the finding that collaboration and awareness are major factors that affect perceptions of implementation, local liaisons can take steps to ensure there is a collaborative environment to implement the McKinney-Vento Act.

Wright, T., Nankin, I., Boonstra, K., & Blair, E. (2018). Changing through relationships and reflection: An exploratory investigation of pre-service teachers' perceptions of young children experiencing homelessness. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(3), 297–308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-018-0921-y>

Wright et al. studied pre-service teachers' (PST) self-reported attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and self-identified skills for working with young children experiencing homelessness in schools. They investigated how pre-service teachers conceptualize homelessness, how they perceive teaching to students experiencing homelessness, and how the teacher preparation curriculum can support students in expanding their understandings of homelessness. Authors conducted interviews with 25 graduates of a dual-certification Early Childhood Education/English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher preparation program at a large Midwestern public university. Wright et al. found that in the sample of PSTs, many enter with misconceptions about homelessness and are not offered sufficient training to overcome these misconceptions on their own. They found that incorporating specific information about homelessness into coursework and supervision, nurturing PSTs' capacity for critical self-reflection, and creating opportunities for PSTs to develop positive teacher-student relationships with children experiencing homelessness were what participants identified as essential in fostering PST self-efficacy.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH FROM POLICY ORGANIZATIONS

Appendix B summarizes reports from policy organizations that have conducted research related to children and youth experiencing homelessness. These reports include valuable data and insights that contribute greatly to the understanding of these children and youth and of ways that services can increase their access to educational opportunities and success in school.

Kull, M. A., Morton, M. H., Patel, S., Curry, S., & Carreon, E. (2019). *Missed opportunities: Education among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. https://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_Education-Brief.pdf

Overview. This report on understanding and addressing youth homelessness found ways in which homelessness affects young people's ability to stay and thrive in school, highlighting a need for homeless systems and education systems to work together.

Methodology. The Voices of Youth Count initiative collected data through a national survey, a youth survey, a provider survey, in-depth interviews, administrative data analysis, systematic evidence review, and policy and fiscal review.

Results. Kull et al. found that

- Young people who do not have a high school diploma or a GED are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness as a young person than those who have at least a high school diploma or a GED.
- Young people who experience homelessness are less likely to attend a 4-year college, and when they do, many still struggle with homelessness.
- For young people experiencing homelessness, local community resources are integral to supporting a sustainable exit from homelessness. The variability of access to high-quality local community resources across the country may present significant challenges to a young person experiencing homelessness.
- Young people often do not learn about educational resources from homeless service providers, which presents a significant challenge to reaching their educational pursuits.

Limitations. The brief used data from varying sources, but survey data are self-reported. Further research might benefit from more empirical studies.

Applications. Homelessness and housing instability present huge obstacles to young people’s ability and opportunity to stay in school and achieve educational success. This brief provides recommendations at all levels of the system in order to earlier identify youth experiencing homelessness, disrupt students’ education less, and enrich students’ education.

[Levin, S., Espinoza, D., & Griffith, M. \(2022\). Supporting students experiencing homelessness: District approaches to supports and funding. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/557.894](https://doi.org/10.54300/557.894)

Overview. Levin et al. examined—through looking at five different school districts—how districts address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, how they fund and staff their programs supporting students experiencing homelessness, and the challenges they confront in meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. The authors also suggested how federal and state policymakers can support districts doing this work.

Methodology. The authors selected five school districts across the United States that received the McKinney-Vento Act subgrants and that have been recognized for their commitment to supporting students experiencing homelessness. The districts ranged in size, demographics, and geographical location. Levin et al. reviewed public documents, conducted interviews with twelve district staff members, and collected financial and staffing data.

Results. Levin et al. found that

- Districts used many creative strategies to identify students experiencing homelessness, but at the same time were certain they had not reached all eligible students.
- Districts provided a wide range of services to students including: essential items, transportation, academic services, physical and mental health supports, specialized support for unaccompanied youth, and support for families.
- Staffing of homeless programs was essential to supporting students.
- Districts needed to raise funds and blend and braid public and private funding to supplement inadequate federal and state funding.

Limitations. The authors noted that this study only examined the specific role of school districts in supporting youth homelessness, but not other strategies at the school or community level. In addition, the study did not examine the quality of implementation of supports for students experiencing homelessness.

Applications. Authors provide policy recommendations based upon their findings. This report should be useful to districts and policymakers looking for ideas on how to create supports and systems that help students experiencing homelessness.

Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., Samuels, G. M., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in rural America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Homelessness-in-Rural-America.pdf>

Overview. This research-to-impact brief by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago drew on multiple research components from Voices of Youth Count to raise new evidence on the distinctive issues of young people experiencing homelessness in rural areas.

Methodology. The Voices of Youth Count initiative collected data through a national survey, a youth survey, a provider survey, in-depth interviews, administrative data analysis, systematic evidence review, and policy and fiscal review.

Results. The authors found that

- Rural homelessness is as common as suburban and urban homelessness but is often more hidden.
- Young people in rural areas are more disconnected from education than young people in larger and urban areas and therefore, more disconnected from support services.
- Native American and Alaska Native young people are at particularly high risk of experiencing homelessness in rural communities.

Limitations. The brief used well-triangulated data from varying sources, but survey data is self-reported. Further research might benefit from more empirical studies.

Applications. Rural homelessness presents young people living in rural communities with unique challenges, and services and support targeted to youth experiencing homelessness in rural communities

is needed. This brief provides implications and recommendations for all levels of the system in supporting rural youth experiencing homelessness.

Shah, M.F., Black, C., Felver, B.E.M. (2015). Homeless and unstably housed K-12 students in Washington State. Washington State Department of Commerce and Department of Social and Health Services. Report No. 11.214. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/rda/reports/research-11-214.pdf>

Overview. Shah et al. used integrated administrative data to investigate the characteristics and needs of students experiencing homelessness in Washington State, and explored measures of risk and well-being related to experiencing housing instability.

Methodology. The authors' data from several databases provided information about children and their families and included 21,096 students who were experiencing homelessness or were unstably housed. The authors compared these data to the data of 612,502 students who were not experiencing homelessness in the school year 2011–2012.

Results. The authors found that

- Students experiencing homelessness, compared to their peers, were often identified by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) caseworkers as “homeless with housing” and were at greater risk by several measures. Older youth experiencing homelessness or staying with friends or family were associated with a higher prevalence of substance abuse and criminal justice involvement.
- Students living doubled-up were associated with a greater risk for future homelessness.
- Schools were identifying many students who qualify for McKinney-Vento Act services but might not have been eligible for housing assistance according to the homeless service system due to a narrow definition that did not include living doubled-up.

Limitations. The results from this report are based on data from Washington State, but state context may vary and the results, therefore, may not be generalizable to other areas. This report included only data from Washington State and the results may be particular to this population and context.

Applications. In Washington State, there is an opportunity to better connect students experiencing homelessness (and those at risk) to services that could support their educational success. Other states may want to conduct similar studies using this study's methodology to explore their own state context.

References

National Center for Homeless Education. (2022) Student homelessness in America: School years 2018–19 and 2020–21. <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Student-Homelessness-in-America-2022.pdf>



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