



Educational Barriers of  
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

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EMG 807

# What are we going to look at today?

## Essential Question

What is it that I need to know about unaccompanied homeless youth so that I am better able to assist them?

## Topics

1. Who are unaccompanied homeless youth and where do they come from?
2. What are the relevant statistics to back up our need to help these students who are at-risk?
3. How do they differ from their housed peers?
4. What are their specific barriers to education?
5. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001
6. Credit Accrual and Recovery

# Who are unaccompanied homeless youth?

These students are defined as “young people [who] confront the dangers and challenges of homelessness without the care of a parent or legal guardian” (NAEHCY, 2010).



# Why are these youth homeless without their families?

- Runaways or forced out of home by parent or guardian
- Physical and sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Disagreements regarding issues such as the youth's sexual orientation or an unwanted pregnancy
- Family violence
- “Forcibly separated from their parents because of traditional housing, shelter and social welfare policies” (Polakow, 2007)
- “Suffer unstable residential and foster care placement” (Polakow, 2007)
- Abandoned by parents



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# Where do they end up?

- Living in precarious situations: cars, campgrounds, parks, abandoned buildings
- Experience violence and victimization

# How big is the problem?

- “Between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away from their homes each year” (NAEHCY, 2008)
- “Recently released federal data show that the number of homeless children and youth identified in public schools has increased for the second year in a row, and by 41% over the past two school years” (NAEHCY, 2010)
- “According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of homeless children and youth (PreK-12) increased from 679,724 students in the 2006-2007 school year to 956,914 students in the 2008-2009 school year” (NAEHCY, 2010)

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- “American children have a 1 in 50 chance of experiencing homelessness in their lifetime” (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2010)
- More data from the Law Center’s 2010 Key Data Report:
  - 39% of the national homeless population are children
  - 38% of the homeless population have less than a high school degree by the age 18
  - 50% of the homeless population report dropping out of school during the course of their education





# Why the increase?

## The current economic downturn is a major reason!





# What are their unmet needs?

- Meeting basic needs (e.g., food, shelter)
- Pairing them up with the services they need (e.g., coping with the stress of homelessness)
- Meeting their educational needs
- Dealing with instability
- Bridging their adolescence into productive adulthood to break the cycles of poverty, homelessness, violence, and victimization



# How do they compare with their housed peers?

- More likely to score lower on standardized tests
- Less likely to be promoted at the end of the school year
- More likely to need remediation
- Experience shame and isolation because of homelessness
- Often means a loss of friends and neighborhood network
- Have a stigma as being a “shelter kid”
- Poor attitude of school personnel

(Polakow, 2007)



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- Higher incidents of a variety of mental health symptoms including anxiety
- Developmental delays
- The longer they stay on the streets the greater the risk for more severe symptoms of depression and low self-esteem
- Greater risk for depression
- Increased reports of self-injurious behaviors because of limited coping skills



- Elevated risk for suicide ideation and suicidal attempts
- More physical health problems
- Increased rates of pregnancy
- Increased rates of STDs
- Weakened immune symptoms
- Risky sexual behaviors
- Twice as much drug use (the more times a youth has run away from home, the higher their levels of substance use)



- Four times as likely to dropout
- 77% more likely to have multiple behavioral problems
- More likely to have school behavior problems
- More likely to have regressive behavior inattentiveness, persistent tiredness, sleep disorders, and inappropriate social interactions with adults



# Why should we help?

There are many reasons to help and the ultimate reason is because of the economic benefits.

If we don't assist them in ending their homelessness and becoming an independent adult, we will be assisting them financially the rest of their lives in one way or another (e.g., incarceration, medical care)



Schools alone cannot meet all the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth but they are a great place to start where students can find:

- ✓ Security
- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Stability
- ✓ Success



School can be where it is about all kids!



