

The National Center for Homeless Education's

LOCAL HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISON TOOLKIT



Revised September 2007



LOCAL HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISON TOOLKIT

**Developed for the National Center for Homeless
Education (NCHE) by**

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National Center for Homeless Education

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro provides critical information to those who seek to remove barriers to education and to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness.



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Foreword

The 2001 reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act required the designation of a local homeless education liaison in every school district. The local liaison has proven to be the key to the effective implementation of the Act.

State coordinators for homeless education surveyed in 2005 reported that the benefits of having local liaisons in every school district included:

- Increased identification of homeless children and youth
- Increased service provision for homeless children and youth
- Better coordination among school district programs
- Increased awareness of homeless children and youth among school and school district staff
- Increased awareness of issues related to homeless education in the community
- Better coordination between school districts and local agencies
- More effective communication between the State Educational Agency (SEA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) with regard to homeless issues

Local liaisons must have a clear understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, be familiar with ways to work with their school districts and communities to identify homeless children and youth, review policies and practices to ensure the school success of homeless students, and create awareness of the needs and rights of homeless children and youth in the school district and the community.

NCHE's *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit*, developed in 2002 and revised in 2007, is designed to orient new local liaisons to their positions and provide them with tools, strategies, resources, and links to resources to carry out their responsibilities. It is useful in providing tips, tools, and resources to veteran liaisons, as well. The original *Toolkit* drew upon effective practices provided by homeless education coordinators and staff from across the nation. The revised *Toolkit* expands upon these practices, reflecting five additional years of learning how best to meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth. The appendices were revised to be more comprehensive and were reorganized for easy retrieval of information, both that included in the publication and that accessible by web links provided.

The *Toolkit* is available for download from the NCHE website at http://www.serve.org/nche/products_list.php#liaison_toolkit. The *Toolkit* may be downloaded in its entirety to have as a ready resource or it may be downloaded in sections to meet specific needs. Written to be user-friendly and to provide quick access to vast amounts of information, it is a publication that every local liaison should have on hand.

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Chapters



Chapter One: Overview



Did you know that

- Homeless children and youth must have access to a public education?
- Barriers that may inhibit the ability of homeless children and youth to access schools must be eliminated?

Do you know

- What potential barriers to school enrollment, attendance, and success may exist in local policies and procedures?
- How those barriers may be alleviated?
- How many homeless students reside and/or attend schools within your school district?

The purpose of the *Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit* is to provide local education agencies (LEAs) with background information and sample resources to ensure the answer to the aforementioned questions can be a resounding, “Yes!”

In districts that operate successful programs to serve students in homeless situations, there is one common denominator: a

homeless liaison. Whether funded through the McKinney program or another source, the liaison is the person who orchestrates opportunities for students and families to begin to break the cycle of homelessness.¹

It is anticipated that local liaisons using this resource will be able to improve their schools’ and school district’s effectiveness in working with homeless children and youth through identification, provision of appropriate services, and increased awareness and sensitivity among school personnel working with homeless students. The *Toolkit* provides a wealth of information on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, roles and duties of local liaisons, successful strategies and practices for building awareness and collaborating with school district and community contacts, and additional resources that can support local efforts. Case studies in every chapter enable readers to apply the information to solve problems related to issues affecting children and youth experiencing homelessness. Sample forms and handouts may be adapted to individual districts. *Toolkit* appendices provide additional resources on a variety of topics.

The *Toolkit* is intended to support local liaisons

¹Charles A. Dana Center. 1997. *Pieces of the puzzle: Awareness, understanding, opportunity: Creating success for students in homeless situations*. Austin, TX: Author.



in fulfilling legislative requirements and offer suggestions for promising practices by addressing:

- LEAs' responsibilities to fulfill legislative requirements in educating homeless children and youth
- Potential roles and responsibilities local liaisons may assume
- Identification of homeless children and youth

The *Toolkit* provides:

- Guidance in identifying common barriers to educational access and success and creating solutions to address them
- Sample tools to develop collaborative efforts, build awareness, and meet the educational needs of homeless students
- Supplemental resources for further study and support

The McKinney-Vento Act, federal legislation in effect since 1987 (formerly the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act), has always required a designated local liaison for all LEAs with subgrant funding, and responsibilities of subgrantee local liaisons have been outlined in legislation. A local liaison is a staff person responsible for working with homeless education issues locally in a school district. In addition, U.S. Department of Education Preliminary Guidance² and Policy Studies Associates³ recommended that *all*

2 U.S. Department of Education. (1995). *Preliminary guidance for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, Title VII, Subtitle B*. Washington, DC: Author.

3 Anderson, L. M., Janger, M. I., & Pantone, K. L. M. (1995). *An evaluation of state and local efforts to serve*

school districts assign a local liaison to “ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in and succeed in school, and that such students and their families receive the educational services for which they are eligible.”⁴

The information in the *Toolkit* is consistent with the U.S. Department of Education initiative, “No Child Left Behind.” The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L.107-110), the most recent revision to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), embraces each of the following four pillars of President George W. Bush’s educational reform plan:

- Accountability—Collecting data that shows results for all students
- Local control and flexibility—Designing programs based on documented needs of students
- Parental choice—Involving parents in a meaningful way in their child’s education
- Doing what works—Using strategies that have data to show their effectiveness

These elements are reflected within the McKinney-Vento Act, which became effective July 1, 2002. Highlights of new provisions in the revised act for children and youth experiencing homelessness include:

- Maintaining students in their school of origin
- Providing transportation to ensure access to the school of origin
- Enrolling homeless students immediately, even if regularly required

the educational needs of homeless children and youth. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

4 U. S. Department of Education. (1995). p. 11.



documentation is missing

- Increasing funding for states to administer effective programs and provide greater funding to LEAs
- Requiring a local liaison in all school districts with specific responsibilities to ensure that the provisions listed above will be met⁵

Local homeless education programs that align themselves with the U.S. Department of Education initiative will produce stronger results for students and will find themselves integrated more fully with other school district programs.

Since all LEAs, regardless of subgrant funding, must designate a local homeless education liaison, resources are needed to support staff assigned this role. The *Toolkit* is intended to provide introductory information that new local liaisons will need, along with a variety of tools that have been collected and adapted from states and local programs across the country, to make the transition to this new role smoother. While geared toward school districts not receiving McKinney-Vento funds that may have less experience serving homeless students, suggestions throughout the *Toolkit* may be valuable for experienced local liaisons, as well.

⁵ National Coalition for the Homeless. (2002). President Bush signs Education Reform Bill. Retrieved January 8, 2002, from <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/edannouncement.html>.

Chapter Two: Homeless Education and the Law



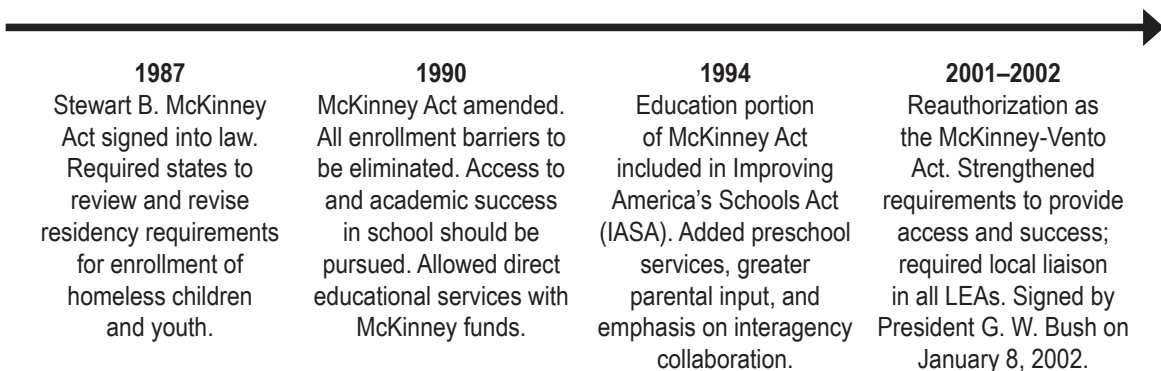
Maria Gonzales and her seven-year-old and nine-year-old daughters have just moved into a homeless shelter. Maria visits the neighborhood school to enroll her daughters. She is given a list of required documents—items she does not have. Maria leaves, believing her daughters cannot attend the school.

Consider:

- *Should Maria be able to enroll her children?*
- *What went wrong?*
- *What should be done?*
- *What could you do to prevent this from happening in a school in your district?*

Responses to these questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

Figure 1: Brief History of the McKinney-Vento Act



When determining how to meet the educational needs of homeless students, an early consideration of school districts is ensuring that the LEA is in compliance with federal and state legislation. Chapter 2 reviews key components of federal legislation and offers suggestions regarding what actions local liaisons can undertake to meet the legal requirements for educating homeless children and youth.

In 1987, legislation was passed to address growing concerns about the plight of individuals experiencing homelessness. This law contained emergency relief provisions for shelter, food, mobile health care, and transitional housing. At the time, the homeless population was increasing rapidly, and there were early indications of changing demographics, with women and children representing a growing portion of the homeless population. Recognizing this growing diversity within the homeless population, Congress included provisions requiring states to ensure that all children experiencing homelessness have the same rights to a free and appropriate public education as housed children. Provisions were adopted requiring states to review and undertake steps to revise residency requirements for school attendance to ensure that homeless children do not experience delays with school enrollment. After the death of its chief Republican sponsor, Stewart B. McKinney of Connecticut, the act was renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, a state coordinator for homeless education is designated for each state. Listings of state coordinators can be found on the NCHC website at http://www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php. The state coordinator for your state can also be identified by contacting your State Department of Education.

(P.L. 100-77). President Ronald Reagan signed it into law on July 22, 1987.

To help meet the new requirements, states received funds to establish or designate an office of coordination for the education of homeless children and youth. In addition to other responsibilities, the state coordinator's office was given authority to gather data on homeless children in the state and develop a state plan providing for their education. These provisions sought to give states the ability to better understand the challenges facing homeless students and increase responsibility for ensuring homeless children were not denied access to a free and appropriate public education.

