

Gaps in Educational Supports for Illinois Homeless Students

February, 2014

A Report by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless



**CHICAGO
COALITION
FOR THE
HOMELESS**

Executive Summary

Homeless children and youth in Illinois have the right under state and federal law to receive supports from their school districts to help them enroll, prevent school changes, and succeed in school. The federal government supplies some resources for school districts to achieve these goals, but the resources are far from adequate.

A December 2013 statewide survey found that in a majority of school districts, more than half of homeless students who needed support were not getting the following services:

- **52% said that more than half of homeless students did not receive tutoring**
- **52% said that more than half of homeless children that needed preschool did not access it.**
- **56% said that more than half of students did not receive counseling**
- **58% said that more than half of students did not receive help with public benefits**
- **50% said that more than half of students did not receive help with long-term housing**
- **44% said their capacity to identify and enroll homeless children and youth not in school was limited to very limited.**

The survey findings indicate a strong need for more resources. Chicago Coalition for the Homeless advocates that the state of Illinois restore \$3 million in school grant funding to assist the growing and unmet needs of homeless students.

Introduction

The federal McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides specific rights to homeless students to help ensure their success in school. It also provides funding to school districts to implement these rights, however the funding has always been far from adequate. To supplement federal funds the state of Illinois dedicated \$3 million in FY2009, but this funding was never renewed. The number of homeless students identified by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has increased 109% since that time. In Chicago, in December 2013, the number of homeless students had increased 26% from the previous December. **ISBE identified 54,892 homeless students statewide for the 2012-2013 school year.**

Deficient Funding for Homeless Student Supports

Current levels of federal funds are not enough to support the academic success of homeless students. The McKinney-Vento's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program gives homeless students access to school and community resources. Nationally, EHCY is funded at \$65 million. Federal funds allow only 1 in 5 school districts throughout the country to receive direct supportⁱ. Federal funding has remained flat, despite a 72% increase in homeless students since 2006-2007.ⁱⁱ **Illinois receives \$5 million in federal funding to serve 859 school districts. Of those, only eight districts directly receive federal funding.** The remaining funding goes to regional offices of education or lead liaisons that serve as many as 100 school districts, with limited ability to provide direct services to individual homeless students or families.

Rights of Homeless Students

The federal McKinney Vento Act and the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act contain a number of strong provisions for school districts.

School districts are mandated to remove any barriers to “enrollment, attendance and success” for homeless students. (42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(7)(A)). “Special attention shall be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless children and youths who are not currently attending school.” (42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(7)(C)). Homeless students are also entitled to free breakfast and lunch, basic waivers of school fees, full participation in all school activities, and transportation assistance in certain cases.

School Districts are legally required to appoint a homeless liaison to ensure homeless students are properly and sensitively identified, enrolled and receiving quality services. Through their liaisons, Districts must connect homeless students and families to preschool, Even Start, Head Start, and vital community resources, including health and dental programs, free and low cost immunizations, housing, mental health services, food pantries and after school programs (42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(6)(A)(ii)).

Homeless Student Survey Results

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless conducted a statewide survey of the McKinney-Vento sub-grantees throughout Illinois. These sub-grantees are school districts or regional offices of education that receive McKinney Vento funding to help homeless student succeed in school. Thirty-six of fifty-four (67%) of the McKinney-Vento subgrantees responded.

In our survey of school districts around the state, respondents provided information about their ability to serve homeless students in five different areas: academics, transportation, family supports, identification/enrollment and attendance.

Academics

When children become homeless they often move multiple times in a school year. If these moves involve a change in schools, the children often fall behind in their academic progress. Every school move can lead to a loss of 4-6 months of academic time.ⁱⁱⁱ Access to tutoring is a critical need to keep them on track in school.

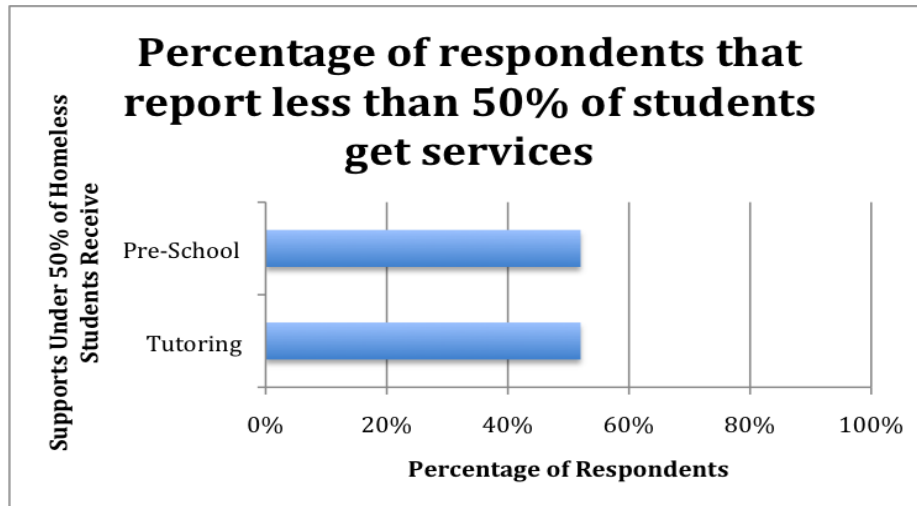
52% of survey respondents said that more than half of homeless students who need tutoring in their district do not receive it – and 33% reported that more than 75% of students did not receive tutoring.

