About Homeless Youth

Every Year, More Than 2 Million Kids in America Will Face a Period of Homelessness

Covenant House website

The number of youth — teens and young adults — living on the street appears to be growing. San Diego saw a 39 percent jump in homeless youth over the past year. In Atlanta, the number of homeless youth in 2016 was estimated to be nearly triple that of previous years. After a concerted effort to count homeless young people, Seattle's King County saw its numbers jump more than 700 percent between 2016 and 2017. And the number of homeless, unaccompanied public school students increased one-fifth between 2012 and 2015.

The Pew Charitable Trusts

As defined in federal legislation, the term "homeless children and youth" refers to minors who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Included are those who:

- are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason

- may be living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, shelters, or awaiting foster care placement

- 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

- are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, or

- migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are children who are living in similar circumstances listed above

The term homeless youth also is used to designate those under age 25 who are living without a parent or guardian.

Some Statistics

Estimates vary because of different definitions and data gathering difficulties. From 1.3 to 2.5 million children and youth have been reported as homeless in the United States (Barnes, Gilbertson, & Chatterjee, 2018; Child Trends, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Family homeless youth (i.e., homeless minors accompanied by a family member) are estimated to be over 30% of the overall homeless population, and they are seen as the fastest growing group of homeless in the United States (Henry, Shivji, De Sousa, et al., 2015; Tobin & Murphy, 2013). According to HUD's 2014 Point-in-Time Report, 34% of the total homeless population is under 24.

The U.S. Department of Education (2017) indicates that: "In 2014–15, some 2.5 percent of students in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools were reported as homeless children or youth (1.3 million students). This percentage varied from 2.0 percent in suburban school districts to 2.4 percent in rural districts, 2.6 percent in town districts, and 3.7 percent in city districts. The largest numbers of homeless students were enrolled in city (578,000 students) and suburban districts (422,000 students), compared to rural (149,000 students) and town districts (139,000 students)."

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Available subgroup breakdowns for 2014-15 indicate that larger numbers of homeless students were enrolled in early elementary grades (excluding preschool) than in later grades. Over 100,000 students were reported as homeless at each grade level from kindergarten to 3rd grade. In contrast, 68,700 students in 11th grade and 83,000 students in 12th grade were reported as homeless. Seventeen percent (234,506) were children with disabilities; fourteen percent (201,124) were English language learners; eight percent were unaccompanied homeless youth; one percent were migratory children/youth. At night, 3 percent were unsheltered, 7 percent were in hotels/motels, 14 percent in shelters, and 76 percent were doubled-up with another family due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or other reasons (such as domestic violence).

While racial, gender, and sexual orientation data are limited, disparities are recognized. Particular attention is paid to homeless LGBT youth (estimates range from 11 and 40 percent of homeless youth).

For state by state data, see https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tgh.asp.

Challenges Related to Well-Being

A range of adverse experiences are associated with children and youth becoming homeless, and once homeless, the youngsters experience additional adverse experiences and negative outcomes (e.g., physical and mental health problems, violence, early pregnancy, substance use, early death). It is widely recognized that child and youth homelessness is associated with conditions such as poverty, discrimination, and problems in the home (e.g., frequent mobility, parental neglect, physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, addiction, mental disorder). For example, 79 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth report experiencing abuse prior to leaving home. Once homeless, reports indicate multiple victimizations. For example, 83 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth experience physical or sexual victimization after leaving their homes, with females more likely to experience sexual victimization (Bender, Ferguson, et al., 2010).

And a study of family homeless youth by Barnes, Gilbertson, & Chatterjee (2018) reports that:

- 29 percent reported self-harm
- 21 percent reported suicide ideation
- 09.3 percent reported suicide attempts.

(Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youths aged 10-24 years old, but it is the leading cause of death among homeless youth.

Given the challenges, it is hardly surprising that homeless children and youth often need personalized special assistance to assure they have equity of opportunity to succeed at school. While direct services to address individual problems are a major concern, it also is essential to develop systems for ensuring housing assistance and case management (Pedersen, Tucker, Klein, & Parast, 2018).

Help Seeking

Researchers report homeless youth tend to engage in self-coping behaviors rather than seeking help from others (Bender, Begun, Durbahn, Ferguson, & Schau, 2018). The main reasons reported are:

>Not trusting others (e.g., lack of confidentiality; concern about stigma and victimization)
>Self-reliant experiences and the ability to self-sooth
>Concern about feel shamed, embarrassed, pitied
>Believing a change life/circumstances is not feasible (so seeking help is pointless)
>Not pleased with services available to them (e.g., due to unfamiliarity, limited service
    hours, a history of negative interactions with service providers, authority figures, and
    overly restrictive organizations, feelings of being misunderstood, overlooked, or judged).