Everyone from the teachers to principals must be accepting and sensitive to perceptions perpetrated by:

1. The media
2. Congressional welfare rhetoric
3. The public at large



# Barriers to Education

- Lack of parent or guardian
- Frequent mobility/lack of stable housing
- Lack of staff awareness and sensitivity
- Inability to complete assignments
- Lack of psychological services
- Inability to participate in co-curricular activities
- Poor health and inadequate medical care and physical needs (e.g., food, clothing, health care)
- Lack of transportation
- Poor service coordination
- Lack of school records and other paperwork
- Employment
- Attendance policies
- Credit accrual policies



(Thompson, 2010)

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# McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001

- McKinney-Vento was passed in 1987 and was the first comprehensive legislation to aid the homeless
- Reauthorized in 2002 as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)



# Gives homeless children and youth the right to:

- “Remain in the same school even if they move;”
- “Enroll in a new school without typically required records such as proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other papers;”
- “Get transportation to school;”
- “Get all the school services they need; and”
- “Challenge decisions made by schools and districts”

“National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2011)

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“Despite McKinney-Vento,  
homeless children & youth  
sometimes need help enrolling and  
participating in school.”

That’s where we come in!!



“National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2011)

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# Who is covered?

“Any child or youth without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence is considered “homeless” under the law.”



“National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2011)

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This includes students who:

- Live with a friends, relative, or someone else
- Are staying in parks, campgrounds, etc.
- Living in a shelter of any type
- Staying in substandard housing
- Living in places not ordinarily used for sleeping (e.g., cars, parks, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings)
- Awaiting foster care
- Abandoned





Unaccompanied homeless youth  
are also covered!!



# School System Resources

- Every school district must have a liaison or coordinator who is in charge of making sure students who are homeless can enroll and succeed in school
- Central office should have their contact information

# What do liaisons do?

- Locate homeless children and youth
- Make sure they are enrolled in school and have equal opportunity to succeed
- Make sure they receive appropriate services (e.g., transportation, special education, ELL services)
- Make referrals (e.g., health, mental and dental services)
- Help with disagreements between youth and schools
- Help with enrollment
- Help with records



Each state must also appoint a state coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth.



**Coordinator**

# Credit Accrual & Recovery

- “Unaccompanied youth often struggle to earn credits in a traditional high school system” (NAEHCY, 2008)
- Struggle to hold down a job, meet basic survival skills
- Struggle with lack of sleep and physical needs not being met
- And these in turns affects their attendance and how well they do once in the classroom
- Just like you’d never ask an employee to work without getting paid, you shouldn’t ask a student to attend school without getting credit



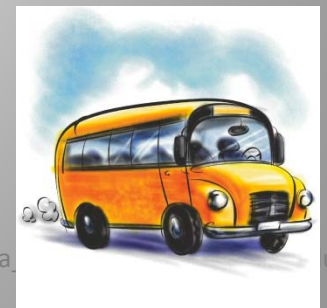
Schools must adopt policies that allow for partial credits and credit recovery to help students graduate since this is vital for them to go on to higher education and financial and life independence.



# 5 Strategies

#1: Working “to keep students in their school of origin so they can avoid the challenges of school mobility” (National Center for Homeless Education, 2010)

- Under McKinney-Vento school districts must work to help students stay in their school or origin, even when they move outside the district
- This includes helping them with transportation when necessary (e.g., re-routing buses, being sure that homeless shelters and other housing options are on the bus routes, or giving public transportation passes)
- Some school districts are actually working with local community agencies to find appropriate housing for youth within their school of origin district

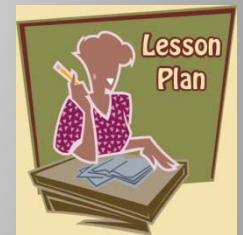


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#2: “Provide support to enable students to attend school consistently and progress academically” (National Center for Homeless Education, 2010)

- Educating school staff so they are better equipped to work with these youth
- Creating lesson plans and co-curricular groups that meet the specific needs of homeless youth
- Providing for basics needs and academic support (e.g., quiet study spaces, after hour access to the school, use of school showers)



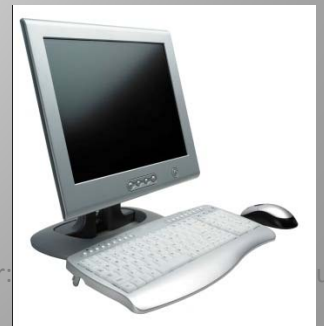
### #3: “Award students’ partial credit for work completed” (National Center for Homeless Education, 2010)

- Since they often have poor attendance, it’s important to give credit when they can show up for school so they can “progress academically”
- Track attendance and homework
- Use test scores to give partial credit
- This tracking can be handled easily with the use of tools such as the web-based database called PowerSchool



#4: To “complement regular classes with independent study programs, including learning labs, online learning, and computerized models” (National Center for Homeless Education, 2010)

