The School Counselor and Students Experiencing Homelessness
(Adopted, 2010; revised, 2018, 2024)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position
School counselors collaborate with school staff and community organizations to identify students who are experiencing homelessness and recognize that students’ housing experiences may greatly affect their mental, physical, academic, career and social/emotional development. As culturally responsive student advocates, school counselors understand how housing experiences may cause forms of oppression and collaborate with families, school staff and community partners to remove barriers to success.

The Rationale
The McKinney-Vento Act defines children and youth experiencing homelessness as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This definition includes but is not limited to children who are:
- sharing housing due to economic hardship or loss of housing (i.e., doubled-up)
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or campgrounds
- living in emergency or transitional housing (i.e., shelters)
- sleeping in places not designed or ordinarily used for human habitation
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, etc.

Data from the National Center for Homeless Education report more than 1.2 million K–12 students who experienced homelessness in the United States were enrolled in public schools during the 2021–2022 school year (NCHE, 2023). This number includes students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, migratory students and unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness. Students experiencing homelessness may face increased educational barriers that can impede overall success in school (Haskett, et al. 2016). These challenges can include low academic performance, learning loss, delays and gaps, grade retention,
social/emotional concerns and increased risk of adverse childhood experiences (De Gregorio et al., 2022, Tobin, 2016).

The McKinney-Vento Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act, guarantees educational rights and supports for students experiencing homelessness and seeks to remove barriers to their educational success (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This includes 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 are uniquely positioned to support students experiencing homelessness within academic, career and social/emotional domains (Waller & Rascoe, 2023). School counselors provide direct services in the areas of instruction, appraisal, advisement and counseling to support the success of students experiencing homelessness. Through indirect student services, school counselors collaborate with families, education and community partners to increase educational equity and access (ASCA, 2019).

To support and advocate for students experiencing homelessness, school counselors:

- Adhere to federal and state laws/mandates, ethical guidelines and school district policies related to supporting students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2022)
- Consult with and refer to school administrators, McKinney-Vento school district liaisons, state homeless education coordinators and community partners to promote the educational success of students experiencing homelessness (NCHC, 2023)
- Support administrative decision-making regarding the determination of eligibility for services under McKinney-Vento in schools
- Partake in professional development opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, Every Student Succeeds Act, school district policy and the rights of students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2022)
- Advocate and foster awareness for students experiencing homelessness by supporting parents/guardians and families in reducing barriers related to school enrollment, transportation, academic achievement, extracurricular activities/programs and appropriate educational placement (Camp et al., 2019)
- Work within their professional scope of practice by managing potential conflicts due to multiple roles/relationships in supporting students experiencing homelessness
● Acknowledge how biases, stigma and deficit-based approaches can negatively affect students experiencing homelessness, school staff and community partners (ASCA, 2022)

● Understand the intersections of students’ cultural identities and the need for culturally responsive practices when working with students experiencing homelessness and their families (Waller & Rascoe, 2023)

● Use data-informed tools and resources to identify academic needs and support remediation planning for students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2019)

● Promote postsecondary readiness resources for students experiencing homelessness through various college- and career-focused activities, including postsecondary transition plans, financial aid and independent student status determination, AP/SAT/ACT preparation and fee waivers, career inventories and college/career advisement (NCHE, 2023)

● Collaborate with school- and community-based mental health professionals to assess students for common associated concerns such as adverse childhood experiences and refer students for additional support as appropriate (Waller & Rascoe, 2023)

● Collaborate with community partners to link students and their families to prevention and intervention resources within the community

● Promote collaborative partnerships with school counseling preparation programs to support the inclusion/integration of research and literature regarding students experiencing homelessness in order to enhance the training and preparation of future school counselors (Camp et al., 2019).

Summary
School counselors promote awareness and understanding of the issues students face when experiencing homelessness. School counselors recognize and identify strengths and distinct challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness and help mitigate their impact on students’ academic, career and social/emotional development. School counselors collaborate with students, parents/guardians, school and community partners to increase educational equity, access and achievement for students experiencing homelessness.

References


**Resources**


National Center for Homeless Education. (n.d.). Resources. [https://nche.ed.gov/resources/](https://nche.ed.gov/resources/)
