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Teach Me, Don't Lose Me: How Schools in Los Angeles are Responding to an Increase in Homeless Youth

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Teach Me, Don't Lose Me: How Schools in Los Angeles are Responding to an Increase in Homeless Youth

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Executive Summary

In Los Angeles County, the most vulnerable of those experiencing homelessness, youth under eighteen, number over 100,000. The negative impact of the trauma and realities of homelessness on their ability to obtain an education, while currently measured in terms of high dropout rates, expulsion, suspension, repeat of grades and other academic setbacks, cannot be fully quantified. In Los Angeles, there is finally an urgency to address the catastrophic homelessness situation. Through the passage of City and County measures, voters approved billions of dollars to combat homelessness. While it remains to be seen if these funds will be used to specifically address the education of students experiencing homelessness, the greatest barrier to homeless students' education is the lack of a stable home. At the federal, state and school district level, policies to that protect the rights of homeless students and their access to public education have been in place for decades.

This study seeks to understand how schools in Los Angeles are responding to an increase in homeless students in order to provide recommendations that will allow Los Angeles schools and organizations to provide support to homeless students. In order to answer the question, "How are Schools in Los Angeles Responding to an Increase in Homeless Youth?" 53 individuals who have direct experience with homeless youth in an educational capacity were surveyed. My research focused on identifying the challenges encountered by homeless students, teaching methods employed to overcome these challenges and resources need to allow homeless students to thrive academically. My research findings, which are consistent with the literature addressing these issues, demonstrate that teachers and administrators feel as though they are not provided with sufficient resources to properly support this vulnerable population of students. Also

consistent with the literature, my recommendations reflect that teachers and schools must identify the barriers and issues the homeless students in their particular schools are facing and respond to those issues rapidly and resourcefully.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Literature Review

Homelessness Defined

The State of Homelessness

United States

California

Los Angeles City and County

Homeless Children and Youth in Los Angeles

Educational Issues and the Impact of Homelessness

Teaching Homeless Students

Policy Background

Los Angeles City and County Efforts to Reduce Homelessness

Los Angeles City - Proposition HHH

Los Angeles County - Measure H

The City of Los Angeles Comprehensive Homeless Strategy

Current Policies to Protect Homeless Students' Access to Education

Federal Policy – McKinney-Vento Act

State, District and Local Level Programs

Methodology

Findings

Recommendations

Conclusion

Works Cited

Appendices

Introduction

In June 2016, the Los Angeles County Supervisors voted unanimously to call for a state declaration of emergency on California’s homeless crisis. According to the January 2016 count by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (“LAHSA”), the County’s homeless population is estimated to number 46,874, an increase of 5.7 percent from 2015. Although a number of policies have been put in place and funding has been provided to reduce homelessness over the past few years, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles continues to increase. A significant percentage of these homeless are children and youth between the ages of three and eighteen. While the majority of these youth are enrolled in school, there are wide academic achievement gaps between homeless students and their housed counterparts due to factors inside and outside the academic arena. This study seeks to understand how schools in Los

Angeles are responding to an increase in homeless students in order to provide recommendations that will allow schools and organizations to provide support to homeless students.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, I have been exposed to homelessness for as long as I can remember. From a young age my classmates and I put together sack lunches for families living in shelters and my family and I packaged Christmas dinners for homeless families. For quite some time, I believed that homelessness was as prevalent elsewhere in the country as it is in Los Angeles. In high school I began tutoring children of families with histories of domestic abuse. Many of these families were homeless and all of the children performed below grade level in school. When I discovered that the number of homeless individuals is significantly greater in Los Angeles than almost every other city in the country, I became very passionate about the issue. Because obtaining an education is the most likely way that an individual will break out of the cycle of homelessness or extreme poverty, I decided to further research the climate of homelessness and education at a time when Los Angeles schools are responsible for an increasing number of homeless students and are grappling to find solutions and resources to enable these students to complete and succeed in school.

Literature Review

Homelessness Defined

When most people think about homelessness, they imagine someone who lives on the street and asks passersby for spare change. While this scenario describes a percentage of homeless people, it does not depict the circumstances of the majority of people living without a stable home. Accurately counting and providing assistance to homeless students must start with

comprehensive and uniform definitions and data collection methodologies. Unfortunately, current data related to homelessness is often inconsistent because the definitions of homelessness and the distinct methodologies employed for counting or estimating homeless individuals and families vary and produce wide disparities.

This is best illustrated by the difference between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) more limited definition of homelessness in comparison to the U.S. Department of Education (“DOE”) definition. HUD defines homelessness as people living in shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing programs and unsheltered locations such as “the streets, vehicles, or parks.” (The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (2016 AHAR, 3)).¹ In contrast, the DOE, which provides guidance to states in connection with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (“McKinney-Vento”), which ensures educational rights and protections for children experiencing homelessness and is discussed below, defines homelessness to include those: 1) living in emergency or transitional shelters, 2) living in motels, camping grounds, or trailers parks due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations, 3) living in automobiles, parks, substandard housing, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings or public spaces, and 4) sharing housing with other persons due to a loss of housing or financial hardship. (McKinney-Vento, 5). This more expansive definition which includes families that are “doubled up” or share housing with other persons due to a loss of housing or financial hardship, creates a significant variance between HUD’s and the DOE’s homeless youth data. (McKinney-Vento, 5). This is because an estimated 76% of homeless children live in “doubled-up” situations with friends or family. (NCHE, 14-15).

¹ The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (2016 AHAR) was submitted to Congress by HUD in connection with the Obama administration’s Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness which was released in 2010, and amended in 2015.

