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Homelessness in the Classroom

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act

- Originally passed in 1987
- Reauthorized in 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act which took effect on October 1, 2016
- 42 United States Code Section 11431 et seq.
- Sections 721 and 722 of the McKinney-Vento Act
- Works hand-in-hand with Title I, Part A and other federal education programs
- Provides stability, access, and support for academic success for homeless children and youth, including preschool-aged children

Homeless Definition (1)

- Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
  - Please note that the term awaiting foster care placement was eliminated on December 10, 2016

Homeless Definition (2)

- Fixed, regular, and adequate are defined as:
  - A **fixed** residence is one that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change
  - A **regular** residence is one that is used on a normal, standard, and consistent basis
  - An **adequate** residence is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs typically met in home environments

Homeless Definition (3)

- Examples of homelessness include children and youth living in:
  - Shared housing due to economic hardship
  - Motels or hotels
  - Public or private places not designed for sleeping
  - Trailer parks or campgrounds
  - Cars, parks, and abandoned buildings
  - Shelters
  - Emergency or transitional shelters

Homeless Definition (4)

- Additional examples of homelessness include children and youth who are:
  - Migratory children who qualify as homeless
  - Abandoned in hospitals
  - Unaccompanied homeless youth

Homeless Definition (5)

- To determine if a homeless child or youth lives in substandard living conditions consider:
  - Health and safety concerns
  - Number of occupants per square foot
  - Age of occupants
  - State and local building codes

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Definition

- “Unaccompanied homeless youth” is defined as a child or youth who meets the McKinney-Vento definition and is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian
- There is no age limit for an unaccompanied homeless youth

Homelessness Effects (1)

- Emotional: Anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, depression, embarrassment
- Social: Poor interaction with others, self-isolates, disruptive, inappropriate
- Physical: Hunger, stress, developmental delays, hyperactivity, tired, poor hygiene

Homelessness Effects (2)

- Homeless children and youth:
  - Are more susceptible to domestic, physical, and sexual violence
  - Typically have greater health problems
  - Are twice as likely to repeat a grade compared to non-homeless students

Homelessness Effects (3)

- Homeless children and youth, also have:
  - History of attending many schools
  - Gaps in skill development
  - Inadequate or inappropriate clothing for the weather
  - Lack of preparation for class
  - Erratic attendance and tardiness

Mobility

- Homeless students can lose four to six months of academic progress with one school move during a year
- Mobility also hurts non-mobile students: a study found average test scores for non-mobile students were significantly lower in high schools with high student mobility rates
- Students who change high schools even once during high school are less than half as likely as stable students to graduate, even accounting for other factors

Additional Consequences (1)

- Homeless students and their families typically, experience:
  - Poor nutrition
  - Inadequate health care
  - Higher exposure to violence and emotional stress
  - Increased incidents of health impairments

Additional Consequences (2)

- With constant moving, children and youth experiencing homelessness leave behind a familiar space, their possessions, and people
- Children and youth experiencing homelessness leave projects half finished, cling to possessions, are restless, may exhibit aggressive behavior, or feel a loss of control so they fight for control at school

Attendance Strategies (1)

- Ask the student about their interests and needs
- Address those interests and needs with their school program and extra-curricular activities
- Provide them with alarm clocks, walking partners, etc.
- Help them to find a quiet and supportive place to work and study
- Coordinate with Child Welfare and Attendance staff
- Develop “success plans” with goals, steps, services, and accountability

Attendance Strategies (2)

- Assign a mentor (youth or adult) to provide guidance, encouragement, and assistance
- Intervene early when they are missing a lot of school
- Ensure that transportation is not a barrier

Attendance Strategies (3)

- Provide them with community resources such as:
  - Clothes closets
  - Food banks
  - Health clinics
  - Laundry services
  - Shower facilities

Behavior Strategies (1)

- Create a calm and quiet management style
- Provide quiet reminders of appropriate behavior
- Create a supportive environment with classroom rules developed together
- Solve behavior problems as a class which creates a climate of trust

Behavior Strategies (2)

- Manage the classroom effectively by reducing disruptions, if possible
- Provide students with the opportunity to take time out for themselves when they are frustrated, mad, or sad
- Have an understanding of homelessness

Academic Strategies (1)

- Assess and plan for students needs and learning styles
- Plan lessons in such a way that content and skills can be mastered in a short period of time
- Maintain high expectations through assignments and lessons
- Expose students to rigorous curriculum

Academic Strategies (2)

- Offer a variety of instructional techniques, such as:
  - Direct instruction
  - Simulated instruction
  - Integrated instruction
- Integrate technology, whenever possible
- Offer hands-on activities

Academic Strategies (3)

- Use higher-level questioning strategies
- Refer to tutoring, after-school intervention activities, etc.
- Coordinate with the homeless liaison in the district and even the county
- Reach out to homeless families on a continuous basis

Academic Strategies (4)

- Contact the previous school to help with placement decisions
- Follow up on special education referrals and/or services
- Help the student identify work samples and assemble a portfolio
- Share a set of text books with the local shelter

Classroom Intervention Strategies (1)

- Teach students alternative ways to express frustration
- Give the students something that belongs only to them
- Don’t take away their possession
- Assist other students in being sensitive to stereotypes of homeless people

Classroom Intervention Strategies (2)

- Support students' efforts to manage or negotiate their own conflict or problem solving
- Break tasks down into small segments that can be completed in a short period of time
- Make sure that the homeless student is enrolled in free and reduced meal program

Classroom Intervention Strategies (3)

- Integrate new students into the classroom quickly with a set of assessment tools that can be quickly administered
- Assign students a “buddy” to help them learn their way around school
- Give the student a clipboard, and other school supplies, to take home

Classroom Intervention Strategies (4)

- Provide structure in the classroom by keeping a consistent schedule and clear rules
- Ensure that students have access to a full range of educational services (Title I, English learners, gifted and talented activities, tutoring, etc.)
- Offer encouragement and understanding

Classroom Intervention Strategies (5)

- Be persistent in maintaining positive social interaction and support
- Don’t penalize students for arriving late to school
- Keep some nutritional snacks for those students who might come to school late and missed breakfast

Parent Outreach Strategies

- Make parents/guardians feel valued as partners in their child's education
- Allow parents/guardians extra time to pay for trips or special events
- Help parents/guardians become familiar with services available
- Provide an informal support system to address issues or concerns

Resources

- The California Department of Education's Homeless Education web page at https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/. Find out who your district and county liaison is, how to support students using Title I, Part A funds, understand what the homeless liaison can do to support you, etc.
- National Center for Homeless Education website at https://nche.ed.gov/, which is the technical assistance center for the United States Department of Education

Contact Information

Homeless Education Program

Integrated Student Support and Programs Office

California Department of Education

Toll-free Number 1-866-856-8214

Email: HomelessEd@cde.ca.gov