The School Counselor and Children Experiencing Homelessness
(Adopted 2010; revised 2018)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position
School counselor recognize homelessness/displacement may have negative effects on the whole child, which encompasses mental, physical, social/emotional and academic development. School counselors help to identify students who are homeless. As social justice advocates, school counselors collaborate with community stakeholders to connect students who are homeless to community supports, work to remove barriers to academic success and implement responsive prevention and intervention programs for children experiencing homelessness.

The Rationale
The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless youth as those lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence (for complete definition, see U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Census data from the U.S. Department of Education notes 2,483,539 children, or one in every 30 children, experienced homelessness in the United States in 2013 (American Institutes for Research, 2014). Students experiencing homelessness have increased concerns for developmental issues pertaining to physical development, mental health and school success (Tobin, 2016) as well as social/emotional development (Haskett, Armstrong, & Tisdale, 2016).

Researchers have found that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be retained and perform below their peers in grades earned and test scores (Masten, Lat, Labella, & Strack, 2015). They have a significantly higher prevalence of developmental delays in communication (Tobin, 2016) as well as social/emotional development (Haskett et al., 2016). Homelessness in youth may also affect neurocognitive functioning (e.g., poor decision making, recklessness behaviors, risk taking and emotional outbursts), academic achievement and lead to an increased likelihood of facing adverse childhood experiences such as trauma and abuse (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012). Close to 75 percent of homeless students drop out before graduating from high school (Abdul Rahman, Fidel Turner, & Elbedour, 2015).

The McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, outlines homeless students’ rights and creates directives for schools to ensure students are able to enroll and succeed in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This charge includes removal of institutional barriers within schools, such as transportation, immunization and physical examination requirements, fees, residency and birth certificate requirements and lack of school records, which impede homeless families’ ability to enroll their children in schools.

The School Counselor’s Role
School counselors:
• Advocate for students and collaborate with parents/guardians to reduce barriers related to school enrollment, academic success and appropriate educational placement
• Establish educational and preventive programs for homeless parents and students
• Collaborate with school and community personnel and coordinate appropriate support services specific to basic, academic and social/emotional needs
• Increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act and homeless students’ rights
• Assess students for common associated concerns such as adverse childhood experiences, and refer students for additional support as appropriate

Summary
School counselors promote awareness and understanding of the issues students face when experiencing homelessness. School counselors collaborate with students, parents/guardians and community stakeholders to overcome the barriers to academic, career and social/emotional success associated with homelessness.

References