HUD and the DOE also rely on different methodologies to report the number of homeless children. Every year, during the last 10 days of January, communities across the United States conduct an enumeration of homeless persons living in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or on the street, in what is known as a “Point in Time” (“PIT”) count. HUD PIT counts are defined as “unduplicated 1-night estimates of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations.” (2016 AHAR, 2).² In Los Angeles City and County, LAHSA, with significant support from homeless services providers and volunteers, conducts an annual PIT to count the number of homeless persons and collect data to determine where and what types of services are needed for the homeless living in Los Angeles (2016 LAHSA Homeless Count).³ The LAHSA homeless count data are reported to HUD and incorporated in HUD’s PIT homeless data presented to Congress in the the AHAR. (2016 LAHSA Homeless Count). Electronic administrative records are used to enumerate people living in emergency in transitional housing. These two counts, the sheltered and unsheltered, are disseminated to Congress and the public through the AHAR. The HUD PIT methodology used to count the “unsheltered” homeless population varies by community and committed resources and has been found to be significantly flawed. (Hopper, 2008). Inaccurate estimates were found to exist based on, among others, counters’ failure to count people who “didn’t look homeless,” and homeless being in places they could not have easily been seen for safety and to allow them uninterrupted sleep. (Hopper). The HUD PIT count also does not count homeless children living in motels, trailer parks, camping grounds or similar settings. Despite the flaws, the annual HUD PIT counts, which are a snapshot of those living in

² The 1-night counts are conducted during the last week of January of each year by Continuums of Care, “local planning bodies responsible for conducting the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area, or an entire state.” (2016 AHAR, 2).

³ The 2016 Los Angeles Homeless Count included, for the first time, a survey-based Youth Count which provides a new baseline for homelessness among youth in the region. (2016 LAHSA Homeless Count).

homelessness on one particular night of the year, help provide local and national estimates of people experiencing homelessness.

In contrast to the HUD PIT methodology, McKinney-Vento requires that all state education agencies and/or local education agencies (commonly referred to as school districts) collect and submit information to the DOE regarding the children who are identified as homeless and enrolled in all local school districts in the state over the course of the academic year using the McKinney-Vento definition of child homelessness. (NCHE, 1). The enrolled student DOE data include children ages 3-5 enrolled in public preschools in local education agencies, but it does not include children under the age of three. (NCHE, 11). Because current research estimates that 51% of the total number of homeless children are under the age of 6, the DOE count of homeless children represents approximately half of the total of homeless children. (NCFH, 99; Bassuk, 498). Because public schools are the only institutions legally responsible for identifying and serving children experiencing homelessness, the DOE/McKinney-Vento data concerning homeless school-aged children and youth appears to be more reliable than the HUD PIT data. However, the DOE data is not without limitation. The DOE data only includes children enrolled in public school and identified by school personnel. (NCHE, iii). As a result, the DOE data does not capture school-aged children who experience homelessness during the summer months, those who drop out of or do not attend school, children who do not enroll in preschool programs administered by local education agencies, and students whose homeless status is unknown to school personnel. (NCHE, iii).

The varying definitions and methodologies result in a staggering disparity in the estimated number of homeless individuals, youth and families. Specifically, using a PIT count,

HUD through the 2016 AHAR reports that in the United States, on a single night in “January 2016, 549,928 people were experiencing homeless. A majority (68%) were staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens, and 32 percent were in unsheltered locations.” (2016 AHAR, 1). In contrast, in its January 2015 Overview of the Data and Causes of Homelessness, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (“NLCHP”), relying on data from HUD, DOE and the U.S Census Bureau estimates that each year, “at least 2.5 to 3.5 million Americans sleep in shelters, transitional housing, and public places not meant for human habitation.” (NLCHP, 1). NLCHP also estimates that “at least an additional 7.4 million have lost their own homes and are doubled-up with others due to economic necessity.” (NLCHP, 1).

With regard to homeless children under the age of 18, the 2016 AHAR reports that, using the HUD PIT methodology, on a single night in January 2016, there were 120,819 homeless children under the age of 18, representing 22 percent of all homeless people living in the United States. (2016 AHAR, 8). In contrast, using the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, the DOE reports that during the 2013-14 school year,⁴ there were 1,263,323 homeless students enrolled in United States public schools. (NCHE, 8).⁵ For reference, the 2014 AHAR reports that on a single night in January 2014, there were 135,701 homeless children under the age of 18, representing 23 percent of all homeless people living in the United States. (2014 AHAR, 32). The variance, 1,165,538 children, is particularly distressing when one considers that the AHAR estimate includes children up to age 18, and the DOE estimate does not include children under age 3 who are too young to enroll in public school. Combining the DOE data on homeless

⁴ The latest years for which the DOE has reported data on homeless students,

⁵ This November 2015 report provides a summary of the 2013-2014 state data collection required by the DOE for the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. The EHCY program, authorized under McKinney-Vento, is designed to address the needs of homeless children and youth and ensure educational rights and protections for them.

students with an estimate of younger non-school aged homeless children in the United States, the number of children experiencing homelessness annually is 2.5 million children. (NCFH, 14). Using United States Census estimates of the total population of children under 18 years, this represents one in every 30 children. (NCFH, 14).

Every year, the HUD PIT count leaves hundreds of thousands of homeless children in the United States uncounted and invisible to policy makers and the public. In order to make these children visible to lawmakers and their communities, the more inclusive definition used by the DOE, which reflects the complex realities of child homelessness in the United States, should be utilized and researchers and advocates should address ways to incorporate this more inclusive definition into HUD PIT methodologies for assessing homeless populations.

In addition, the definition and methodology used to accurately assess homeless youth, ages 16-24, should specifically include the categories that describe the circumstances many homeless youth are experiencing, including: 1) Youth that are “couch surfing” find temporary shelter with friends, classmates, or acquaintances. Individuals in this position are often unsure of how long they will be permitted to stay at the location; 2) “Disconnected youth” or “opportunity youth” are individuals between the age of 16 and 24 who are currently not enrolled in school or working; 3) “Emancipation” or “aging out” refers to young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 who are no longer under care of the foster system; 4) “Runaway youth” refers to minors who leave home without permission; 5) “Street youth” is anyone under the age of eighteen who spends most nights in unsheltered locations such as the street, vehicles, or parks; 6) “Thrownaway youth” are individuals under the age of eighteen that are asked or forced to leave home by a parent or guardian. (National Network for Youth). Because each of these categories

are surrounded by different problems and potential interventions, to focus on youth homelessness effectively, those living in these situations should be accurately identified, counted and their needs addressed.