One respondent said if they had more resources they would, “Provide more one-on-one support of students who are struggling academically to help them be successful, and more assistance to college-bound students who need support to complete college admissions and financial aid.”

Another respondent said they would like to be able to “provide tutoring after school and in the evenings at shelters and transitional housing.”

Early childhood education also has a strong correlation with academic success later in life. The Chicago Child-Parent Center study found that children participating in early education programs had a 29% higher rate of high school completion, a 33% lower rate of juvenile arrest, a 41% reduction in special education placement, and a 40% reduction in the rate of grade retention, in comparison to students without this support.^{iv} For homeless students, this is even more critical.

52% of respondents said that more than half of homeless children that needed preschool did not access it.



Parental involvement has also been shown to impact academic achievement. A synthesis of research on parent involvement found that, regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education^v

47% of respondents reported that they had limited or very limited capacity to engage parents in school activities.

Transportation

Transportation is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to meeting the needs of homeless students. One of the primary purposes of the federal McKinney-Vento law is to prevent children from having to change schools because of homelessness. They are entitled to transportation assistance to attend the school they were in when they became homeless. Without this assistance, school stability is often not possible. The survey showed that funding does not meet students needs for transportation although in some cases schools are legally bound by the McKinney-Vento Act to provide it: **21% of respondents said that less than 50% of students who need it get transportation to school.**

A much greater percentage could not provide transportation to school events and extracurricular activities:

56% of respondents said more than half of the enrolled homeless students who needed it did not get transportation to extracurricular activities

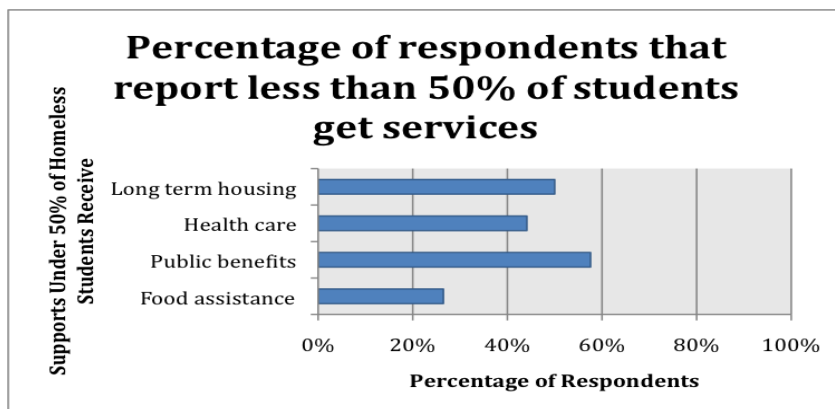
70% said that more than half of parents did not get transportation to attend school events

Family Supports

A key provision of the McKinney-Vento Act is that liaisons work to connect homeless families with needed supports to stabilize the families. Very few schools actually have the funding or capacity to do this.

A majority of respondents said that fewer than half of their school districts' homeless students received the following support services:

- **56% said that more than half of students did not receive counseling**
- **58% said that more than half of students did not receive help with public benefits**
- **50% said that more than half of students did not receive help with long-term housing**
- **44% of respondents said that more than half did not receive help connecting to health care**
- **42% reported limited or very limited capacity to train staff on resources for homeless families.**



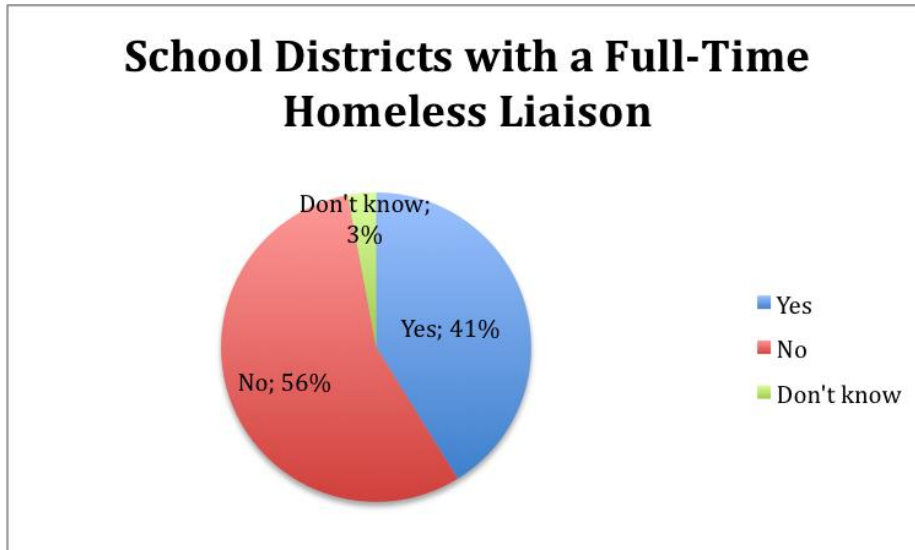
One respondent identified the need for a greater ability to provide these supports: “There would be funded staff whose only job it was to serve McKinney-Vento students and they would each be assigned schools in their district to serve. They would identify and do case management for each student/family.”

