



As the twig is bent
The tree inclines.

-Virgil



**Children and Youth
Experiencing Homelessness
Have the Right to
a Free, Appropriate
Public Education**

Keri Leslie

Newport School District

Homeless Liaison

The Role of School

“What homeless children need most of all is a home. . . . But while they are experiencing homelessness, what they need most is to remain in school. School is one of the few stable, secure places in the lives of homeless children and youth – a place where they can acquire the skills they need to help them escape poverty.”

National Coalition for the Homeless, 1998

The Scale of Homelessness

- **1.4 million school-aged children were identified as homeless in 2019 - almost double the numbers reported in 2008**
 - This equates to around 1 in 30 children - which also means, probably at least 1 kiddo in your classroom.

National Center on Family Homelessness, air.org
 - Our District identifies between 121-131 homeless students a year. Over 10% of our student population.

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- At least 1 in 30 adolescents ages 13-17, experience some form of homelessness unaccompanied by a parent or guardian over the course of a year.
 - 29% of homeless youth report having substance misuse problems.
 - 69% of homeless youth report mental health problems.
 - 33% had once been part of the foster care system.
 - 50% of homeless youth have been in the juvenile justice system, in jail or detention.
 - 27% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth who are homeless reported exchanging sex for basic needs compared to 9% of non-LGBTQ youth who reported having to exchange sex for basic needs.
 - 62% of LGBTQ youth report being physically harmed while experiencing homelessness while 47% of non-LGBTQ youth reported being physically harmed while homeless.
 - The lack of a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) is the number one correlate for elevated risk of youth homelessness.

Get Out, Fast!

Your home is on fire or you are fleeing with just seconds to get out!

What would you have time to grab and shove into a trash bag to take with you?

When the dust settles... will you end up with your birth certificate, social security card, driver's license, insurance information, teaching certificate, cash and cards, school books, school work, backpack...

How vulnerable are you to becoming homeless?



Answer “yes” or “no” to the following:

- Could you ever experience a flood, fire, tornado, or other natural disaster?
- Do you work in an area of the economy/job market where your job might become obsolete?
- Could you ever suffer from a long-term illness or accident without proper health benefits or other compensations?
- Do you live in a household with no more than one full-time wage earner?
- Are you behind on any monthly bills?
- Is there lack of housing or are housing costs in your area increasing faster than wages?
- Does anyone in your family struggle with addictions such as drugs or alcohol?
- Could you become a victim of domestic violence or another reason to leave with nothing but your life...

Who is homeless?

- ▶ **Youth in homeless situations that are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.**

(Living with someone who will not be held legally accountable for the welfare of the child, whether they've been living there 2 days or 2 years.)

- ▶ **A school-age student or youth who lacks a fixed regular, and adequate nighttime residence...**

- ▶ In “doubled-up” situations, living in the home of another person due to loss of housing; or Couch Hopping
- ▶ Living in motels, hotels or campgrounds;
- ▶ Temporary, emergency or transitional housing;
- ▶ Living in a place not designed for human accommodations i.e. street, city park, car, abandoned building;
- ▶ Youth not residing with legal parent or guardian; and
- ▶ Runaways

Possible Signs of Homelessness

Identify. . .

These characteristics could be attributed to students with other issues as well as those students experiencing homelessness.

- Attendance at several schools
- More than one family at the same address
- Attention-seeking behavior
- Hunger and hoarding of food
- Poor hygiene and grooming
- Sleeping in class
- Inappropriate dress for the weather
- Some common statements used by homeless students include:
 - “We've moved a lot.”
 - “We're staying with relatives/friends while looking for a place.”
 - “We're going through a bad time now.”

McKinney-Vento Act

- Reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Act originally enacted in 1987.
- Requires educational access, attendance, and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Is mandated but not funded, though states are provided funding to support local grants and statewide initiatives.



Federal Law, through the McKinney-Vento Act, Requires Districts to Provide Educational Stability for Homeless Students

- ▶ Requires public schools to immediately enroll students experiencing homelessness even when lacking:
 - Proof of residency
 - Guardianship
 - Birth certificates, school records, or other documents
 - Medical records, including immunization records
 - Required dress code items, including uniforms

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- ▶ Requires school placement in: *School of Origin*
 - Student has a right to stay in school last attended when permanently housed or in which last enrolled (under the law, students are allowed to stay in their school until the end of the school year, when feasible).

Why school of Origin?

- Students who switch schools frequently score lower on standardized tests
 - It takes youth 4-6 months to recover academically after changing schools
 - It provides them with one constant in a life of variables
- ▶ Requires school district will provide Transportation to school of Origin *and for the Resident school to share transportation or share cost of transporting student(s) to school of Origin.*

Federal Law Requires Districts to Provide Immediate School Access

** addressing needs for Homeless Students**

School District

- Set aside Title I funds.
- Reserve slots in Early Head Start and Preschool programs.
- Ensure immediate enrollment.

Schools

- Enroll students in free breakfast and lunch programs.
- Ensure access to **all** appropriate instructional supports/resources, including those available through Title I set asides, gifted programs, and special education.
- Conduct an educational assessment.
- Alert teachers of a student's living situation (respecting privacy).

Addressing Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness, cont'd.

Teachers

- Make the student feel welcome, recognizing that starting a new school can be stressful and intimidating under any circumstances
- Encourage supportive relationships. *Assign a “peer buddy” to help the student get acquainted with the school and classroom.*
- Establish consistent boundaries.
- Give the youth ownership of school space (locker, shelf in your room)
- Have **High** Expectations
- Recognize stressful environments outside of school and provide accommodations for homework. *(the youth may not have the means to be able to make a collage or do a science project outside of school and/or may have a chaotic living situation not conducive to homework)*
 - *Provide needed supplies*
 - *Provide time and space in school*
 - *Modify homework*

Addressing Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness, cont'd.