The State of Homelessness

United States

At the national level, utilizing the HUD PIT methodology, the 2016 AHAR finds that from 2015 to 2016, the number of people experiencing homelessness declined by three percent, and since 2007, national homelessness has decreased by 15 percent. (2016 AHAR, 1, 10). The 2016 AHAR found that nationally, homelessness among families with children declined by 6 percent between 2015 and 2016. (2016 AHAR, 32).⁶ On a single night in January 2016, 194,716 people were homeless in 61,265 families with children, representing 35 percent of all people experiencing homelessness. (2016 AHAR, 32). Finally, the 2016 AHAR found that nationally, on a single night in January 2016, there were 120,819 homeless children, and 35,868 unaccompanied homeless youth.⁷ (2016 AHAR, 8, 44). In contrast, the DOE reports 1,301,239 homeless children enrolled in school for the 2013-14 school year. (NCHE, 6). The nighttime residence for these children are reported as unsheltered (3%), motels (6%), shelters (15%) and doubled up (76%). (NCHE, 11).

California

In California, the 2016 AHAR finds on a single night in January 2016, California

⁶ AHAR defines people in families with children as “people who are homeless as part of households that have at least one adult and one child.” (AHAR, 2).

⁷ AHAR defines unaccompanied youth as “persons under age 25 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are not a parent presenting with or sleeping in the same place as his/her children.” (2016 AHAR, 44). Homeless Youth between the ages of 18-24 accounted for 89.3 percent of the AHAR identified homeless youth. (2016 AHAR, 44).

accounted for 22 percent (118,142) of the nation's homeless population, the highest percentage in the country. (2016 AHAR, 12). In California, 66 percent (78,390 people) were without shelter and 34 percent (39,752) were staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe havens. (2016 AHAR, 12). HUD also reported that California has 11% (20,482) of the nation's homeless people in families with children. (2016 AHAR, 36). The 2016 AHAR finds that California has the greatest number of homeless unaccompanied youth, 11,222; which is 31 percent of the national total. (2016 AHAR, 46). Seventy-eight percent of these homeless unaccompanied youth are unsheltered. (2016 AHAR, 47). Utilizing its public school data collection methodology, the DOE reports that 235,983 homeless students were enrolled in California schools for the 2014-15 school year. (NCEH, 8).⁸

Los Angeles City and County

The 2016 Los Angeles Homeless Count, also using HUD PIT methodology, found that homelessness in Los Angeles County increased 5.7% to 46,874 in 2016 from 44,359 in 2015, and 74% of the homeless population in Los Angeles County, is unsheltered, an increase of 11.8%. (LAHSA, 4). The 2016 AHAR finds that Los Angeles County has the highest rates of unsheltered homeless people in families with children and the highest numbers of unaccompanied children and youth in the country. (2016 AHAR, 38, 47). In Los Angeles, the homeless count identified 6,611 homeless family members, an 18% decrease from 2015 to 2016. The California Department of Education tabulates the number of homeless public school students for 2014 as being 67,301 in Los Angeles County (an increase of 25% since 2011, and 25% of the homeless student in California), and 14,560 in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD),

⁸ Note that the number of homeless students enrolled in California public schools is almost double the number of all California homeless individuals identified in the HUD PIT count.

more than any other California school district. (Packard).⁹

Again, the drastic difference in the definition and methodology utilized by HUD versus DOE is evident where the number of homeless children identified by Los Angeles County public schools is higher than the HUD PIT count number of all homeless individuals living in Los Angeles County. Even these staggering numbers understate the problem. First, the numbers do not include homeless youth and children who are not in school or whose school is not aware they are homeless. Second, parents and guardians may be reluctant to report homelessness to school staff for fear they will be reported to child protective services, or risk causing the person they are doubling up with to be evicted. Similarly, older students may fear unwarranted attention from law enforcement, child protective services or abusive parents or guardians if they admit to being homeless.

Homeless Children and Youth In Los Angeles

While there are numerous explanations for the causes of homelessness faced by families with children, the main causes of homelessness of Los Angeles families and youth mirror those of other areas of the country, and include:

- Persistently high rates of poverty/decline in public assistance
- Lack of affordable housing
- Eviction/foreclosure
- High risk of homelessness based on racial and ethnic disparities,\
- Single parenting challenges
- Traumas experienced by women and children

⁹ “Homeless Public School Students” is defined as public school enrollees who were recorded as being homeless at any point during the school year. (Packard).

- Teen pregnancy
- Cost of child care
- Alcohol and drug addiction
- Mental health issues

(NCFH, 74-83; LACOE, 4).

Further, each night time residence situation, along with whether a child is living with relatives, is accompanied by common and distinct obstacles. A youth living with their family in a motel has distinct survival and educational issues from an adolescent living on the street. Families living doubled up are often in residences that are unsafe and unsanitary due to lack of running water or electricity, animal infestations, or structures that are not up to proper building codes and/or uninhabitable.

LAHSA defines homeless youth as those age 18-25. Homeless youth are often referred to as Transition Age Youth (TAY). LAHSA and homeless youth providers, including the LGBT Center and Covenant House, have identified the following reasons for youth becoming homeless:

- Being kicked out of the family home
- Abuse
- Running away from home
- Aging out of the foster care system
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Family economic hardship
- Rejection of LGBTQ status by family

(LA CHS, 29)

For homeless youth, the issues are complex and severe. Many homeless youth have experienced trauma and attachment issues which lead to difficulty with developing trust in peers and adults within and outside of their family. (National Child Traumatic Stress Network). Drug use and addiction, a higher incidence of pregnancy, a proclivity for suicidal thoughts, low self esteem, engagement in survival sex and domestic abuse are behaviors and experiences that have a profound impact on their survival, emotional well-being, and ability to access education and succeed academically. (Tierney, 53). Unaccompanied homeless youth require different interventions than accompanied homeless youth because the two groups experience different setbacks. (Thistle-Elliott, 6).

Staff from LAHSA, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the LGBT Center and other service providers report that homeless youth do not self-identify as homeless for these reasons:

- Do not want to stand out among their peers, youth prefer to “hide in plain sight”
- Fear of being preyed upon in adult environments, especially Skid Row
- Unaware of target programs serving homeless youth
- Fear of being reported to law enforcement or child welfare
- some youth not ready to give up their freedom or lifestyle

(LA CHS, 29)

LAHSA reports that 15-20 percent of homeless youth in Los Angeles County self-identify as LGBTQ. Regarding difficulties faces by other homeless youth – listed above – LGBTQ homeless youth experience higher rates of physical assault, sexual exploitation, and mental

health issues. LGBTQ also experience rejection by their family and homophobia from society at large, including homeless youth and individuals within the homeless services community. (LA CHS, 30).