In 1990, educational opportunities for the nation's homeless children and youth were further enhanced. Provided with new information and data collected by state coordinators that revealed homeless children encountered significant obstacles in obtaining free and appropriate educational services, Congress amended the McKinney Act (P.L. 101-645). The Act reflected an intolerance for any barrier that prohibited the enrollment of homeless children and youth, along with a recognition that the true challenge was not simply to enroll homeless children but to promote their academic success in public school.

Specifically, the McKinney amendments required state homeless education coordinators to look beyond residency issues toward other potential barriers that keep homeless children and youth out of school. As a result, states were required to review and revise all policies, practices, laws, and regulations that might act as barriers to the enrollment, attendance, or academic success of homeless children and youth. In addition, states were responsible for assuming a leadership role in ensuring that LEAs reviewed and revised policies and

procedures that might impede the access of homeless children and youth to a free and appropriate public education.

To promote the academic success of homeless students, the reauthorization provided for direct educational services. Prior to passage of the 1990 amendments, states were prohibited from using McKinney funds to provide such services. Today, school districts that apply for and receive McKinney-Vento subgrants may use the funds to provide before- and after-school programs, tutoring programs, referrals for medical and mental health services, preschool programs, parent education, counseling, social work services, transportation services, and other services that may not otherwise have been provided by the public school program. To meet this expanded role, appropriations were increased significantly from 1987 levels.

When amended again, the education component of the McKinney Act was incorporated into the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA, Section 323 of P.L. 103-382), the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which contains many other education programs, such as Title I, Part A, and Migrant Education. As part of IASA, the McKinney Act increased legal protections for homeless children and youth to ensure greater access to the appropriate education services provided under federal, state, and local law. Under the new amendments, states were authorized to extend services funded by McKinney to preschool children. Additionally, categorical spending limits within the law were removed, giving LEAs with McKinney funds greater flexibility in developing programs to meet the educational, social, and health needs of homeless children and youth. The law stated that a homeless child may be enrolled in the school of origin (the school attended before becoming homeless or the school in which the student was last enrolled) or the school attended by other students residing in the area

where the student is staying temporarily. States were charged with ensuring that school districts abide by a parent's or guardian's preference, to the extent feasible, when making enrollment decisions. Finally, the Act strengthened provisions requiring interagency coordination and collaboration between state and local education agencies and other agencies and organizations that provide services to homeless people.

In 2001, the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program was reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act and was signed by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. National statistics showed that over one million children and youth are likely to experience homelessness in a given year and that extreme poverty, coupled with high mobility and loss of housing, places these children at great risk for educational challenges. These data resulted in additional supports being incorporated into the law. Among the changes for the Office of State Coordinator for Homeless Education is the requirement to strengthen state support to *all* school districts by coordinating with local liaisons to ensure accountability, greater flexibility to use McKinney-Vento funds, and increases in funding. The reauthorization strengthened the policy that homeless students should be integrated with their housed peers by explicitly prohibiting the segregation of homeless students through the creation of new separate schools or separate programs within schools and by requiring the Office of State Coordinator for Homeless Education to provide technical assistance to promptly integrate homeless children and youth attending separate schools and programs into schools and programs serving non-homeless students. Clarification of who is considered homeless is addressed by describing specific situations that qualify students as homeless. Prior to this version of the law, educators were dependent upon descriptions found in the U.S. Department of Education's Preliminary Guidance. The explicit categories are described later in this chapter.



Legal Responsibilities of LEAs

As mentioned in Chapter 1, a 2001 reauthorization requirement is the need for each LEA to designate a local homeless education liaison to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified, enrolled in school, and receive appropriate services to meet with success in school. This local liaison must assist the school district in its compliance with federal and state regulations related to the education of homeless children and youth.

A list of LEA responsibilities for serving children and youth experiencing homelessness (with

examples of appropriate activities) follows in Table 1. This list provides LEAs with an outline for shaping the roles and responsibilities to be assigned to local liaisons, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. (A copy of the complete McKinney-Vento Act and U.S. Department of Education Policy Guidance can be found in Appendix A.)

In addition to federal requirements, LEAs must consider any state legislation that may further shape the responsibilities of local liaisons. Local liaisons should contact their state coordinator for state-level information related to the education of homeless children and youth.

Table 1: LEA Responsibilities and Activities

Areas of Responsibility	Activities and Responsibilities to Support Area Compliance
1. Ensure access to school and appropriate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designate a contact person as a liaison for homeless children and youth, ensuring that homeless children are identified, enrolled, and receive equitable access to high-quality education and support services.• Review and revise policies that may impede homeless students' access to school.• Disseminate public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth, increasing awareness of homeless children's educational rights.• Ensure identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness.• Immediately enroll homeless children and youth, eliminating delays caused by lack of records or other enrollment requirements.• Ensure that homeless children are not segregated or stigmatized because of their homelessness.



Areas of Responsibility	Activities and Responsibilities to Support Area Compliance
<p>1. Ensure access to school and appropriate services (cont.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer services to homeless students that are offered to non-homeless students, including transportation services and educational services for which the student is eligible (e.g., Head Start; Even Start; preschool; programs for students with limited English proficiency LEP/ESL/ELL], programs for gifted and talented students, special education, etc.). • Ensure coordination between homeless education and Title I, Part A, programs. • Maintain and transfer records in a timely fashion. • Assist with immunizations. • Promote awareness among staff of the needs of students experiencing homelessness.
<p>2. Reduce school transfers and enhance educational stability and continuity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep children in their school of origin to the extent feasible, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of parents/guardians. • Ensure the right to attend school of origin extends for the entire duration of homelessness and that children who become housed during the academic year may continue their education in the school of origin for the remainder of the academic year.
<p>3. Strengthen parental choice and involvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure homeless parents are fully informed of the enrollment options and educational opportunities available to their children. • Provide written explanation to parents should disputes arise over school selection or school enrollment and refer parents to liaisons to mediate such disputes. • Provide homeless parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.

Areas of Responsibility	Activities and Responsibilities to Support Area Compliance
4. Ensure educational rights of unaccompanied youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately enroll unaccompanied youth. • Maintain unaccompanied youth in school of origin to the extent feasible, unless this is against the youth's wishes. • Immediately enroll youth in the school to which they seek enrollment pending resolution of any disputes regarding such placement. • When applying for McKinney-Vento funding, include an assessment of the needs of unaccompanied youth in the application.
5. Ensure access to public preschool programs for young homeless children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform preschools operated by the SEA or LEA of McKinney-Vento Act provisions related to young homeless children. • Develop policies and strategies to facilitate the enrollment of young homeless children in preschool programs

Impact of Other Educational Legislation

The McKinney-Vento Act states that homeless children and youth must have access to the same educational services provided to other students. In addition, other educational legislation makes reference to serving homeless students. For example:

- Head Start includes homeless preschoolers as a targeted population to be served. Background on homelessness and its impact on young children, as well as implementation guidance, can be found in a 1992 Information Memorandum from the Head Start Bureau (U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services, Log Number: ACF-IM-92-12). Just as the legislation requires public schools to identify and remove barriers that may delay enrollment, the same requirement applies to Head Start programs.

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was amended in 2004 to facilitate the timely assessment, appropriate service provision and placement, and continuity of services for children and youth with disabilities who experience homelessness and high mobility. The reauthorized law requires greater coordination and compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act. IDEA also requires that homeless preschoolers and

all homeless children be included in the Child Find process for early identification of special education needs. For unaccompanied youth, IDEA specifically requires LEAs to appoint surrogate parents and to make reasonable efforts to complete the appointment process within 30 days.

- Title I, Part A, targets students most at risk of failing in school. A child who is homeless and attending any school in the district is eligible for Title I services. This includes schoolwide schools, targeted assistance schools, and non-Title I schools. LEAs must reserve (set aside) a portion of Title I, Part A, funds needed to provide services to homeless students in non-Title I schools that are comparable to those being received by other Title I students. In addition, in order to receive their allocation of Title I funds, the LEA must include how the district will coordinate with the McKinney-Vento Act when filing their plan with the SEA.
- The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 makes runaway, homeless, and migrant children categorically eligible for free school meals. To implement expedited procedures, school officials must work closely with the local liaison and directors of homeless shelters to ensure that children are provided free meal benefits as promptly as possible, as well as to ensure that the school food service is promptly advised when children leave the school or are no longer considered homeless. The local liaison should be familiar with the appropriate school district contacts for free and reduced price meals programs and explore opportunities to collaborate. Suggestions for such collaborative efforts can be

found in Chapter 5.

See Appendix B for additional information on laws that impact the education of homeless children and youth.

Defining Homelessness

Before schools can be certain they are complying with legislation related to educating students experiencing homelessness, they must understand who can be considered homeless. The McKinney-Vento Act (Section 725) defines homeless children and youth as follows:

- Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes children and youth who are:
 - Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.
 - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.
 - Living in emergency or transitional shelters.
 - Abandoned in hospitals.
 - Awaiting foster care placement.
- Children and youth who 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.
- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
- Migratory children who qualify as

homeless because they are living in circumstances described above.

- Unaccompanied youth who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above. The term “unaccompanied youth” includes a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. This would include runaways living in runaway shelters, abandoned buildings, cars, on the streets, or in other inadequate housing; children and youth denied housing by their families (sometimes referred to as “throwaway children and youth”); and school-age unwed mothers living in homes for unwed mothers because they have no other housing available.

In determining whether or not a child or youth is homeless, the LEA should consider the relative permanence of the living arrangements. Determinations of homelessness should be made on a case-by-case basis. Note that incarcerated children and youth are not considered homeless. A helpful resource is NCHC’s *Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act* issue brief, available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>. (See Appendix J for additional resources.)

Many staff members within a school district may encounter homeless students while carrying out their responsibilities. In addition, the community and schools must work together to reach homeless families and unaccompanied youth and ensure they are aware of their educational rights. To fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the law successfully, the local liaison should provide training and awareness materials throughout the school district and community. (See Appendix C for additional awareness resources.)

Return to the case of Maria presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Consider:

Should Maria be able to enroll her children?

Yes, lack of records cannot delay enrollment for students experiencing homelessness.

What went wrong?

Maria did not have information about the educational rights of her children. Possibly, the school was unaware of these rights as well.

What should be done?