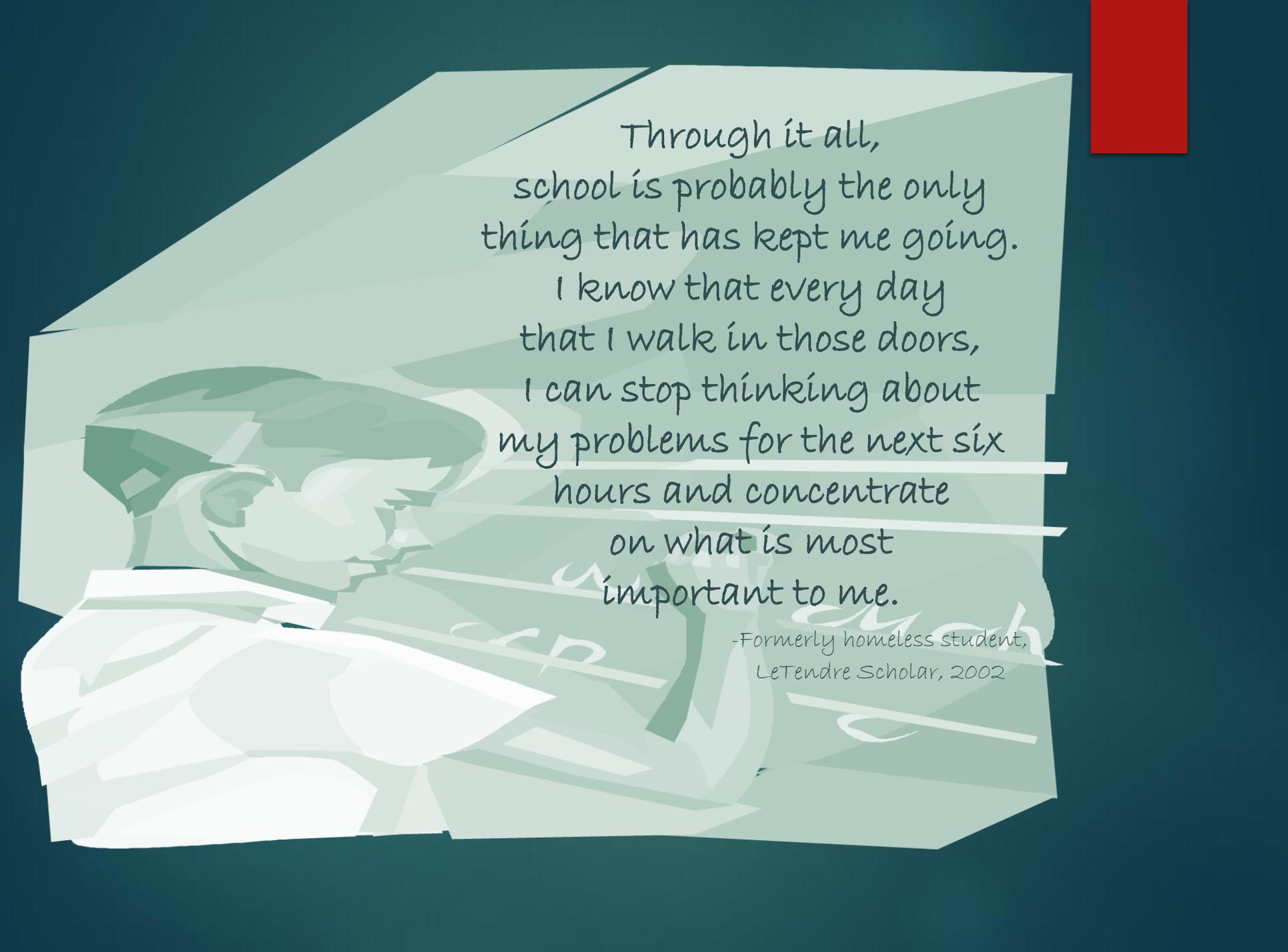
Administrators

- ▶ Use enrollment forms that provide a checklist of living situations that may indicate homelessness
- ▶ Use sensitivity when discussing the family's living situation. Invite parent/youth to fill out enrollment paperwork in a quiet area away from the traffic of the front office. *Watch for signs that indicate need for help with reading and/or writing*
- ▶ Enroll student(s) immediately. Call and/or fax previous schools, doctors, health clinics to obtain appropriate records. *Ensure students attend class and are fully participating in **all** school activities available to them while school records are obtained.*
- ▶ Provide tour of facility and let them meet child's teacher
- ▶ Give student a small welcome gift that shows the school colors and/or team name
- ▶ Inform your District's Liaison of student(s)
- ▶ Spend 5 minutes a week with a Homeless Student

Working With Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

In summary

- Reduce school entry stress.
- Promote academic success through encouraging words and actions that recognize gains made.
- Accommodate students in need, understanding they may not have a home environment conducive to homework, projects, etc
- Use tutoring and after-school programs to provide academic support.
- Increase access to services and activities.



Through it all,
school is probably the only
thing that has kept me going.

I know that every day
that I walk in those doors,
I can stop thinking about
my problems for the next six
hours and concentrate
on what is most
important to me.

-Formerly homeless student,
LeTendre Scholar, 2002



Education is the key to
breaking the cycle of
Homelessness

McKinney-Vento Contacts

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You can also contact your building principal.

For more information, links, guidance, and/or forms, please see the NSD Website @ <https://www.newportgriz.com/site/Default.aspx?PageID=139>