Studies suggest that some homeless youth have social networks comprised mostly of street-based peers who do not have jobs or attend school. Seeking help or social acceptance from these peers is seen as promoting an increase in risky behaviors (e.g., substance use, risky sex) and mental health problems (de la Haye et al., 2012; Yoder, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 1998).
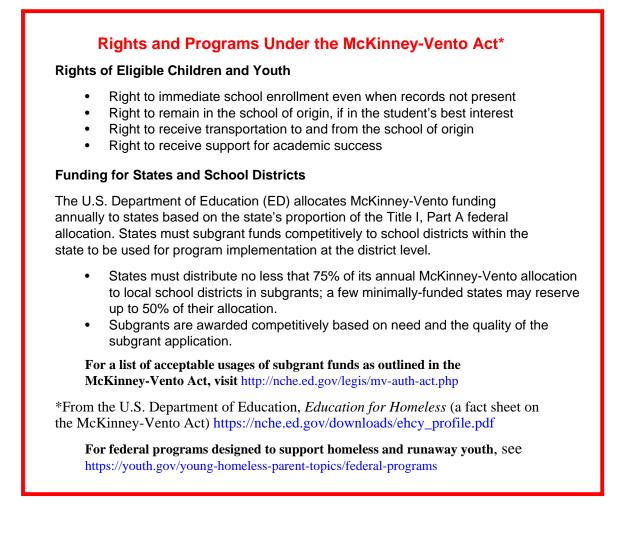
See Appendix A for a sample of what homeless youth have to say.

Federal Policy

It was not until 1986 that Congress began considering legislation to address the problem of homelessness. 1987 saw passage of what is now known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (PL100-77). This act is the only major federal legislative dealing with homelessness.

Through this Act, the federal government gives grants to different states and school districts to provide services to homeless youth. The program eases access to and provides for receiving help at school (see Exhibit below).

The McKinney-Vento Act has been amended over the years to expand its scope and strengthen its the provisions; the most recent amendment was in 2015 in connection with passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The result is a mandate that districts remove barriers to the enrollment, attendance, and opportunity to succeed in school for homeless children and youth. Districts are required to designate a homeless liaison, pro-actively identify homeless children and youth, and provide transportation to stabilize the educational experiences of homeless students. Students can enroll without having to provide documentation of their current address, school records, or immunization records. Besides transportation, students are to have access to food, medical services, and tutoring. The homeless liaison is to help homeless students and families by providing information about and guiding access to resources.

Rights and Programs Under the McKinney-Vento Act*

Rights of Eligible Children and Youth

- Right to immediate school enrollment even when records not present
- Right to remain in the school of origin, if in the student's best interest
- Right to receive transportation to and from the school of origin
- Right to receive support for academic success

Funding for States and School Districts

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) allocates McKinney-Vento funding annually to states based on the state's proportion of the Title I, Part A federal allocation. States must subgrant funds competitively to school districts within the state to be used for program implementation at the district level.

- States must distribute no less that 75% of its annual McKinney-Vento allocation to local school districts in subgrants; a few minimally-funded states may reserve up to 50% of their allocation.
- Subgrants are awarded competitively based on need and the quality of the subgrant application.

For a list of acceptable usages of subgrant funds as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act, visit http://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv-auth-act.php

*From the U.S. Department of Education, *Education for Homeless* (a fact sheet on the McKinney-Vento Act) https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/ehcy_profile.pdf

For federal programs designed to support homeless and runaway youth, see https://youth.gov/young-homeless-parent-topics/federal-programs

The School's Role

As they do in improving their efforts to address the learning, behavior, and emotional problems of all students, schools address homelessness by including an emphasis on:

- Understanding the nature and scope of problems experienced by homeless children and youth and how their problems overlap with those experienced by other students

- Outreaching to re-engage those who are not in school

- Addressing barriers to enrollment, attendance, participation, and progress

- Supporting, enhancing and sustaining engagement

See Appendix B for a sample of what school district McKinney-Vento Act liaisons have to say.

Mentor Relationships

Frequently mentioned in the homeless youth literature is how beneficial teacher and school-based "mentor" relationships are (e.g., Fruiht & Wray-Lake, 2012, Erickson et al., 2009). The general literature on mentorships indicate that a positive role model or mentor is associated with academic success and college attendance. Additionally, having a mentor for educational attainment is typically seen as a positive addition to any youngster's life. Available findings suggest that mentorship received from a teacher or adult outside of the youth's family can be especially potent. Such findings are consistent across racial and ethnic groups. Unfortunately, some students who probably would benefit significantly from mentoring are reluctant to enter into such a relationship.