Educational Issues and Impact of Homelessness

The statistics concerning the educational impact of homelessness are devastating.

- **Less than one out of four homeless youth graduate from high school.**
- Homeless students are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school, be expelled or suspended as their housed counterparts.
- Within a single year, 97% of children who are homeless move up to three times and 40% attend two different schools.
- With each school change, a student is set back academically by an average of four to six months.

(LACOE, 6).

Because homeless students face barriers that their housed counterparts do not, they generally do not perform at as high an academic level. These barriers include: hunger, being unable to meet enrollment requirements, high mobility, lack of transportation, lack of school supplies and clothing, poor health, fatigue, emotional crisis/mental health issues, prejudice and misunderstanding and lack of a parent or guardian. (LACOE, 18). Adolescents who experience hunger due to lack of means are significantly more likely to receive special education services, repeat a grade, develop conduct disorders and psychiatric and function problems. (APA, 1531). Unaccompanied youth are prevented from enrolling in school because of curfew laws, liability concerns, and legal guardianship requirements. (Tierney, 56). Homeless youth have lower

literacy rates and more frequent suspensions from school than stable housed students.

Throughout the country, about two thirds of high school homeless youth are not proficient in math and English and score significantly below grade level, repeat grades, and have poor attendance compared to stable housed students. (Tierney, 53). Average daily attendance is 74% for homeless students compared to 89% for stable housed students.(Tierney, 53). For high school students, the average daily attendance is 51% for homeless students and 84% for stable housed students. (Tierney, 53). During a school year about half of homeless students will change schools once and a third of homeless students will change schools at least twice in the United States. (Tierney, 54). This high mobility of homeless students negatively affects their academic achievement. Homeless families and individuals frequently move because shelters and temporary accommodations may not be available in a particular school district. It is estimated that with each move, 3-6 months of education is lost. (National Coalition for the Homeless). Over 50% of homeless students have been suspended at least four times for infractions such as tardiness, uniform violation, and excessive absences and over 30% of homeless students have repeat behavioral problems that cause educational problems. (Tierney, 54). Homeless youth are more likely to remain homeless as adults without access to proper education. (Tierney, 55). Out of all homeless individuals, 2% are college graduates, 22% have participated in college, 38% graduated high school or GED, and 39% don't have a high school degree. (Tierney, 54).

Regarding the impact on medical health, the LACOE reports that homeless children are more likely to experience health related problems as their housed peers: 1) Two times more likely to experience childhood illness; 2) Four times more likely to be asthmatic; 3) Two times more likely to be hospitalized; and 4) Higher rates of blood lead levels. (LACOE, 7).

In addition to all these traumas and the stigma of homelessness, many homeless students and their parents fear the academic intake process because of their immigration status. An estimated 30-40 percent of LAUSD's students are children of mixed-status families that could be affected by deportations. (Nicosia).

Teaching Homeless Students

In LAUSD, 72% of the homeless students are Hispanic, 21% are African American, and 4% are white. (LAUSD Homeless Data). The majority of the homeless students are in grades 1-4, ages 6-10. (LAUSD Homeless Data). The majority, 55% are living in a doubled up situation, 8% live in shelters and 8% live in motels. (LAUSD Homeless Data). As discussed below, the McKinney-Vento Act protects homeless students' rights and access to education. Undocumented students are eligible for McKinney-Vento services to the same extent as documented students, including undocumented, unaccompanied homeless students. (LACOE, 16).

It is important for schools and teachers to treat information concerning a student's living situation as confidential. Homeless students and parents may be hesitant to confide their homeless status due to domestic violence, fear children will be removed to foster care, forces to transfer schools or be deported. (LACOE, 19). School and teachers can play an important role in protecting the confidentiality of the family's situation, providing resources, compassion and stability.

There are a number of resources that schools and teachers can, and in some instances must, make available to homeless students. These include transportation, enrollment assistance, backpacks and school supplies, school clothing and uniforms, dispute resolution, assistance

locating specific outreach programs, summer programs, housing assistance, tutoring/afterschool programs, counseling, housing assistance, early childhood programs, parenting programs, and health services. (LACOE, 31).

Given the demographics of homeless students, it is highly likely that the schools they are attending will be school in high poverty areas. Throughout the United States, the teacher turnover rate is 50 percent higher in primarily high poverty schools than their low poverty counterparts. (Blazer, 6). Teachers prefer to teach in low poverty schools due to higher salaries, preferable working conditions, and support from administration and parents. (Clotfelter, 1363). This leads to inexperienced teachers finding jobs in high poverty schools while teachers who are already in the system and have more experience are placed in more affluent schools. (Clotfelter, 1363). In the United States, 20 percent of teachers in high poverty schools have less than three years of experience while only 11 percent of teachers in low poverty have less than three years of experience. (Blazer, 6).

Perhaps the most exciting development in homeless focused education is a Los Angeles Charter high school, scheduled to open in September 2017, which is specifically designed to meet the needs of homeless and foster care students. In 2016, two Los Angeles educators, Kari Croft and Eric Whalen, were awarded the \$10 million in XQ: The Super School Project, a contest to redesign high schools. (Resmovits). RISE (Revolutionary Individualized Student Experience) High was created to meet the unique needs of homeless, foster youth and other students with diverse learning needs. RISE High exists outside the confines of a brick and mortar high school building. Rather than housing all learning experience in one central, traditional school, RISE will share space with existing nonprofits in downtown Los Angeles and

other high need areas to ensure that students experiencing unstable living conditions that require constant moving will have a variety of access points to a consistent school model and network of adults and peers. The school facilities will be co-located with existing nonprofit service partners who have proven success in the provision of wraparound services such as medical and mental health care; health, fitness and wellbeing; legal services; meals; arts, and extracurricular activities. Students will have access to flexible scheduling to meet their personal needs and fulfill any additional responsibilities they have, such as working to support themselves and family or taking care of children or younger siblings. A RISE app will provide 24/7 access to academic support and to meals and shelter availability.