Basic information about the McKinney-Vento Act should be available to school personnel and homeless families.

What could you do to prevent this from happening in a school in your district?

- *Ensure an individual in the school district assumes the role of local homeless education liaison, as required by the McKinney-Vento Act.*
- *Encourage the identification of school-level contacts to work with the district liaison.*
- *Place posters in community areas and at the school where enrollment occurs.*
- *Have brochures in shelters and other community services offices explaining the educational rights of homeless children and youth.*
- *Provide staff responsible for enrollment (principals, secretaries, attendance officers, guidance counselors, etc.) with training to recognize who may be considered homeless and to comply with the enrollment requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.*
- *Implement additional support strategies in the succeeding chapters of this Toolkit.*

Chapter Three: Local Liaison Roles and Responsibilities

Policies and Procedures on the Local Front



Principal Phil Branton has noticed that students are arriving at his school from a recently opened shelter in the neighborhood. This is a new development, and Principal Branton has had no experience working with homeless families. Shelter workers are telling him the children can enroll even if they cannot fulfill the school district's enrollment requirements.

Consider:

- *Who can Principal Branton contact to learn about his responsibilities when enrolling students experiencing homelessness?*
- *What other information and resources might Principal Branton need to best serve these new students?*

Responses to these questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

The establishment of local homeless education liaisons addresses the questions posed in the previous scenario. All local school districts must comply with the basic requirements for serving homeless children and youth outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act. However, without an individual identified by the district to coordinate such efforts, there may be many Principal Brantons with little experience and little knowledge of the legal requirements for serving homeless students. In Chapter 2 we reviewed local requirements required by the McKinney-Vento Act. This chapter provides suggestions for local policies and procedures and outlines the responsibilities a local liaison may be assigned to ensure compliance and improve services for homeless children and youth.

Identifying Homeless Children and Youth

Look at the picture below. Can you determine which child is homeless?



Appearance alone is insufficient to identify a child or youth as homeless. There is no simple method to make such identification—that’s part of the challenge schools face when attempting to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Knowledge of the definition of homelessness and legal requirements will not ensure homeless children and youth have access to and receive the educational services to which they are entitled. Schools may not be aware that a family arriving at the school to enroll is homeless or that the students they serve are experiencing homelessness. Homelessness can be “invisible.” Schools may not be aware of the indicators that suggest homelessness exists, and families may be reluctant to share such information.

So, how can homelessness become more visible for school personnel? Strategies include:

- Collaborating with community agencies, including shelters, to identify homeless children who require access to the public school system.
- Offering professional development opportunities to support staff in learning how to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness and their educational needs.
- Recognizing the warning signs of homelessness.
- Providing a supportive, welcoming setting for families.

Such efforts must be in place if the full intent of the law to meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth is to be realized.

This section includes tips for identification procedures. In addition, common signs of homelessness can be found in Appendix C, formatted for use as a handout or flyer.

Tips for Identifying Homeless Children and Youth

Familiarity with potential warning signs is a first step in identifying children and youth who may be homeless. Effective identification also requires additional analysis of information already being collected by the district and community outreach. Consider the following strategies suggested by local school districts:

- Post educational rights of homeless children in areas throughout the community and school areas where families will see them when they enroll. (NCHE provides free posters upon request by ordering online at http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php. Contact your state coordinator to see if your state provides a state version.)
- Disseminate brochures or flyers that explain the educational rights of homeless children; offer suggestions to ensure children are enrolled in school quickly and offer contact information for additional help. Send a supply to each shelter that accepts children in your area, department of social services, health department, and other service providers that may work with homeless families. (See Appendix C for awareness materials or contact NCHE at 800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org for materials for parents and unaccompanied youth.)
- Familiarize staff with the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homelessness.
- Access student management software. Make use of the capabilities of the administrative software at your school. Sort and list students

by address and note occurrences of the same address for more than one family.

- Review mailing labels. When printing newsletters or other mailing labels, note occurrences of the same address for more than one family.
- Become familiar with local motel addresses. Look up the addresses of low-cost motels, and note when families/students list them as their own.
- Make personal contacts with the front desk staff at motels, low-cost health facilities, police stations, and other public service facilities. Ask them to notify you when they meet homeless families with children.
- Enroll a child or youth who lacks records immediately. Missing records may be an indicator of homelessness. Contact the previous school to have the records sent. Develop a procedure to assess students for placement purposes if academic records are not immediately available.
- Avoid using the word “homeless” when discussing a student’s possible eligibility. Many families will not disclose that they are homeless for fear of being stigmatized; or, the family may not be aware of some of the living situations that would qualify them for services, such as living doubled-up with friends or relatives due to loss of housing.
- Use a district-wide residency questionnaire upon enrollment; the questionnaire should include checkboxes for different kinds of living arrangements, such as “home”, “apartment”, “shelter”, “doubled-up”, “in vehicle”, etc. (See Appendix D for a sample residency questionnaire.) Follow up with families whose living arrangements may qualify them for services under McKinney-Vento.
- When homeless families enroll their children in school, ask if they have preschool-age children.
- Offer assistance if you think a family may be homeless.
 - Assure families that their children can enroll even if the family does not have a “regular place to live” right now.
 - If possible, take the family to a private location away from the front desk when enrolling.
 - Offer help in completing forms. Hesitation may indicate an inability to read. Have materials available in multiple languages.
 - Provide the student with supplies needed to take into the classroom.
 - Work with your school nutrition specialist to ensure that free meals are provided at school.
 - Be sensitive, patient, calm, and reassuring.

Identification processes can be made systematic through tracking with appropriate documentation. Challenges of sharing information across agencies while maintaining appropriate confidentiality (such as FERPA - the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) may require interagency agreements. Data management systems are becoming more common to assist multiple agencies that serve homeless individuals and families to share information. As these become more prevalent, districts should explore how they could participate in the process. Coordinating with the school district’s data management department and contacting the local Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) office may be logical first steps in identifying the appropriate channels. Many localities have developed district-level systems for identifying and tracking homeless students, including San Antonio, Texas; Richmond, Virginia; and West Contra Costa Unified School District in California. Appendix D contains forms adapted from the documentation used by these LEAs.

The effectiveness of such a system for collecting information related to homeless status upon enrollment will require appropriate training of staff responsible for the school enrollment process, such as secretaries, guidance counselors, and principals. Such information can then be used to improve services for students experiencing homelessness such as:

- Referrals to counselors or social workers when additional services are needed
- A means of identifying mobility patterns
- A way to disaggregate achievement data

Refinements to the services being provided by the school district could then be made using data-driven decision making. (See Appendix E for further tools and information on data collection.)

Facilitating Enrollment

According to the McKinney-Vento Act, local school districts must review local policies and procedures and revise those that may act as barriers that prevent homeless children and youth from accessing the appropriate services. The law further states that homeless students must be enrolled immediately. This section identifies common barriers homeless children and youth encounter and offers suggestions for alternatives that could be incorporated into local policies and procedures to ensure compliance

with the McKinney-Vento Act.

Review and revision of legislation, policies, and procedures have been required at the state level as well. Despite efforts to comply, some state laws and policies may continue to conflict with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. An important reference when this occurs is the United States Constitution, Article VI, known as the Supremacy Clause, which states that federal law supersedes state law when conflicts arise. In addition, to receive funds from other compensatory programs, including Title I, Part A, states and LEAs must provide assurances that they will comply with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act.

Local school districts should contact their state coordinator's office for guidance when reviewing policies and procedures. Your state coordinator is a resource that can provide information related to state requirements and policies. In addition, the state coordinator may have additional guidance on local districts' policies and procedures tailored to your state. The national homeless education partners can also assist in determining compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act. (See Appendix P for national partner contact information.)

Please note that significant changes in policies and procedures will likely involve the cooperation of the local school superintendent, local school boards, and possibly the district's attorney. Local liaisons pursuing revisions to local policies and procedures should identify the appropriate channels and important contacts who should be involved. Support from high-ranking local administration is needed for significant changes to be acknowledged at the school level where students are served. (See Appendix F for a sample local homeless education policy that complements the McKinney-Vento Act.)

Residency Requirements

Homeless children and youth may move frequently and reside in places lacking traditional addresses. This makes residency difficult to verify. A form to assist in verifying homelessness can be found in Appendix D. In addition, federal law requires that students have the following two options for school enrollment: (a) the school of origin (that is, the school the child attended prior to becoming homeless or the school in which the child was last enrolled) or (b) the school attended by other students residing in the same area where the family is staying temporarily. (For more information, download the NCHE brief, *Confirming Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Services: Do's and Don'ts for Local Liaisons*, at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.)

Determining residence of homeless children and youth for enrollment purposes must acknowledge these two options. Remaining in the school of origin is considered generally to be the best option for maintaining school stability and educational continuity, if this is feasible, meaning, in the student's best interest. (For feasibility considerations, see item G-4 in the U.S. Department of Education Guidance in Appendix A. See Appendix D's sample form, *Determining Feasibility of School Placement*. Download the NCHE brief, *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection*, at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>; this brief provides questions that school staff may use with parents to determine the best school selection option for their child.)

The wishes of the student's parents must be considered first. In the event that the school district's decision does not concur with the parents' preference, written documentation must be sent to the parents who have the right to appeal by following the state's enrollment dispute procedure.

In the event that the student is an unaccompanied youth, the wishes of the youth must be considered. An unaccompanied youth also may appeal a school district decision using the dispute resolution process.

A decision made at the school district level must be documented if a dispute occurs. The school district should be able to provide evidence that it acted in accordance with the McKinney-Vento Act to serve the best interests of the student.

Residency concerns cannot delay the enrollment or attendance of a student experiencing homelessness. While disputes are being resolved, the student must be enrolled and attending the school requested by the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, whether it be the local school or the school of origin.

Students' Documentation for School Enrollment

Frequent moves, lack of personal space, domestic violence, and many other factors can make it difficult for homeless families to maintain the documentation schools require for enrollment. Frequently, alternatives for the most common documentation or copies of originals, may be substituted. In addition, technology is useful in expediting the transmission of needed information. Phone calls and faxes can be used to quickly locate missing documentation, such as academic and special education records, immunization and health records, or birth certificates. The McKinney-Vento Act requires that the enrolling school must contact the last school attended to obtain student records. Suggestions for specific documents can be found in Table 2. While waiting for documentation, the school must enroll the student.