For more on mentoring, see:

>National Mentoring Resource Center https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php
>Tutor/Mentor Connection http://www.tutormentorconnection.org/

Embedding Homeless Concerns into a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching

As the focus on homeless children and youth is expanded, greater emphasis must be placed on differentiating among those so designated, their similarities to other students manifesting problems related to well-being, and on system development and policy implications of such differences and similarities. Besides assisting with housing, it remains unclear as to the degree to which subgroups of homeless students require supports that differ from other students who also need effective caretaking and special assistance.

From our perspective, it is essential for policy makers to think beyond discrete interventions if they are to ensure equity of opportunity for every student to succeed at school. Given sparse resources, schools must embed their focus on homeless students into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. And in doing so, they must outreach to the community and weave school and community resources together. (See *Improving School Improvement-* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html .)

Appendix A

What Do Homeless Youth Have to Say?

From: *Hidden in plain sight: Homeless students in America's public schools*
http://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/2016-12/HiddeninPlainSightFullReportFINAL_0.pdf

By listening to those on the frontlines of this issue, we can learn how and why they experienced homelessness, what effect it had on their ability to succeed in school and life, and what might help them persist toward high school graduation, college, and future careers. These young people have large dreams even in the face of great challenges. They do not choose to be homeless, nor want it to define their futures. It is time for America to address this issue that affects millions of our young people and work together to ensure homeless children have the supports, stability and care they deserve to pursue the American Dream.

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Tricia Raikes
Co-Founder, Raikes Foundation

Here's a sample from the report's youth interviews:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix B

What a Sample of School District McKinney-Vento Act Liaisons Had to Say

As part of her work on the topic of homeless students, UCLA student Hoppe Taylor surveyed a sample of Los Angeles County School District McKinney-Vento liaisons. She asked the following:

- What has benefitted this population the most/primary areas where you see success in schools?
- What needs improvement within this system and can potentially benefit from more research?
- What are the primary resources you use for homeless youth, families, and schools?

Here are the responses:

What has benefitted this population the most/primary areas where you see success in schools?

>Helping them locate affordable housing resources
>Connection with a caring adult, especially a teacher. Being able to feel a part of the school community
   with access to all the same things as their non-homeless peers. Homelessness often brings with it
   shame and lack of resources. Adolescents who are desperately trying to fit in with peers often struggle
   if they do not have a strong support system and resources to "fit in".
>McKinney Vento protections for school of origin, transportation assistance, free nutrition, AB 1806 -
   minimum graduation requirements, extending McKinney Vento protections to preschool age. An
   increase in the provision of mental health supports in schools.
>I believe you have to look at the whole child approach, specifically basic needs. From a simple
   backpack with school supplies, to clean uniforms, to access to nutrition - there are necessary before
   MHS can be successful. Also, enrichment and supplemental tutoring would go a long way in helping
   students to academic success.
>What has benefitted this population at the moment is having community liaisons at each of our school
   sites. Having a person dedicated to helping provide resources to our parents of homeless students has
   made a positive difference in our parents and we hope in turn that students feel more comfortable and
   able to focus on their studies and having greater student achievement.
>We feel that our homeless children and youth most benefit from the growth mindset. All staff reject
   the deficit mindset regarding their situation as homeless. In place, we think in terms of eliminating
   barriers that they face that can keep them from achieving their best potential in school. The
   interventions relative to eliminating those barriers are listed in #3. We also encourage and enable
   active participation by numerous agencies and organizations committed to our goal of eliminating
   barriers among our population. Our Caring Community Collaborative has more than 150 members.

What needs improvement within this system and can potentially benefit from more research?

>Knowing where to go for the resources needed. Sometimes it feels like you don't know where to go
   for assistance
>Longitudinal studies of students that experienced homelessness for varying lengths of time that have
   been successful in completing HS and going to college. What were the most effective supports they
   received including monetary and emotional. The impact of "doubling up" on student success. How
   does living with another family impact student learning and wellness? Do supports like uniforms,
   backpacks, etc. make a difference in student success?
>Provisions for supporting unaccompanied homeless youth, better identification of homeless students
   in school. More child care and preschool placements so children can spend longer each day with a
   safe, supportive routine. Of course - some affordable housing.
>A coordinated system, that pull various resources and fundings to offer a comprehensive array of
   services to meet the complex needs of our homeless students.
>We need specialized help for students and families that are going through transitional living. This is
   very traumatic for children and at the moment there seems to be more monetary help for Transient
   people than for families going through transitional living. Another improvement that can be made is
   funding through the state. At the moment they award districts with grants to provide resources to our
   families, but these awards are far and few in between. This funding should be based on how Local
   Control Funding Formula funds are awarded.
>They are most in need of development is that of the mental health supports available to our students.
   We need to approach this dimension of educating homeless children and youth differently and

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research would help us identify the areas of need and implementing focused, targeted tiers of intervention. Department of Mental Health has endless amounts of money for mental health, but there is so much red tape and barriers to accessing it, trying new programs, etc. It gets very frustrating. Another area of focus could be analyzing the impact when teachers and other school employees are trauma-informed.