On January 19, 2017, I interviewed RISE co-founder, Kari Croft. She explained that there are several components at the heart of the idea of RISE High and the interaction between them makes for a powerfully unique model that re-imagines high school. First, they put the most marginalized students at the center of their research to show homeless students that they deserve the best. Second, RISE High is designed by and for students. Not only does this create an environment where homeless students' problems are addressed, it also gives them a voice. Third, RISE High disregards traditional school structures because they do not accommodate the lives of homeless students. Rather, they provide flexible scheduling, personalized learning plans, wraparound services, and a relevant and cultural curriculum. Finally, the model demonstrates what is possible when a community of stakeholders who have been trained to meet a diverse set of student need, come together to support students' best interests.

The RISE school bus will be reconfigured into a mobile resource center with wifi, charging stations and mobile tutors that come to the students. (Resmovits). It is this type of

individual based, scalable, innovative learning, which takes into account the frequently disrupted lives of homeless youth that could have a dramatic impact on the future of education for homeless youth.

Policy Background

Los Angeles City and County Efforts to Reduce Homelessness

Since November 2016, Los Angeles City Proposition HHH, the Homelessness Reduction and Prevention Housing and Facilities Bond (“HHH”) and the Los Angeles County Plan to Prevent and Combat Homelessness (“Measure H”), have been passed by voters in Los Angeles. The expenditure of funds approved by HHH and Measure H should provide significant resources to reduce the number of homeless women, children and families, build supportive housing, and facilitate access to necessary services. The passage of HHH and Measure H clearly reflects the growing concern in Los Angeles over the increase in the number of homeless individuals and the visibility of the encampments.

Los Angeles City - Proposition HHH

HHH was placed on the ballot by vote of the Los Angeles City Council. (HHH). A two-thirds supermajority vote was required for passage of HHH. By supporting HHH, the voters approved issuance by the City of Los Angeles of \$1.2 billion in bonds¹⁰ to provide safe, clean affordable housing for the homeless and those at risk of being homeless, including temporary shelters, showers, storage facilities and facilities used to provide increased access to mental health care, drug and alcohol treatment and other services. HHH bond proceeds cannot be used

¹⁰ Bonds are used by school districts, cities, and states to raise money to pay for expense projects.

to finance services for the homeless or to replace existing sources of funds used to developing similar homeless housing or facilities for services. (HHH).

Los Angeles County - Measure H

Although HHH provided funding for approximately 10,000 units to house the chronic homeless, providing housing alone does not solve many of the issues that lead people into homelessness. Measure H, which required two-thirds approval by Los Angeles County voters, and passed on March 7, 2017, raises the county sales tax by $\frac{1}{4}$ cent for ten years, with the funds used to finance mental health, substance abuse treatment, health care, education, job training, rental subsidies, emergency and affordable housing, transportation, outreach, prevention, and supportive services for homeless children, families, foster youth, veterans, battered women, seniors, disabled individuals, and other homeless adults. (Measure H). The County estimates that the $\frac{1}{4}$ cent Homelessness Tax will raise an estimated \$373 million per year. (Measure H). Together, HHH and Measure H are expected to decrease significantly the number of homeless and provide additional support services for the homeless population, including children and families.

The City of Los Angeles Comprehensive Homeless Strategy

As background for the passage of HHH and M, in January 2016, the Los Angeles “Comprehensive Homeless Strategies” report (“LA CHS Report”), the most comprehensive homeless strategy report in Los Angeles City history, was released to the public. (LA CHS). The City Council’s Homelessness and Poverty Committee held two public hearings in January 2016, and in February 2016, the City of Los Angeles adopted the strategy set forth in the LA CHS Report. (LA CHS). The LA CHS Report lists more than sixty-two recommendations to

address homelessness over the next ten years, at an estimated cost of \$1.87 billion dollars. (LA CHS, Garcetti).

Central to the LA CHS Report is recognition that the City cannot “achieve a reduction in homelessness unilaterally,” and that a coordinated effort with the County of Los Angeles, existing non-profit providers, and LAHSA is required. (LA CHS). The LA CHS Report found that 13,000 units of new housing, including 10,000 units of supportive housing, would be needed to house Los Angeles’ homeless population, at an estimated cost of more than \$1 billion. (LA CHS). The City’s strategy, which is consistent with that of LAHSA and HUD, is that providing stable housing to homeless individuals prior to providing needed services is a more effective strategy than providing support services without guaranteed housing. (LA CHS).

The strategy championed by the supporters of HHH is based on the Housing First model. Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness by moving homeless people into permanent housing as quickly as possible and providing services once they have been placed into homes. The housing-first initiative proposes that homeless individuals and families should be provided housing with no conditions, including a predetermined length of sobriety or current enrollment in drug and alcohol programs. (Pathways). This allows homeless individuals to achieve housing stability leading to an improved quality of life in all areas. Housing First was created in 1992 by Pathways to Housing in New York (“Pathways”). (Pathways). Pathways provides housing along with supportive treatment in mental and physical health, substance abuse, education, and employment. Pathways residents are placed in apartments scattered throughout the city to avoid concentrated poverty. (Pathways). Some Housing First programs target certain types of individuals or households such as families with children, victims of domestic violence, or people

who suffer from drug and alcohol addictions. (NAEH)

LAHSA estimated that in 2016, there were 21,338 unsheltered homeless people and 7,126 sheltered homeless people in the city of Los Angeles totaling 28,464. (2016 LAHSA Homeless Count). The 2009 estimated public cost for people living in supportive housing is \$605 per month while the public cost for homeless people is \$2,897 per month, therefore, providing housing and supportive care to the homeless results in a 79% reduction in public costs. (UWGL). This is because providing housing to the homeless, particularly chronically homeless, costs less than the costs that accompany hospital visits due to exposure from living on the streets and the costs that accompany incarceration due to trespassing, loitering, drinking in public, vandalism and other non-violent crimes.(UWGL). Public tax dollars spent on the homeless include inpatient treatment/detox admission, alcohol and drug outpatient treatment/detox, emergency room visit, hospitalization, mental health clinic, arrest, jail time initial booking, jail time per diem, and prison time. (UWGL). The purpose of the Housing First model is to equip the homeless with resources that will allow them to be reintegrated into society by first providing housing and then focusing on the experiences, patterns or disabilities that caused them to become homeless. (Pathways). Housing First works to assist the homeless by distributing basic services, reducing the overall homeless population, and by saving taxpayers thousands of dollars per individual. (Pathways).

