

The School Counselor and Children Experiencing Homelessness

(Adopted, 2010; revised, 2018)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize that homelessness/displacement may greatly affect the whole child, encompassing mental, physical, social/emotional and academic development. School counselors help to identify students who are experiencing homelessness. As social justice advocates, it is school counselors' duty to recognize and work with students around their specific strengths. School counselors collaborate with community stakeholders to connect students and their families who are experiencing homelessness to community supports, work to remove barriers to academic success and implement responsive prevention and intervention programs for children experiencing homelessness.

The Rationale

Homelessness is defined by the McKinney-Vento Act as youth who lack 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, Fiat, 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 may 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 (ESSA), outlines the rights of homeless students 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 impeding homeless families' ability to enroll their children in schools.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors:

- Advocate for students and collaborate with their parents/guardians to reduce barriers related to school enrollment, academic success and appropriate educational placement
- Recognize the strengths of the individual student and all of those who have experienced homelessness
- Attain knowledge for assisting unaccompanied youth per specific state guidelines, following legal and ethical codes
- establish educational and preventive programs for homeless parents and children
- 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, ESSA and the rights of homeless students
- 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 recognize the strengths these students bring to school from 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

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- Tobin, K.J. (2016) Homeless students and academic achievement: Evidence from a large urban area. *Urban Education, 5*(2), 194-220.
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Resources

Department of Education Releases Guidance on Homeless Children and Youth. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/education-department-releases-guidance-homeless-children-and-youth>

Improving Graduation Rates in Students with Homelessness,
<https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/recordingView?webinarKey=5929145428874061059®istrant>