Guardianship and Unaccompanied Youth

Complications in family living arrangements may prevent homeless students from being able to reside with parents due to shelter restrictions or lack of adequate space. For example, a teenage son may not be allowed to stay with his mother in a domestic violence shelter. Children and youth may be living with other relatives or friends in areas far from the parents' residence. Runaway youth or youth whose families have abandoned them may have no

recognized guardian. These children and youth cannot be denied enrollment due to the lack of a legal guardian. An affidavit signed by an adult willing to act *en loco parentis* (in the place of the parent) may be considered as an option. Schools, with the assistance of the local liaison, should enroll these students immediately and work with the appropriate authorities to ensure their access to needed services. (For more information, download the NCHE briefs, *Unaccompanied Homeless Youth* and *When Legal Guardians Are Not Present: Enrolling Students on Their Own*, at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.)

Table 2. Potential Enrollment Barriers and Possible Solutions

Potential Enrollment Barriers	Possible Solutions
Residency requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Check state law for specific exemptions for homeless children and youth. ■ Allow alternative proof: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Student Residency Form (See Appendix D) ■ Hotel or motel receipt ■ Letter from shelter, community agency, or parent verifying homelessness and indicating location of residence
Original birth certificate requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow alternative proof: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Other original documents: baptismal record, passport, immigration certificate, notice of birth, or verification of birthdate from the hospital where the child was born ■ Copies of school records, birth certificate, or birthdate verification from appropriate social service agency ■ Affidavit (See Appendix D)

Potential Enrollment Barriers	Possible Solutions
Social Security card or number	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May request number, but cannot require it. (See the Privacy Act of 1974 or Plyler v. Doe for supporting legislation.) ■ Assist family in obtaining cards or new copies, if lost, from the Social Security Administration (Social Security Hotline: 800-772-1213).
Previous school records, including special education IEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accept parent report with phone call verification to the previous school. ■ Have records faxed from the previous school. ■ If the previous school cannot be identified, or if the student was not previously enrolled, consider creating a procedure for immediate screening and placement (See NCHE brief, <i>Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Without Records</i>, at http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php).
Health records and immunizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accept copies, phone calls, faxes, or references in previous school records as verification. ■ If no records exist or immunizations have not been received, have the school refer the family to the local liaison to help the parents in obtaining the necessary immunizations and/or records; this is a requirement of local liaisons under the McKinney-Vento Act. ■ If appropriate, the parent or guardian may sign a “personal beliefs” exemption stating such medical services run counter to personal or religious beliefs.
Parent or guardianship verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accept an affidavit (See Appendix D). ■ Accept documentation of a court date for pending custody hearings. <p><i>Note: Schools may be required to report circumstances where guardianship has not been verified.</i></p>
Unaccompanied youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enroll the student and work with appropriate agencies to assist the student. ■ Have the adult with whom the student is staying complete a Caregiver’s Authorization Form (See Appendix D).

Dispute Resolution

Each state is required to have a process for resolving disputes related to enrolling homeless children and youth in school. This process may occur when questions regarding school of origin or transportation services arise. The local liaison is frequently one of the first individuals to be informed of such a dispute and has specific responsibilities that should be outlined in the state's enrollment dispute resolution process. Contact your state coordinator for a copy of your state's procedure.

Ensuring Access to Educational Services

When students experiencing homelessness enroll in school, they will frequently require access to special school programs. The students and families should be connected with appropriate services as soon as possible. Homeless students must have access to all educational programs and services for which they are eligible. Unfortunately, the normal referral process may delay services, and if families move frequently, the process may not be complete before students move again.

Be sure to consider the following programs when reviewing local policies and procedures to decide if homeless students do have the appropriate access:

- Free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch
- Title I, Part A
- Special education
- Gifted and talented
- Transportation

- After-school and summer programs
- Head Start and other early childhood programs in the district
- ELL/ESL/LEP services

A local homeless education liaison should contact offices that provide these educational services in the school district to discuss how homeless students receive such services and to determine if any revisions in policies or procedures would ensure greater access. (See Appendix B for information on related laws.)

Suggestions to initiate collaboration with other departments can be found in Chapter 5.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Local Programs

Documenting the efforts made by local school districts in serving homeless children and youth can be formalized through a data collection and/or evaluation process. Data obtained can be used to improve programs and current efforts, document compliance and accountability, and leverage supplemental funding when sought.

A resource entitled *McKinney-Vento Data Standards and Indicators Guidebook* is available on the NCHE website at <http://www.serve.org/nche/products.php>. NCHE facilitated the development of standards for quality McKinney-Vento programs with input from state coordinators, local liaisons, national partners, and staff from the U.S. Department of Education. The standards represent a comprehensive approach to serving homeless children and youth in a school district; the indicators for each standard provide suggestions for collecting concrete, quantifiable data to determine the extent to which the standard is being met. (See Appendix E for the Standards and Indicators and other data




collection resources.)






LEA Responsibilities a Local Liaison May Fulfill









A local homeless education liaison can fulfill many roles. The local liaison can be an administrator, a professional development coordinator, a collaborator, or an outreach specialist. The local school district will need to shape the position, based on its current needs in serving homeless children and youth.

These responsibilities should be revisited over time with some items being deleted and others added, depending on the composition of the community, the level of awareness established in the schools, and the level of implementation that has occurred for revised policies and procedures. Table 3 lists many of the responsibilities that a local liaison is required to fulfill. In addition, the table includes responsibilities that are suggested as good practice.

Table 3. Responsibilities for Local Homeless Education Liaisons

Issue	Responsibility	Legally Required
Policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review local policies and procedures that may impact homeless children and youth, such as school enrollment and access to school programs (This is an LEA requirement that may be assumed by the local liaison). ■ Revise local policies and procedures determined to be potential barriers for homeless children and youth (This is an LEA requirement that may be assumed by the local liaison). ■ Ensure that homeless students are identified by school personnel. 	  

Issue	Responsibility	Legally Required
Enrollment and access to educational services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure that homeless students enroll in, and receive equal opportunity to succeed in, the schools of the LEA. ■ Ensure that homeless families, children, and youth receive educational services for which they are eligible, including free school meals, Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs administered by the LEA; and referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services. ■ Ensure that parents or guardians are informed of educational and related opportunities that are available to their children and are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. ■ Assist in the resolution of disputes, ensuring that they are mediated in accordance with the state's dispute resolution process. ■ Facilitate transportation arrangements. 	    

Issue	Responsibility	Legally Required
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure that the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any accompanied youth, is fully informed of all educational rights, including the right to remain in, and receive transportation to, the school of origin. ■ Post the educational rights of homeless children and youth in all schools in the district. ■ Post the educational rights of homeless children and youth in the community in places where homeless families and youth may receive services (e.g., shelters, public health clinics, libraries, and soup kitchens). ■ Inform school personnel, service providers, and advocates who work with homeless families and youth about the duties of the local liaison. ■ Collaborate and coordinate with state coordinators, community service providers, and school personnel responsible for the provision of education and related services to homeless children and youth. 	    
Unaccompanied youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assist unaccompanied youth in school enrollment and placement decisions, including considering the youth's wishes in those decisions, and providing notice to the youth of the right to appeal such decisions through the dispute resolution process. ■ Ensure that unaccompanied youth are enrolled immediately in school pending the resolution of any dispute that arises over school enrollment and placement. ■ Assist children and youth who do not have immunizations or medical records in obtaining the necessary immunizations or records. (See Appendix J for resources related to serving unaccompanied youth.) 	  

Issue	Responsibility	Legally Required
Suggested activities to ensure district-wide compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide professional development for school district staff to build awareness of the educational needs of homeless students, legal responsibilities of the school, and local policies and procedures. ■ Provide outreach to community service providers through presentations, announcements, and dissemination of relevant resources. ■ Provide training for parents. ■ Distribute tutoring supplies, clothing, and other useful resources to schools. ■ Conduct a needs assessment to find out what needs to be improved in your district's efforts to serve homeless students. ■ Conduct an evaluation of your district's homeless education program. 	

The list of responsibilities in Table 3 is in no way exhaustive, yet may appear overwhelming at first glance. Many of these responsibilities will require outreach and collaboration with the community, other district-level personnel,

and school-level personnel. Chapters 5 and 6 contain suggestions and resources to begin such outreach and to build partnerships to meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth.

Return to the case of Principal Phil Branton presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Consider:

Who can Principal Branton contact to learn about his responsibilities when enrolling students experiencing homelessness?

- *The local homeless education liaison is the most appropriate contact for the principal. The local liaison not only has information on federal and state requirements but also can explain how these requirements are implemented at the local level.*
- *The state coordinator for homeless education can also be a useful resource, especially when discussing general information related to state/federal requirements.*
- *The national partners in homeless education. (See Appendix P for contact information.)*

Chapter Four:

Strategies for Meeting the Educational Needs of Homeless Children and Youth



An advisory board for homeless education met to discuss what they could do to promote access to and success in schools for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Around the table sat individuals who worked with students in shelters, a local homeless education liaison, a classroom teacher, and several school district administrators. Ideas flowed about methods to get information to staff involved in educating students. The board members realized that building awareness was key and talked about mailings, personal contacts, training opportunities, and the successes and frustrations that they had faced. In addition to the ever-present need to build awareness was the question of how to actually meet the educational needs of children and youth. The team came to the following conclusions:

- 1) Get students enrolled in school.*
- 2) Identify their individual needs.*
- 3) Connect the students with the appropriate services.*

The board members realized that homeless students are a diverse group whose educational needs vary greatly and that the community and school district had resources available that could meet many of the potential needs. The conversation returned to awareness. The academic success of homeless children and youth could be increased if staff:

- Had information about students experiencing homelessness.*
- Were able to identify the potential needs of homeless students.*
- Could refer students to the appropriate school district and community supports.*

Consider:

- Given this scenario, what steps would you recommend be taken next?*
- Do other people need to be included in the planning? If so, who?*

Responses to these questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

The McKinney-Vento Act calls for states and localities to eliminate enrollment barriers. Chapter 3 reviewed common barriers and suggested potential remedies. Underlying any endeavor taken on behalf of students who are experiencing homelessness is the need to ensure that people understand what the law allows and how the state expects localities to implement the requirements. If compliance is to be realized and homeless children are to be served appropriately, school personnel must know what rights these children have. Building awareness across multiple levels is a major responsibility of local liaisons.