Whether the HHH and Measure H funding will have an impact on the educational issues facing homeless students is not yet clear. However, Los Angeles County Office of Education (“LACOE”) is focused on quantifying the financial cost to public services resulting from Los Angeles’ growing population of homeless students. According to the LACOE, Los Angeles

County school districts lose at least \$14.5 million in funding every year because of chronically absent homeless children. (Palta). LACOE has also found that there currently are nearly 63,000 homeless public school children in Los Angeles County, a 25 percent increase from 2011. (Palta). In an effort to get a seat at the HHH and Measure H funding table, the LACOE is gathering data to demonstrate the burden youth homelessness places on Los Angeles' social welfare and school systems to provide leverage for funding programs that will support homeless students. (Palta). The LACOE estimates there are more than 12,500 homeless students in Los Angeles County who are chronically truant, meaning they missed 18 or more days due to unexcused absences. Those absences each cost schools \$64 per day in funding, totaling about \$14.5 million in a year. (Palta). This number does not include the large number of homeless students who miss school frequently, but haven't reached the definition of "chronically truant." Nor does it factor in the 12 percent of homeless children who never attend school. (Palta).

Documentation filed in connection with an April 6, 2017 County of Los Angeles Measure H Homeless Initiative Revenue Planning Process meeting to discuss a funding request for \$9.5 million for the 2017-18 school year indicates that the LACOE is seeking Measure H funds to develop and provide a two generational approach to homelessness prevention. (Measure H Revenue Request). Specifically, the funding request proposes that HHH would fund two staff positions at LACOE to assist with coordination and integration efforts to provide services to the families who cannot received homelessness prevention services due to current funding restrictions, and to develop cross-sector data collection on the child and parent or caregiver outcomes to provide insight about possible ways to enhance the service delivery system for families with young children experiencing homelessness and homeless youth. (Measure H

Revenue Request).

Current Policies to Protect Homeless Students' Access to Education

Federal Policy – McKinney-Vento

There are current policies in place at the federal, state, school district levels that protect the rights of homeless students and their access to public education. In 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the first significant federal legislative response to homelessness, was passed and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1987. (EHCY Profile). This legislation merely required states to review residency requirements for the enrollment of homeless youth and children. (EHCY Profile). In 1990, the McKinney Act was amended to require states to eliminate enrollment barriers and to provide school access and academic support for homeless students. (EHCY Profile). In 1994, the McKinney Act was included in the Improving America's Schools Act, which added preschool services, encouraged interagency collaboration to promote student success, and increased parental input. (EHCY Profile). In 2002, the McKinney Act was reauthorized as McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 (McKinney-Vento) by the No Child Left Behind Act, and required all school districts to appoint a homeless education liaison to ensure effective implementation of the law at the local level. (EHCY Profile). On December 10, 2015 President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act, which reauthorized McKinney-Vento, and took effect on October 1, 2016. (McKinney-Vento). McKinney-Vento is a federal mandate monitored by the DOE which provides funding to states for providing educational access to schools and services for homeless youth.

Under McKinney-Vento, state education agencies and local education agencies must

review and revise policies and procedures to remove barriers to a high quality education for homeless children and youth. (McKinney-Vento). McKinney-Vento requires that:

- 1) Homeless students who move have the right to remain in their schools of origin, if in the student's best interest;
- 2) If it is in the child's best interest to change schools, homeless students must be immediately enrolled in a new school, even if they lack documents normally required for enrollment;
- 3) Transportation must be provided to or from a homeless student's school of origin;
- 4) Homeless students must have access to all programs and services for which they are eligible, including charter schools, school nutrition programs, special education, preschool, language assistance for English learners, and before and after school care;
- 5) Unaccompanied youth must be given special protections, including immediate enrollment without proof of guardianship; and
- 6) Unaccompanied youth, parents and guardians have the right to dispute school selection, enrollment and eligibility determinations.

(McKinney-Vento).

In 2015, total annual federal funding to states under McKinney-Vento was \$65,042,000. (EHCY Profile). In the more than 20 years since the passage of McKinney-Vento, the rate of school attendance by homeless students has increased by 17%. (Tierney, 59).

At the state and local level, the DOE requires all state education agencies and local education agencies to submit information regarding student homelessness on an annual basis. Additionally, the McKinney-Vento plan submitted by the state to the DOE must include:

- 1) Demonstration that the state education agencies and local education agencies have developed and will review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children;
- 2) Description of how homeless children and youth are or will be given the opportunity to meet the same challenging state achievement standards all students are expected to meet;
- 3) Strategies to address problems resulting from enrollment delays caused by immunization records, medical records, residency requirements, lack of birth certificates, school records or uniform or dress code requirements;
- 4) Description of procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding educational placement of homeless children;
- 5) Policies to ensure transportation is provided to and from the school of origin if necessary; and
- 6) Description of procedures to ensure homeless children have the equal access to the same programs as provided to other children.

(NAEHCY).

State, District and Local Level Programs to Address the Issue of Homeless Students

In California, at the state level, the focus is on providing indirect support to ensure homeless youth are in school and counting the number of homeless students in schools. (Tierney, 61). It is important that homeless youth enroll in school not only because of the importance of a proper education, but also so that they have access to supplementary services that are only provided to students enrolled and attending school. (Tierney, 61). In addition, in 2013, California passed Senate Assembly Bill 177 (“SB 177”), the Homeless Youth Education Success

Act which includes provisions that affirmed the education rights of California's homeless students by considering them eligible to participate in extracurricular activities including after school sports, even if they do not meet school-residency requirements. (SB 177). SB 177 also provides youth access to educational support and services by requiring: 1) immediate enrollment of a homeless child or youth; 2) the State Department of Education and the Department of Social Services to organize a work-group to develop policies and practices to support homeless children and youth and ensure that child abuse and neglect reporting requirements do not create barriers to school enrollment and attendance; and 3) local educational liaisons for homeless children and youth to ensure public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths are distributed in schools. (SB 177).

In October 2013, the California legislature also passed enacted Assembly Bill 652 ("AB 652") the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, which clarifies that the fact that a child is homeless or classified as an unaccompanied minor (as defined by the McKinney-Vento education definition), is not, in and of itself, a sufficient basis for reporting child abuse or neglect. (AB 652). This allows youth to seek services without the fear of being reported to child protective services or the police, or being returned to abusive homes.