- Youth have some times in their lives that are more stressful than others when their academics may suffer but when they’re under less stress they will be able to accomplish more academically
- If schools use more “nontraditional” learning programs/approaches along with a certified teachers and other required school personnel, they can help learning during the academically productive times more along faster
- McKinney-Vento assists with access to technology and transportation to assist with these programs
- Also a good idea to waive fees too

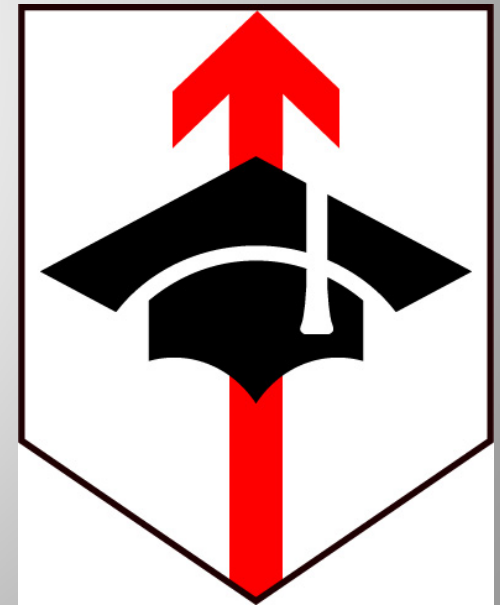


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#5: “To ensure that students experiencing homelessness can enroll in appropriate innovative and/or alternative programs”  
(National Center for Homeless Education, 2010)

- Middle College High Schools
- GEAR UP
- Upward Bound
- Running Start
- Dropout prevention and recovery
- Work experience programs



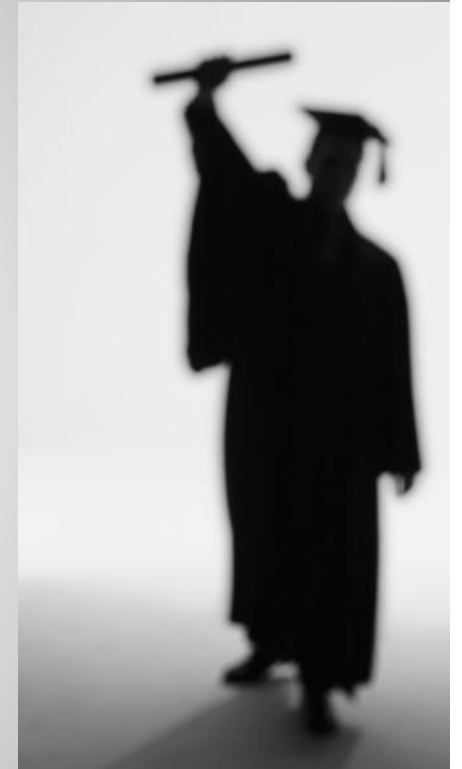
According to the National Center for Homeless Education there are four school district strategies that can also boost accrual and recovery options

- “Providing training and information to teachers and curriculum coordinators about homeless students’ needs and seek their support and participation in facilitating credit accrual;
- Review and revise policies that act as a barrier to youth attaining credit;
- Explore the credit recovery resources and strategies available in your district and community and address barriers to homeless students’ access to these programs; and
- Talk to youth about their interest and needs and seek their help in developing cred accrual and recovery strategies.”



Remember:

Fighting dropout is the one way we are going to ensure that these students become successful adults who are not caught up in the cycles of poverty, homelessness, violence, and victimization.



# Questions??





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# Other Resources

- Kentucky Department of Education McKinney-Vento Information page:  
<http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/administrative+resources/federal+programs+and+instructional+equity/title+programs/title+x+part+c+mckinneyvento+homeless+education+program.htm>
- Kentucky's Housing and Emergency Assistance Reaching the Homeless page:  
<http://www.kyhousing.org/page.aspx?id=506>
- National Center for Homeless Education's Kentucky State Performance Report Card page:  
<http://nchespp.serve.org/profile/KY>
- Children's Defense Fund page: <http://www.childrensdefense.org>
- National Center for Children in Poverty page: <http://www.nccp.org>
- National Coalition for the Homeless page: <http://www.nationalhomeless.org>
- PowerSchool page: <http://www.pearsonschools.com/products/powerschool/>