- At the school district level, the local liaison may assist the school district in identifying any existing barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth and take steps to alleviate them.
- At the school level, individuals responsible for student enrollment must be aware of the mandates in federal and state law related to students who meet the definition of homelessness.
- At the classroom level, teachers must know how to meet the needs of the highly mobile homeless students and the class as a whole.

Promoting awareness of the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness among staff at all levels is needed to provide educational access and effective strategies that lead to greater success in school.

Awareness Building

A three-pronged approach to awareness building may be taken in the school district by addressing specific issues at three levels: (a) the school district/community level, (b)

the school level, and (c) the classroom level. In order to build awareness, the local liaison must decide where to target such efforts, what channels to access, and what message to provide. The issue of homelessness is complex and can be overwhelming. In reality, most local liaisons have time limitations, with homeless education accounting for a small portion of the multiple responsibilities they must fulfill. Therefore, efforts must be targeted. Chapter 4 offers suggestions for building awareness and developing strategies from the school district level to the classroom level. (Appendix C contains helpful awareness materials. Appendix H contains additional resources related to collaboration. Appendix N contains useful training resources.)

What Can School Districts Do?

Become Familiar with Laws and Policies Affecting Homeless Students

School districts must have procedures to ensure that students experiencing homelessness have access to school. The local liaison is the key person to understand the McKinney-Vento Act and ways it should be implemented in the school district. The local liaison should also be familiar with other laws that affect homeless students, such as Title I, Part A; IDEA; and free school meals. In addition, the local liaison must be aware of state and local policies that either support or act as barriers to the education of homeless students. The local liaison is instrumental in creating district-wide awareness of laws and policies and in facilitating the revision of policies that pose barriers.

Conduct a Needs Assessment

Best practice suggests that a needs assessment be conducted to shape the development of an action plan. Taking the time to conduct a needs assessment and create a service plan provides

the local liaison with a clear sense of where to start and a vision of anticipated goals to be realized. Needs can be identified, grant-writing opportunities targeted, and collaboration initiated to meet the educational needs of students. In addition, if the district is considering applying for McKinney-Vento funds, a needs assessment will be required as part of the application process.

Local liaisons should work with their school district data departments. Ongoing, systematic data collection will ensure that local liaisons have the most current information to share related to the needs of homeless children and youth. (See Appendix E for resources to assist with conducting a needs assessment and collecting data.)

Since LEAs not receiving McKinney-Vento funding may have limited resources to conduct a needs assessment, the state coordinator could be contacted for basic information collected at the state level. For example, state coordinators will have information on barriers that continue to be challenging and examples of practices that have been successful at the local level. Local liaisons in nearby school districts with subgrants can be another valuable resource. The state coordinator will have contact information for such local liaisons.

Identify Community Contacts

Local liaisons will need basic information about the community related to issues impacting homeless students. For example, knowledge of the location of all shelters that accept children and youth in the school district and surrounding communities and the populations they serve is needed to build relationships with shelter workers who may assist families enrolling students. A similar approach could be used with low-income motels. It is important that the schools serving areas with shelters and hotels be informed of the existence of these residences to encourage

school-level outreach.

Localities receiving HUD funds have participated in a Continuum of Care process that includes an extensive needs assessment, including the identification of existing resources, agencies, and their services. This information would be valuable when referring homeless families for services and building collaborative networks with the schools. Other potential sources for this information would be state or local interagency groups working with homeless families. Again, your state homeless education coordinator may be able to identify agencies and contacts. Students experiencing homelessness have many needs beyond those addressed by schools. Assisting families through referrals for additional services, such as housing, medical services, and social services, can increase stability and ensure students are ready to learn when they reach the classroom.

Provide Outreach to Schools and the Community

As noted in Chapter 2, LEAs, with the assistance of local liaisons, must ensure access of children and youth experiencing homelessness to school by:

- Educating school personnel about the federal, state, and local (if applicable) laws and guidelines regarding the education of students experiencing homelessness.
- Posting signs (in multiple languages, if applicable) in schools and other locations where homeless families receive services to let parents/guardians know of their student's educational rights.
- Collaborating with community organizations.

In addition, it is recommended that local liaisons:

- Contact local shelters and inform shelter directors or children’s coordinators of the appropriate contact for assistance with school-related issues.
- Distribute materials about the educational needs of homeless children and youth.
- Meet district-level directors of departments such as guidance; special education; gifted education; transportation; and Title I, Part A, to identify collaborative efforts to benefit students experiencing homelessness.

Review, Revise, and Develop Local Policies and Procedures

The local liaison should ensure that local policies and procedures are reviewed and recommend changes to facilitate the enrollment and academic success of homeless students as needed. Since no requirements can act as barriers to delay enrollment, all enrollment requirements should be identified and alternatives generated that could satisfy requirements or expedite their fulfillment. For example, the McKinney-Vento Act states that a student who lacks proof of residency cannot be denied access to school. A logical substitution could be an affidavit stating where the student is currently staying at night in place of a utility bill. Chapter 3 of the *Toolkit* contains additional examples of barriers and potential solutions.

The requirement to keep a homeless student in his or her school of origin when feasible (in the child’s best interest) necessitates a process to make such a determination. Schools must first consider the school of origin and the preference of the parents, guardians, or unaccompanied

youth. If the school disagrees with the family’s or youth’s preference, the school must provide written documentation of its decision and its justification. The family then has the option to follow the procedures established by the state’s dispute resolution process. Having such procedures in place will support schools in collecting information to best serve their students experiencing homelessness while not delaying enrollment.

Districtwide procedures for working with students who are homeless increase the consistency of school responses. Such procedures should address the following:

- Enrollment
- School of origin
- Transportation
- Access to educational programs
- Dispute resolution (developed by the state)

Appendix J includes links to briefs that have been created jointly by the national partners in homeless education with input from state and local programs. These resources may be helpful in developing effective policies and procedures consistent with the McKinney-Vento Act. Appendix F includes a sample local policy that LEAs may use as a model to complement the law in their district.

Collaborate with Other School District Programs

The local liaison also may serve as a resource to other school district departments to ensure that students experiencing homelessness have access to the appropriate educational services. The local liaison may identify ways for the departments to use what they are already doing to assist students experiencing homelessness.

Table 4: Ensuring Access to Other Educational Programs

Department	Suggestions of What Can Be Done
Federal Programs (e.g., Title I, Part A; Title II; Safe and Drug- Free Schools; Migrant Education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Look for an overlap in missions and populations to serve homeless children and youth collaboratively ■ Review the legislative requirements for these programs and their references to serving homeless students.
Special Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review provisions for homeless students with special needs in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. ■ Work with the school district’s special education coordinator to ensure that schools expedite requests for child studies and determinations of eligibility; homeless students often move before the process is complete and, as a result, experience delays in obtaining services. Homeless children must be included in Child Find efforts. The local liaison’s community contacts can assist in these efforts. The local liaison and special education coordinator should also develop a process for identifying a surrogate for an unaccompanied youth, when needed.
Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Offer a session on the McKinney-Vento Act and meeting the needs of homeless and highly mobile students to teachers, school counselors, enrollment staff, pupil transportation staff, and school and district administrators. ■ Provide short information “blurbs” about homeless education for school and district newsletters. (See Appendix N for helpful training resources, including online tutorials, that may be recommended to school and district staff.)
Student Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Using district databases, track student movement within the school district and target students moving frequently to determine if homelessness is a factor. If so, stabilize the student’s school placement should future moves occur. ■ Work with attendance and truancy staff to help you identify students whose homelessness is affecting attendance and generate strategies to increase regular attendance.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discuss the transportation provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act with the pupil transportation director and establish policies and procedures to arrange transportation for homeless students expeditiously. ■ Include shelters on school bus routes so that stops are located nearby, and be responsive to changes, as needed. If possible, arrange for students in shelters to be the first on and last off the bus, to avoid stigmatization.

What Can School Personnel Do?

In general, school-level administrators need information to share with staff members responsible for enrolling new students. This information should include the rights of homeless children and youth to a free and appropriate public education and examples of best practices that promote compliance. Staff development may initially target district schools with the greatest likelihood of serving homeless students; however, all district schools will need information on homeless education to ensure doubled-up populations and children continuing to attend their school of origin are served appropriately, as well. Staff serving unaccompanied youth, in particular, should receive information on the challenges facing these students and ways to support their academic progress and ensure credit accrual and retrieval.

One way to disseminate information is to request a slot on the agenda of the school district principals' meeting. During a brief presentation, the local liaison can explain his/her role in ensuring student access to school and request that principals designate a homeless education contact for each school.

Local liaisons who have developed school-level contacts report that this has been a critical element of their success in reaching homeless students. With a point of contact's name, it is more likely that materials sent to the school will get to the appropriate staff and be read. The contact becomes a resource to call when problems arise. Given principals' limited time, a form the principal completes to identify such a contact and returns via intra-district mail is recommended. A flyer could be included providing general information on enrollment requirements and tips for the designated contact. A sample form for identifying a school-level point of contact is included in Appendix G.

A variety of professionals work in schools and impact the experiences of students who are homeless. Tip sheets that local liaisons can distribute to critical personnel, such as guidance counselors, school secretaries, administrators, and school nurses, are provided in Appendix L.

What Can Classroom Teachers Do?

The local liaison for homeless education can provide teacher tips for working with homeless students that:

- Heighten teacher awareness of the issues and needs associated with working with children and youth who are homeless.
- Promote sensitivity to the issue of homelessness.
- Support effective teaching strategies.
- Ensure all students participate in local and statewide assessments.

Most educators feel a connection to the students they teach. They want the best for them. However, few educators have had the experience of being homeless and may not be aware of what it is like to live in a shelter. They may not know the telltale signs of homelessness. While there are volumes of information that one could give educators, brief lists that can be read quickly and incorporated into the classroom environment with relative ease may be most useful.