What are the primary resources you use for homeless youth, families, and schools?

>Los Angeles County of Education (LACOE) liaison is a great resource

>Mostly bus passes and metro card for transportation. Occasionally we will support students with clothes and other resources including food, graduation fees, Christmas presents.

>Tutoring, transportation, nutrition, referrals for resources and housing supports, socio emotional support and school-based counseling, instrumental supports for families, provision of school supplies and priority for after school programs, access to extracurricular activities and summer school.

>Primary resources are the school (at the elementary), like parent center or family resource center; at the secondary school - it's the teacher and counselors' relationship with the students that will help the students to succeed.

>The primary resources we connect our families to is organizations such as The Whole Child and First Day; they are the organizations in our areas that house families who are going through homelessness. We also offer counseling resources through Spiritt Family Services, Pacific Clinics and The Whole Child. We provide parents with transportation tokens, clothing, school supplies, and hygiene kits through our Mickinney Vento, and shoes and jackets through the organization like Shoes that Fit.

>Interventions include
 easy access to Medi-Cal, health care, housing support, job placement (for parents), homework help, scholarships for enrichment opportunities, events that connect families with local resources, provision of basic needs (clothing, food, school supplies, hygiene kits). Our homeless students also benefit from social emotional supports from all tiers of support: counseling, play therapy, substance abuse prevention and treatment, mentor programs. We have also implemented tiered supports for all ages that support our homeless students. SERVE at Nogales HS is an elective class based on a family setting. Students engage in deep discussions presented by a counselor and led by peer leaders. Students have the opportunity to engage in Restorative Practices Curriculum when they are suspended rather than being at home in our Alternative to Suspensions class. We also offer parenting classes that meet the court mandate and other ones that are offered on an ongoing basis throughout our district. We have Parent Centers at which homeless parents can access the internet to look for jobs, check student grades, look for housing, etc. We do a monthly food distribution in partnership with LA Regional Food Bank.

Hoppe's conclusion after reviewing the responses:

First: Thanks to all who replied. From the responses that I received, the goals for schools not only are to address the physical needs of students, but also their mental well-being. It seems the primary resources students are being pointed toward are designed to meet their or their family's physical needs, such as temporary housing, food, medical kits or places of service, and transportation. At the same time, most responses focused on helping change students' mentality about their current situation and encouraging them to stay in school and use the resources that are there. Additionally, there seems to be a push towards encouraging using school as a place to increase social support. Barriers noted include insufficient funding to provide students with resources they need, and teachers and staff not knowing how to deal with the trauma that these students continue to experience.

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For more information and resources

>Federal Program Office, Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program, U.S. Department of Education, (202) 453-6777 HomelessEd@ed.gov , http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html

>National Technical Assistance Center

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) has been ED's homeless education technical assistance provider since 1998. Housed at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NCHE provides a toll-free helpline, a comprehensive website, online and face-to-face trainings, and informational resources. 800.308.2145, homeless@serve.org , http://nche.ed.gov

>*The Most Frequently Asked Questions on the Education Rights of Children and Youth in Homeless Situations* https://naehcy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2017-10-16_NAEHCY-FAQs.pdf

>youth.gov addresses the six main issues that homeless students face, such as housing, employment and education attainment, connecting students to supportive adults (such as an informal mentorship), providing independent living skills and training, connecting homeless youth to mainstream resources, and providing individual plans for the goals that this population has. https://youth.gov/youth-topics/runaway-and-homeless-youth/education

>*Enrolling Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness in School* https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/enrollment.pdf

Local Resources

For help finding out about housing or other support services in an area, contact
>the local agencies such as the United Way, Salvation Army, or rescue mission
>the McKinney-Vento state coordinator see https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/sccontact.pdf
>a local McKinney-Vento school district liaison

Relevant National Organizations

Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness http://www.icphusa.org/

National Alliance to End Homelessness http://www.endhomelessness.org/

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth http://www.naehcy.org/

National Coalition for the Homeless http://www.nationalhomeless.org/

National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth https://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty http://www.nlchp.org/

National Network for Youth http://www.nn4youth.org/

SchoolHouse Connection http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/