California school districts apply for McKinney-Vento grants from the state to implement programs, including summer camps and afterschool programs, that increase educational access for homeless youth (Tierney, 61). LAUSD receives approximately \$125,000 annually from McKinney-Vento grants. (Tierney, 62). The main source of funding for LAUSD homeless youth programs comes from Title I funds that are set aside for homeless youth. (Tierney, 62).

At the district level, in 2006, LAUSD's Board of Education passed the Access for All

resolution which established LAUSD's Homeless Education Program ("HEP") to "identify homeless youth, provide training and technical assistance to school and community personnel and to facilitate enrollment and equal access to all school programs for homeless students district wide." (LAUSD HEP). In 2015, LAUSD budgeted \$1.8 million for HEP. (Tulley, 2015).

HEP services include: 1) Facilitation of school enrollment as needed to ensure compliance with district policy and to equal access to educational and meal programs, as well as tutoring and other services available at the school site; 2) professional development trainings for school personnel and community agencies regarding the rights and responsibilities of homeless students; 3) technical assistance regarding the proper identification, enrollment, and service needs of homeless students and their families; 4) assistance with transportation, backpacks, school supplies, and clothing vouchers; 5) medical, dental, and mental health referrals, in addition to other school/community services; 6) education of students and parents on their educational rights, and promotion of parent participation in school related activities; 7) assistance to unaccompanied youth with enrollment procedures, school placement options, and retrieval of immunization records; 8) advocacy services for parents and students during school related educational meetings, such as Student Study Team (SST), Individualized Educational Program (IEP), and Student Attendance; 9) Participation in the mediation of school enrollment disputes; and 10) assistance to specialized populations of homeless students, including preschoolers, homeless teen parents, children with special needs, and unaccompanied youth. (LAUSD HEP). Under LAUSD's HEP, every school site is entitled to a designated homeless education liaison who can facilitate the above referenced services. (LAUSD HEP).

At the school level, the focus is to keep data on how many homeless students attend the

school. (Tierney, 62). The school also provides counselors and supplementary resources. The school can choose to budget for an attendance or dropout prevention counselor. (Tierney, 62). Ironically, it actually benefits homeless students to have attendance issues because it brings attention to the student. Unfortunately, the services provided are more uniform than individualized so not all homeless students may benefit from them. (Tierney, 62).

Methodology

The objective of this research is to understand how schools are responding to an increase in homeless students in Los Angeles and recommend policies that would help support them. The data was gathered through an online qualtrics survey that addresses the experiences of 53 administrators, teachers, tutors, counselors, and aides. I focused on subjects that are regularly exposed to homeless children and youth in an educational capacity in order to get a first hand perspective. Most policymakers have not had direct experience in a classroom with homeless students and I felt it was important to gather data from the individuals on the ground who see the effects of increased homelessness in order to analyze the severity of the issues and the efficacy of the solutions. The purpose of the survey was to answer the research question, “How are schools in Los Angeles responding to an increase in homeless youth?” The purpose of the first half of the survey was to understand the climate in which homeless students are attending school or educational programs. The purpose of the second half of the survey was to ask the individuals who have a firsthand perspective of homeless students how to best support these students. The surveys were distributed to staff at several schools and nonprofit organizations. I began by contacting individuals that I know personally or that colleagues connected me to. They shared

the survey with other members at their school or organization who have experience working with homeless students. These schools and organizations were Five Keys Schools and Programs, the Institute for the Redesign of Learning, People Assisting the Homeless, A Safe Place for Youth, RISE Charter School and Aviva Family and Children’s Services.

Findings

The survey consisted of 5 multiple choice questions and five short answer questions. (See Appendix for list of survey questions). Responses were collected from teachers (37%), “other” (26%), administrators (25%), and tutors (11%). “Other” consists of counselors, therapists, mental health/child welfare staff, and 1:1 classroom aides.

Of those surveyed 48% have been involved with homeless students for 1-4 years, 21% have been involved with homeless students for 4-9 years, 21% have been involved with homeless students for ten years or more, and 10% have been involved with homeless students for less than one year. (Figure 1).

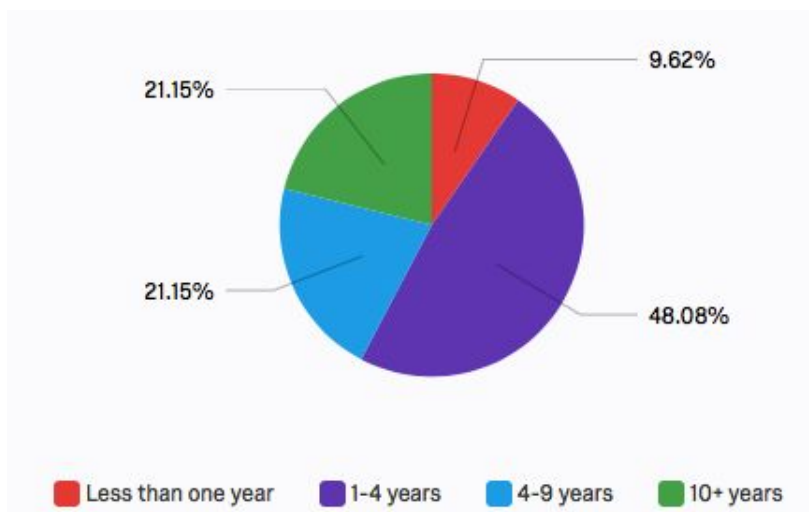


Figure 1: Years Experience

The data shows that the subjects that have been working with homeless students for 1-4 years include 13 teachers, 5 administrators, 4 tutors, and 3 “other.” Subjects that have been working with homeless students for 4-9 years include 5 “other,” 4 administrators, and 2 teachers. Subjects that have been working with homeless students for more than 10 years include 4 teachers, 4 administrators, and 3 “other.” Subjects that have been working with homeless students for less than one year include 2 tutors, 2 “other,” and 1 teacher. (Figure 2). In this survey, 70% of teachers reported to work with homeless students for less than four years. This is much higher than the national average of 20 percent of teachers who work for less than three years in high poverty schools. (Blazer, 6). This may be due to the rise of homeless students in Los Angeles schools.