When a student is identified as homeless, the teacher should be told privately and confidentially. Prior districtwide training and dissemination of information may prepare teachers for such an occurrence. Sensitivity can be nurtured in advance, but concrete strategies to meet the educational needs of homeless students may need to be revisited. Resources should be readily available for

teachers who have not had homeless students in their classes before. If school-level contacts have been identified, these contacts could have pre-made packets to share with teachers as needed. (Handouts on recognizing signs of homelessness and teacher tips for creating a successful school experience for students experiencing homelessness are included in Appendices C and L. A list of NCHE publications that focus on instructional practice can be found in Appendix N.)

What Can Parents Do?

Parents and guardians play an important role in shaping how students perceive the change in their living arrangements. Parents may be disillusioned about the school experience from their own K–12 experiences or from frustrations of trying to get their children enrolled. Families may need some tips to assist their child during this time.

- The NCHE brief, *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection*, assists parents in deciding whether to keep their child in the school of origin or transfer their child to a new school. Download the brief at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.
- A sample parent tip sheet can be found in Appendix L.
- A parent booklet, *What to Do to Help Your Child in School*, is available from NCHE; order online at http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php or by phone at 800-308-2145.

In addition to helping parents, these materials may be beneficial to enrollment staff, shelter staff, and teachers. For enrollment staff, the materials will help them know what kind of questions the parents may ask. For the shelter worker, the materials will assist in coaching parents who need to enroll students in school.

For the teacher, the materials may identify activities that could be incorporated into the classroom. The experience will more likely be a positive one if individuals are sensitive and welcoming to the parents.

Teachers should offer to assist parents by explaining report card information such as their children's state assessment scores. This information will assist parents in making good decisions about their children's education.

Parents should be encouraged to participate in school events, such as activities of the parent-teacher organization. Assisting with transportation may help parents who are unable to come to school to be involved. For parents who are hesitant to come to the school, an informational visit to the shelter or place where the family is currently staying may reinforce that the school is interested in the well-being of their children and the input parents provide.

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

The local homeless education liaison must support awareness building among all school district personnel. Teachers, administrators, secretaries, guidance counselors, social workers, and other staff are constantly changing, just as the homeless population seems to be in constant motion. Attending to awareness once a year will not be sufficient. Awareness must be an integral part of the local liaison's ongoing responsibilities. Using lists for quick reminders and reference will link what people need to know with what the child or youth is experiencing. (See Appendices C, L, and N for awareness, quick reference, and training materials.)

Return to the case of the local advisory board in the beginning of this chapter.

Consider:

Given this scenario, what steps would you recommend be taken next?

First, the board should be applauded for having a formal mechanism for dialogue across agencies. If they have not done so, the board may wish to:

- *Conduct a needs assessment or tap into an existing resource such as that required for Continuum of Care.*
- *Be sure schools have contact information for local shelters and low-income motels in their attendance zones.*
- *Identify contacts in other education programs homeless students may access.*
- *Provide easy-to-read reference lists to education and related professionals.*

Do other people need to be included in the planning? If so, who?

Others are probably needed, although the board already includes multiple perspectives. Some potential future participants include administrators for Title I, Part A; special education; staff development; student support services; and transportation.

Chapter Five: Developing Collaborative Efforts



It's 7:45 a.m. and Isaac Anderson, a local homeless education liaison, walks into his office as the phone rings. He is relieved the coffee does not spill as he juggles putting down his briefcase and mug. He answers the phone. A shelter director is calling to tell him a family with two middle-school-aged children arrived during the night. The mother wants the children to stay at their former school in the district. Isaac knows that he does not have any money for bus tokens to get the children to a school outside the shelter's attendance zone. The shelter director says that she will drive the children to school today, but will need assistance in the future. Isaac says that he will call her back later in the day.

Consider:

- *What does the law require?*
- *What options does Isaac have?*
- *What would happen in your school district?*

Responses to these questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

What can our local liaison in the above scenario do? Isaac wears several hats, and local liaison is just one of them. He *is* responsible for ensuring the enrollment of children and youth who are homeless, but his school district does not receive any McKinney-Vento funds. Isaac does have options. He could:

- Call the school district transportation coordinator to see if a bus could drive by the shelter and get the children to their school of origin.

- Contact the student support services coordinator to determine how that department could assist.
- Alert the school to the children's change in living arrangements so that school personnel can be sensitive to additional needs the students may have.

Finally, Isaac must ensure that the parent's preference regarding placement is followed to the extent feasible, and transportation must be arranged.



Isaac will not be able to resolve the transportation challenge alone. Relationships with other departments in the school and the community will be necessary to bring closure in this case. Chapter 5 focuses on building collaborative relationships using examples from the experiences of local liaisons.

Basic Tips for Collaboration

Identifying Potential Partners

Collaboration is a two-way street. People who work with children and youth experiencing homelessness often do so with little or no targeted financial resources. Collaboration with other departments in the school district is an essential tool to access services for homeless students. When deciding to pursue a collaborative partnership, it is helpful to:

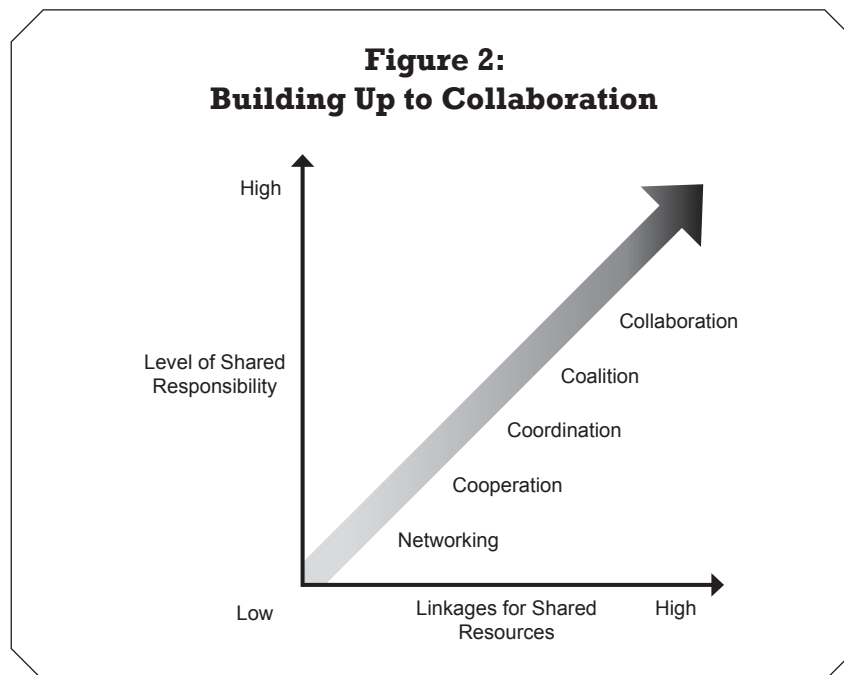
- Identify the needs of homeless students in your district.
- Know the responsibilities of other departments in your district.

- Identify areas of interest or overlap between homeless education and other departments.
- Consider how other departments can provide assistance and be sure to determine how the assistance can benefit the department, if undertaken.
- Consider how the local liaison can provide reciprocal support, if possible.

Once a potential collaborative relationship is identified, determine your key contact person in the department. Communicate regularly, and keep the issues germane to students as your focus.

Realizing the Level of Involvement Needed

Collaborative efforts is used loosely here to describe a relationship where two or more individuals or groups work on behalf of the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The degree to which the parties



share responsibilities and resources can vary greatly across partnerships as shown in Figure 2. Relationships can range from low-level networking to true collaboration, which by definition is the highest level of shared responsibility in which resources are integrated. Some examples of each level may be found in Table 5. When reaching out to other departments

and agencies, it is important to consider the level of relationship that may be needed to realize goals and to build on existing relationships that may be expanded. When new partners are sought, consider working on lower-level relationships to build trust before attempting more complex interactions.

Table 5: Levels of Collaborative Efforts

Level	Description	Example
Networking	Making connections with individuals or groups whose purpose is related to your mission	Having copies of the transportation department's meeting minutes forwarded to you
Cooperation	Limited working together	Asking a Spanish teacher to translate a document to be used to promote the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness in the Spanish-speaking community
Coordination	Combined effort on an initiative that meets the needs of both parties	Arranging with school nurses to refer children experiencing homelessness for free or low-cost medical and dental care
Coalition	Regular communication and sharing of resources, but each group still retains control over its domain	Agreeing on a process to ensure that student services, the local liaison, and the transportation department communicate when a homeless student has a change of address to ensure that the bus transports the student to/from the location where he/she is currently staying
Collaboration	Working together and pooling resources to meet a common purpose or goal	The school and local liaison work with the parent(s) or guardian(s) to provide the best educational program for the student experiencing homelessness

Initiating the Collaboration

Once you have considered how to make collaboration a win-win opportunity for students, it is time to approach the individuals, departments, or agencies with whom the prospective partnership will be formed. Appendix H provides a sample form to identify future collaborative strategies. Suggested activities for accomplishing a collaborative partnership include the following:

- Schedule a time to meet with the individual in charge of the department or agency.
- Prepare for the meeting by identifying the key points to be discussed.
 - Explain your role as local liaison.
 - Share what is needed in the district to support children and youth experiencing homelessness.
 - Ask the individual for his/her support based on the department's or agency's responsibilities.
 - Offer concrete suggestions for actions that can be taken by department or agency staff.
 - Enter the meeting with a positive outlook and plan to leave with a specific commitment for support.

Developing the Collaboration

True collaborative relationships are often the result of growth. In fact, many collaborative agreements are sustained by building upon existing structures. While not all collaboration needs to be intense, key features of successful collaboration include the following:

- Establishing a common goal, purpose, or focus

- Communicating regularly
- Sharing resources
- Prioritizing and strategizing together

Be sure to build in opportunities to discuss and develop these features when creating and maintaining relationships with other departments and agencies. (See Appendix H for more information on collaboration.)

Working with Other Departments in Your School District

Frequently, awareness of the needs and the issues associated with homeless students by central office staff is needed. Educating fellow central office personnel on the legal requirements for the education of homeless students is an important first step. The next logical step is opening a dialogue to determine how departments can help. Crucial to working with other departments is the elimination of educational barriers for homeless students. Many departments can contribute to the access and success in school of students experiencing homelessness.