The lack of 24-hour, year-round shelter is also a huge barrier, according to one respondent: “Our local homeless shelter is only open a partial year, with only overnight hours. I would like to see more opportunity for growth in these areas. It's very difficult to not have a place to be able to send a family to sleep for the night when the shelter is closed. Some agencies that can provide

emergency motel vouchers have lost funding, and therefore, we have limitations there as well. I definitely see a huge need for resources in this area.”

Staff Capacity

The survey results showed that **56% of school districts did not have a staff person dedicated to the job of homeless liaison full-time.**



Another key tenet of the McKinney-Vento law is the requirement for schools to identify and immediately enroll homeless students, with special attention to children and youth not in school. However, **44% of respondents said the capacity to identify and enroll children and youth who were not already in school was limited or very limited.**

In addition, 33% of respondents reported that more than 50% of homeless students who needed truancy prevention could not receive it with current resources.

Funding Priorities Identified by Survey Respondents

We asked school districts around the state what needs they would identify as priorities if they had increased funding to serve homeless students. The top priorities most often identified were:

- (1) transportation**
- (2) staff to connect families to services**
- (3) increased capacity for the identification of homeless students in school**
- (4) tutoring**

Although many needs were identified by the survey, these four are foundational for ensuring that homeless students enroll in school, can get to school, succeed in school, and have more stable home lives. Increased funding has been linked to better outcomes for homeless students. When Illinois included \$3 million in the state budget for homeless education in FY2009, Township

High School District 211 in northwestern Cook County used part of its \$34,000 grant to name a point person in each school building and reach out to students and families. The number of identified homeless students more than doubled in the year following the grant. Similarly, Chicago Public Schools used the additional state funds to increase staff. Youth workers reached out to homeless high school students who were in danger of dropping out. That year they were able to increase the graduation rates of homeless students from 72% to 84%. If Illinois dedicated increased funding for the four essential services identified above, it would have a significant impact on educational stability and success for homeless students.

Recommendations:

- Illinois should restore \$3 million in state funding to provide grants to school districts to assist homeless children and youth

- Illinois should advocate for increased federal resources to match the growing number of homeless students.

ⁱ A Critical Moment: Child and Youth Homelessness in our Nations Schools, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, July 2010

ⁱⁱ Chicago Tribune, “Homelessness: A Growing Challenge for Illinois Schools,” November 7, 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Expert Panel Report (1991) submitted in *B.H. v. McDonald* by Dr. Joy Rogers, Ph.D., Loyola University Department of Education.

^{iv} The Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS; Reynolds, 1991, 1999; Reynolds, Bezruczko, Hagemann, 1997)

^v [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#) (PDF, 1.19 MB, 241pp) A. T. Henderson & K. L. Mapp. (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002) [Report Conclusion](#). (PDF, 87 KB, 5pp)

Appendix:

Counties covered by respondents and number of homeless students per county.

County	# Homeless Students
Adams	166
Bond	76
Boone	49
Brown	10
Calhoun	70
Champaign	474
Chicago	18854
Clark	15
Coles	140
Cook (North)	2004
Cook (West)	1128
Cook (South)	3025
Cumberland	31
Dewitt	44
Douglas	63
Edgar	79

Ford	48
Iroquois	64
Kane	1693
Kankakee	563
Kendall	238
Knox	122
Lake	964
LaSalle	397
Lawrence	37
Lee	60
Livingston	113
Logan	85
Macon	186
Macoupin	348
Madison	2803
Marshall	28
Mason	27
McDonough	113
McHenry	604
McLean	274
Menard	1
Mercer	10
Monroe	90
Montgomery	248
Morgan	222
Moultrie	28
Ogle	174
Peoria	939
Piatt	63
Pike	37
Putnam	24
Randolph	256
Richland	310
Rock Island	295
Sangamon	976
Schuyler	21
Shelby	37
Scott	23
Tazewell	347
Vermillion	452
Warren	10
Whiteside	286
Will	1564
Winnebago	1807
Woodford	86