- The school board may need to address local policies that are potential barriers to enrollment, such as tuberculosis testing.
- Student support services may coordinate with homeless education programs to track intra-district transfers of homeless students.
- Student services may assist with record transfer and enrollment.
- The transportation department may allow shelters to call to arrange bus service for new children and youth at the shelter.

- District professional development provided at the start of each school year for the local school-records clerks may include homeless awareness training.

Collaboration yields understanding, new options, and coordination of resources. The key is identifying critical needs, key players, and potential actions at the start. Some departments are more likely than others to have a role to play in educating homeless children and youth. Special education and Title I, Part A, are highlighted because of legislative references to homelessness in their respective laws.

Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), amended in 2004, requires greater coordination and compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act. Local liaisons should work with special education coordinators to help establish procedures to ensure expedited assessment, appropriate service provision and placement, and continuity of services within required timelines for children who experience homelessness and have disabilities.

The child find component in IDEA includes identifying unserved young children with disabilities who are homeless. The local liaison can provide information regarding the location of homeless families in the district, thereby assisting special education directors in the outreach required for child find. Linking young homeless children who may require special education with early intervention can be a powerful way to avoid more serious learning problems when students enter school. (See Appendix B for additional information on IDEA.)

Title I, Part A

Since approximately 7% of local school districts receive McKinney-Vento sub-grants, the majority

of districts must consider other resources to meet the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Title I, Part A, funding is used by many school districts to improve the academic performance of children in poverty. Students experiencing homelessness are, by definition, part of the population that Title I serves. Title I and the local homeless education liaison can work for the benefit of homeless students by ensuring that they receive comparable services whether or not they attend a Title I school in the district. LEAs must reserve (or set aside) funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to children in Title I-funded schools to serve homeless children who do not attend participating schools, including providing educationally related support services to children in shelters and other locations where children may live.

Please note, however, that the U.S. Department of Education has stipulated that while Title I, Part A, funds can be used for educationally related services, they may not be used to fund transportation to the school of origin for homeless children and youth. Because transportation services to the school of origin are mandated under McKinney Vento, the use of Title I, Part A, or Title V funds for transportation would be considered supplanting, which is prohibited. However, Title I, Part A, funds *may* be used for transportation to the school of origin, once a student is permanently housed, for the remainder of the school year. (This is addressed in the Policy Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education in Appendix A and in the NCHE issue brief, *Title I and Homelessness*, which is available for downloading at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.)

See Table 6 for Title I collaborative strategies identified by veteran local liaisons.

Table 6: Collaboration Between Title I and Homeless Education Programs

Goals	Potential Strategies
<p>Increase awareness and understanding of the issues relating to homeless students and how Title I, Part A funds may be used to serve them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communicate with a variety of Title I groups by developing conference presentations, staff development events, public service announcements, and welcome packets with information for new staff. ■ Post the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and the legal rights of homeless students in schools and administrative offices throughout the district.
<p>Eliminate organizational and attitudinal barriers and strengthen programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Move beyond “turf issues” and emphasize common goals. ■ Partner with additional programs that support students with similar challenges, such as migrant education and special education. ■ Publicize successful Title I/homeless education collaborations (e.g. Minnesota; Oregon; Miami-Dade County, FL; Fresno, CA; and West Contra Costa, CA).
<p>Increase communication between the Title I and homeless education programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish ongoing communication between the local liaison and Title I coordinator. ■ Co-locate Title I and homeless education program offices. ■ Include homeless education representation on Title I committees. ■ Identify crossover policies; supporting homeless education programs can fulfill Title I requirements, too. ■ Include homeless education and Title I collaboration in district monitoring.
<p>Clarify and strengthen policy areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish policies, procedures, and guidelines to identify and serve homeless students. ■ Review needs assessment data with the Title I coordinator to determine the amount of funds to be set aside to serve homeless students. ■ Clarify how set-aside funds can be used to support homeless students.
<p>Build leadership at the LEA level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Celebrate successes. ■ Identify and emphasize a common vision and common goals within the district and community.

Collaboration to Support the Transportation of Homeless Students

Remaining in the school of origin increases school stability for homeless students. When remaining in the school of origin is feasible (meaning, in the student's best interest), school districts must provide transportation to and from the school of origin. The local liaison is instrumental in coordinating these arrangements.

Collaboration is the key to getting transportation arrangements in place efficiently and expeditiously. The local liaison should work closely with the school district pupil transportation director, including providing training to the director and transportation personnel on the McKinney-Vento Act and the needs of homeless students. Together, the pupil transportation director and the local liaison should review the transportation needs of homeless students and develop ways that the school district can meet these needs.

In school districts where homeless students cross district lines to remain in the school of origin, the local liaison should collaborate with the local liaison and pupil transportation department from other school districts. Having inter-district policies, strategies, and agreements in place ensures that cross-district transportation can be implemented without delays.

Local liaisons should also explore community resources that might be available to assist with transporting homeless students. Local liaisons should initiate conversations with the department of social services, housing authorities, child welfare agencies, and juvenile justice. Many agencies have vans and buses that they are willing to use for transporting homeless students. Oftentimes, taxi companies

and public bus systems are willing to provide services at a discount to homeless families. Creating awareness and buy-in for serving homeless families is the first step in establishing community collaborations.

Working with Parents and Guardians

Parents (and guardians) are logical partners in a child's education. The majority of parents experiencing homelessness want their children to receive an education. They are interested in many of the same offerings as parents of housed children, such as tutoring, after-school activities, free and reduced price lunch, and special academic services. It is clear that facilitating family involvement will increase the success of students in school, as many research studies have shown.¹ Schools need to build trust, establish communication pathways, and provide opportunities, such as offering transportation to nighttime events or parenting classes.

For families burdened with the additional stress of being homeless, greater outreach at the district and school level may be necessary. This may mean:

- Assisting with best interest decision making for school selection (See the NCHE brief, *Guiding the Discussion on School Selection*, for more information; the brief is available for downloading at <http://www.serve.org/nche/briefs.php>.)
- Acknowledging the family's critical role and requesting specific types of family participation in the school; providing transportation, when needed,

¹ Epstein, J. (1995) School, community, parent partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76, 701-712.

will increase the likelihood of family participation.

- Providing parents with report cards that include their children’s performance on state assessments.
- Providing parents with information about their children’s educational rights and available educational programs.
- Helping to link parents to community resources.
- Being sensitive to demands on parents’ time that may conflict with job schedules or job- and house-seeking efforts.
- Being welcoming to parents when they come to the school; providing them with a tour of the school and introducing them to the child’s teachers.
- Visiting parents in shelters or other places outside of the school setting.
- Communicating with parents about their children’s education in their native language. The district’s English as a second language (ESL) or limited English proficiency (LEP) program may be a logical collaborator.
- Using outreach workers, such as those employed in migrant education, to meet with families and introduce them to the school district.

Regardless of the approach, the end goal is the same—to get the parent(s), guardian(s), or caregiver(s) involved as partners in the student’s education.

Working with the Community

Students experiencing homelessness need all the support that can be mustered. School typically occupies less than one-third of a student’s day. Conducting a needs assessment (as introduced in Chapter 4) will help identify community contacts who offer services for homeless families. Both public and private resources can be used for referrals. Identifying community resources takes time. Local liaisons should start with the most common community resources and add to the list as new contacts and needs are identified. Consider the following:

- The public health office is a source for immunizations.
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office will have a listing of communities that participate in the Continuum of Care process. Such communities have identified resources and areas of need and have developed a plan for serving persons who are homeless in their locality. If available, such a planning document will contain much of the community information that will be needed by schools. (In addition, the district may wish to be included in the Continuum of Care process to ensure that children and youth’s educational needs are considered.)
- It is useful for both schools and the local liaison to know the locations of shelters in the various attendance zones that serve children.
- The location of the community food pantry (often associated with churches) will assist in meeting the physical needs.
- A listing of local dentists, optometrists,

and mental health professionals that will volunteer services can help meet the health needs of the children and youth.

- The local boys and girls clubs provide services that can benefit students.
- The United Way and The Salvation Army can assist in finding shelter for homeless families.
- Local businesses frequently welcome partnerships for community service in which they can provide resources for concrete needs.

Having a list of phone numbers and contacts for these places will be a handy reference when unexpected calls for specific services are received. The blank phone list in Appendix H may be used to create a contact list. Local liaisons should take some time with the business section of the phone book, identify potential resources, and make contact to introduce themselves and the homeless education program. The local liaison will make a homeless family's life more safe, secure, and stable by linking them to supportive resources in the community. In addition, you can be instrumental in ensuring a coordinated delivery of services by bringing community agencies together.

Collaboration Meets Many Needs

The federal law requires children and youth experiencing homelessness to be enrolled in school and receive services comparable to those received by housed students. When a local liaison receives a call, action is needed to ensure that the student has access to school and the tools for success.

There are few full-time state coordinators in the country, and most local liaisons, like Isaac, are responsible for other programs. Unfortunately, if someone is experiencing homelessness, their

plight is full time. By combining efforts, services to the homeless student may be increased. By collaborating with the community and various departments in a school district, the extension of services for the child or youth can become richer, more comprehensive, and more effective.

Recall the case of Isaac, the homeless education liaison with a transportation challenge, presented at the beginning of this chapter. The afternoon has arrived, and Isaac must return his call to the shelter director.

Put yourself in Isaac's shoes. . .

What does the law require?

With the 2001 reauthorization, the law clearly states that local school districts are responsible for providing transportation to the school of origin. If the parent wishes the children to stay in the school of origin and it is feasible, transportation must be provided.

What options does Isaac have?

Isaac could work to establish relationships with:

- *Pupil transportation so that there is a bus with a nearby route that can stop by the shelter.*
- *Special education, which provides transportation to students out-of-zone for educational purposes.*
- *The district-level PTA board for funding emergency public transportation tokens for homeless students and their parents or guardians.*
- *Many varied and creative groups willing to assist, support, and reach out to homeless families.*

Isaac may seek out alternative ways of providing transportation using public transportation, taxis, and the family, possibly by providing gas vouchers to cover the cost of gas for the commute in the family car, if the family has one. Isaac may need this wide array of contacts if additional services are required to meet students' needs.

Chapter Six: Getting the Message Out



Kenion Hughes is reading over the McKinney-Vento Act to see what information needs to be shared with his school district. As the local homeless education liaison, he must identify efficient and cost-effective ways to reach staff in his large urban school district. Personnel need information to ensure homeless children and youth have access to the appropriate educational services. In addition to working with families living in shelters, Kenion recently learned that older youth are living in makeshift camps by the river and in abandoned buildings downtown. He makes a list of the people who need information about the homeless education program and finds that they include both school district personnel and community members.

Consider:

- Who might be on such a list?
- What information should be shared?
- How do you deliver information? In other words: “Get the message out!”

Responses to these questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

Vehicles for Communication

Communicating within the School District

Use interoffice systems for print materials.

School districts typically have mechanisms to get information and materials disseminated to central office and satellite locations. The interoffice mail or pony system can be used

to distribute print materials. (See Appendix H for a contact list template.) Having a school-level point of contact to whom materials can be addressed will increase the likelihood that information is read and, if needed, posted.

Posters and brochures informing parents of their children’s right to an education are effective. Educational rights posters and booklets are available from NCHE; they can be ordered

online at http://www.serve.org/nche/online_order.php or by calling 800-308-2145. Some state coordinators produce posters, brochures, and announcements for use at the local level or provide originals that can be copied locally. Another alternative is an advertisement-style announcement that can be included in newsletters and other print publications. (See Appendix C for a sample.)

Employ technology. While print materials are the most conventional medium for communication, the use of electronic media has become widespread. The Internet, e-mail, and listservs are convenient and efficient ways to share information.

- **A school district webpage** can link to the state homeless education webpage and be used to post information germane to the school district's individual needs, policies and procedures, and contacts. Check with your state coordinator for homeless education to determine if a state website has been developed. Appendix M contains a template for creating a homeless education webpage. On the webpage, the local liaison can post common questions and answers, such as the following:

- Who is homeless?
- How can homelessness be determined?
- What are the rights of homeless children and youth?
- What can school personnel do to support homeless students?
- What should be done if a student is missing documents the school district requires for enrollment?
- What are critical links? Be sure to include national resources, such as NCHE,

NAEHCY, and NLCHP. (See Appendix P for these organization's contact information.)

- Information can be customized to include links to local resources and key contacts in the school district and community.
- The local liaison can document communications and send messages more quickly through e-mail than by using the school district inter-office mail. Creating an e-mail distribution list will expedite the process of sending messages and will facilitate the documentation of communication.
- The listserv option is useful primarily to the local liaison who can get information, filter it, and distribute materials that the building-level contact should read. Local liaisons may wish to subscribe to the NCHE listserv to keep abreast of national issues and network with educators and service providers facing similar challenges. (E-mail NCHE at homeless@serve.org to subscribe.)
- **School districts' cable television channels** offer another option for reaching school district personnel and the community. If available, the local liaison could:
 - Prepare a brief text message about the rights of homeless children and youth to enroll in school and the importance of doing so.
 - Create a brief five- to ten-minute awareness video presentation, if production capabilities exist.
 - Arrange for use of published videos (see Chapter 7 for potential sources).

Communicating Throughout the Community

As concerns and questions arise, the local liaison is the point of contact for many shelter providers, homeless parents, and unaccompanied youth. Posters and brochures about the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness and how to access services should be available.

- Contact shelters as logical points for dissemination of information. (See Appendix C for sample resources.)
- Post the rights of homeless students to a free and appropriate education on community bulletin boards and in areas where homeless people congregate, such as laundromats, soup kitchens, food pantries, libraries, and other service organizations.
- Since many churches have outreach efforts, let the pastors know about the rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness through an awareness flyer or brochure.
- Send information to the local boys and girls clubs, local HUD contact, housing authority, Salvation Army, and United Way.
- Visit shelters and other service providers so that they can connect your face to your name.
- Contact the HUD office in your area to obtain additional contacts.
- Run public service announcements (PSAs) on local television channels.
- Make awareness presentations to

community service organizations.

People must be familiar with homeless education issues to identify potential solutions that meet students' educational needs. Creating awareness of the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness is a step that successful programs revisit frequently. With turnover of staff and mobility in the community, the audience continues to change and efforts to reach out must be sustained.

Consider the Need to Translate Materials

If there is a significant bilingual population in the district, translating the documents into the most common languages should be considered. For example, in Chicago, materials are printed in both English and Polish to meet the needs of the community. Larger school districts may have a system in place for translating documents. If a district lacks such resources, consider using a member of the community to provide the translation. For example, one program had its family brochure explaining educational rights of homeless children translated into Spanish by a volunteer tutor who worked in a shelter, and the chair of the Spanish department at a nearby university edited the translation.

Promoting Awareness

Building a personal presence within the school district and across the community is an effective, though time-consuming, activity to be undertaken by the local liaison. Making presentations not only promotes awareness, but also provides a personal connection with

the audience. Successful local liaisons often share stories demonstrating that building *relationships* with people in the school and community has been key to overcoming barriers and finding creative and effective solutions. A brief presentation will increase visibility for the homeless education program and begin relationship building.

Whether the presentation is made to school personnel, such as the school board, or a community group, such as the Rotary Club or shelter workers, the basic information on the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness can be highlighted. (See Appendix C for information on awareness videos about homelessness. See Appendix N for links to useful training resources.)

Getting the Word Out: A Summary

Promoting awareness of the educational rights of homeless children and youth is a continual process as personnel and the population being served shift and change. Having multiple means to get out the message increases the audience and the likelihood of reaching those who need the information most. Posters, brochures, alerts to insert in publications, and face-to-face presentations are among the vehicles that can be tapped. Experiencing homelessness is a stressful time for families, and schools have the opportunity to be a stabilizing force in students' lives. Education is a potential key in breaking the cycle of homelessness—a key that can only be utilized when staff, the community, and families know where to find it.

Return to case of Kenion, the local liaison trying to get homeless education information to the community, which was presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Consider:

Who might be on such a list?

School board, central office staff—especially those involved with educational programs and student support services—principals, teachers, secretaries, counselors, shelter workers, religious leaders, civic organizations, homeless consortia, youth advocates, truancy officers, police, social services, etc. With so many possibilities, targeting those that will have the greatest impact must be part of Kenion's planning. Knowing that older youth may be underserved and that local liaisons have special responsibilities to advocate for these youth, Kenion may wish to work more closely with youth advocates in the immediate future.

What information should be shared?

- Educational rights of homeless children and youth
- Contact information for the local liaison
- Services available through the school district
- Stories to “put a face” on the homeless children in the community

How will you get the message out in your school district and community?

Chapter Seven: Research and Resources



Mary Jo Hogan, the local homeless education liaison received a call from a teacher at Newby Elementary whose class was doing a problem-based learning unit on homelessness. The second-grade teacher asked if Mary Jo had any resources that would be helpful in facilitating the students' investigation into the topic. Mary Jo said that she would get back to the teacher. Hanging up the phone, Mary Jo thought, "Where in the world can I quickly find materials appropriate for seven- and eight-year-old students?" While pondering this question, she found she was pleased that the teacher thought to call her—it indicated that the posters in the school offices were being read. She turned her attention to the task at hand.

Consider:

- *Where can Mary Jo turn for help with this request for information?*
- *What types of resources would be helpful for this class project?*
- *What kinds of similar requests might Mary Jo anticipate in the future?*

Responses to these questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

There are numerous resources on the issues of homelessness and homeless education. An Internet search engine will give thousands of page links, ranging from statistics, to lesson plans, to advocacy groups. A trip to the children's section of a public library yields several picture and chapter books. The research and resources listed in this chapter provide a starting point for local liaisons to explore even more extensively. Organizations listed at the

end of the chapter continue to develop and identify new resources and may be consulted to update the information contained here. In addition, your state coordinator for homeless education is another resource to be tapped.

Research

Research on educational issues impacting children and youth experiencing homelessness

is available in print and online. Resources range in length from briefs to books.

The Internet has a plethora of research and resources available. The NCHE website is a local first stop for research and information. Areas of particular interest may include the Information by Topic section (<http://www.serve.org/nche/ibt/ibt.php>) and the Research page (<http://www.serve.org/nche/ibt/research.php>). Staff at the NCHE Helpline can assist you in addressing questions related to research on homeless education and effective practices. Contact the NCHE Helpline by calling 800-308-2145 or e-mailing homeless@serve.org.

Building a Collection of Resources

By reading the *Toolkit*, you have already begun to establish a collection of resources to support individuals working on behalf of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Taking some time to look through the research and resources listed in Appendices O and Q will yield items that can be ordered for free or a free preview, as well as downloadable items. Start a binder or a file for the materials you collect. Many of the children's books are in local public libraries. Again, another resource is your state coordinator, who may have copies of articles. Building a collection of research and resources is a gradual harvesting process.

Return to the case of Mary Jo, who is trying to locate materials for second-graders, presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Consider:

Where can Mary Jo turn for help with this request for information?

The local shelter that works with children may have helpful materials. The state coordinator may know about programs implemented in the state or nationally to promote awareness with children. Additionally, the school's librarian may be aware of books in the collection that would be appropriate.

What type of resources would be helpful for this class project?

The teacher would probably appreciate a variety of resources so that the students' different learning styles can be accommodated. Items for the teacher might include:

- *Children's literature reading list.*
- *Information on the scale of homelessness in the local area.*
- *Lesson plans on sensitivity and awareness relating to homelessness that are accessible on the Internet.*
- *Posters available from groups such as The Institute for Children and Poverty (<http://www.icpny.org/>) that can be requested via the Internet.*
- *Classroom presentations by the local liaison, such as reading a book and discussing homelessness.*
- *A list of awareness videos about homelessness, which can be found in Appendix C.*

What kinds of similar requests might Mary Jo anticipate in the future?

- *Requests from teachers working with homeless youth and wondering how to provide support*
- *Inquiries from high school students that are researching the issue of homelessness*
- *Inquiries from guidance counselors who are wondering if there is anything out there to help with group sessions for students who are in various stages of transition*