		How long have you been involved with homeless youth education?				Total
		Less than one year	1-4 years	4-9 years	10+ years	
What is your primary role in educating homeless students?	Tutor	2	4	0	0	6
	Teacher	1	13	2	4	20
	Administrator	0	5	4	4	13
	Other	2	3	5	3	13
	Total	5	25	11	11	52

Figure 2: Primary Role vs. Length of Involvement

Of those surveyed, 56% spent five hours or more with homeless students per week, 27% spent 2-5 hours with homeless students per week, and 17% spent one hour or less with homeless students per week. (Figure 3). This is important because the majority of the subjects spend extensive time with homeless students which allows them to experience how they learn and behave in the classroom. Once teachers have an understanding of the best practices to educate

homeless students they can recommend and advocate for measures to be taken to support homeless students as well as their teachers.

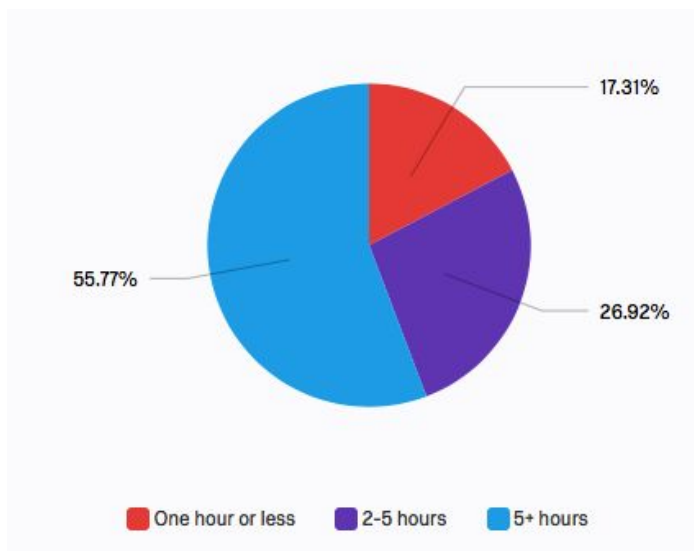


Figure 3: Hours per week with Homeless Students

In response to the survey question, “In your experience working with homeless students, what barriers do they face outside the classroom that might affect their school experience?” 81% of subjects responded hunger, 62% responded violence, 62% responded jobs, 60% responded the stigmatization of being homeless, and 57% responded “other.” (Figure 4). “Other” responses include the additional explanations: lack of self-esteem, lack of supplies, hygiene, exhaustion, transience, unstable living conditions, general outside stress, family issues, anxiety, unstable living situation, mental illness, physical illness, lack of transportation, emotional trauma, concerns about their family’s well being, lack of stability and foundation, lack of access to higher education, domestic trauma, being part of the LGBT community, and substance abuse. The variation in answers shows the importance of approaching youth homelessness on a case by

case basis. (NNY). Each student’s situation is unique and to develop one solution for varying circumstances will fail to address the complexity of the issues and traumas experienced by homeless students and their families. For example, an accompanied homeless minor with a physical illness will not require the same interventions as an LGBT unaccompanied minor with a substance abuse problem. With hunger as the most commonly reported barrier, the literature is reflected as students who suffer from hunger are more likely to repeat a grade and have physical, emotional, and behavioral issues. (APA).

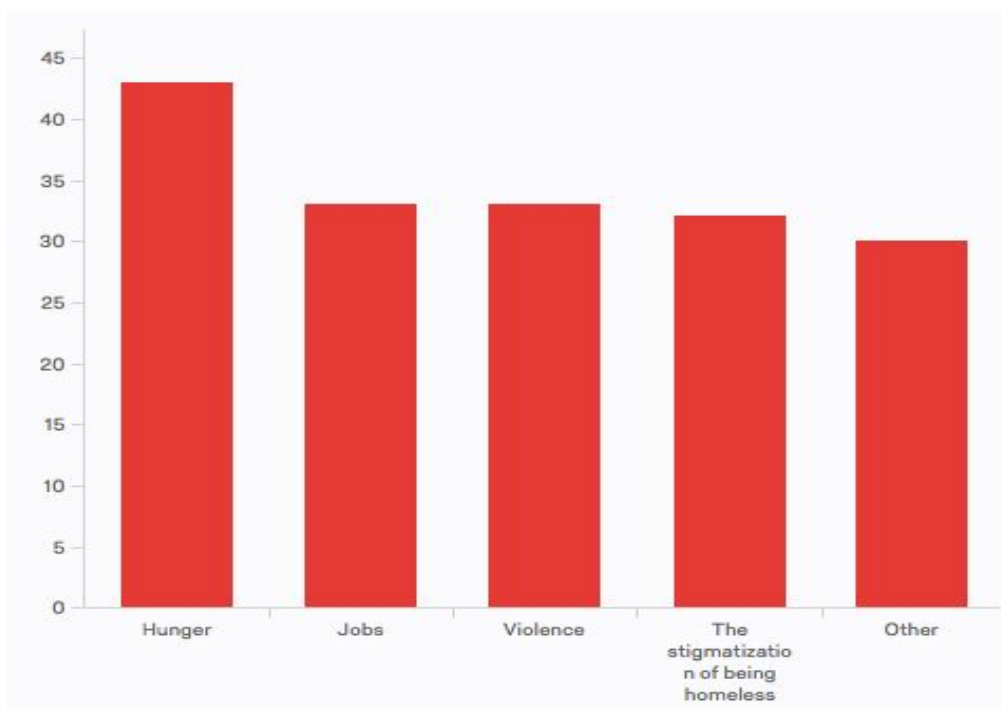


Figure 4: Outside Barriers

In response to the survey question, “What extra resources should be the highest priority for assisting homeless students?” 92% responded affordable housing, 75% responded increased

public services, 68% responded increased resources to schools, and 30% responded “other.” (Figure 5). “Other” responses included: mental health services, increased access, financial support, parent training, job placement, liaisons, increased per pupil funding, more support for non-profit organizations, educating the public, behavioral support services, food outside of school, no cost health care and dental services. Corresponding with this research, individuals who are directly involved with homeless students stated that the highest priority for assisting homeless students is permanent housing. (LA CHS). When homeless families and individuals are placed in permanent housing, they do not require many of the supplemental resources designed for homeless individuals and families.

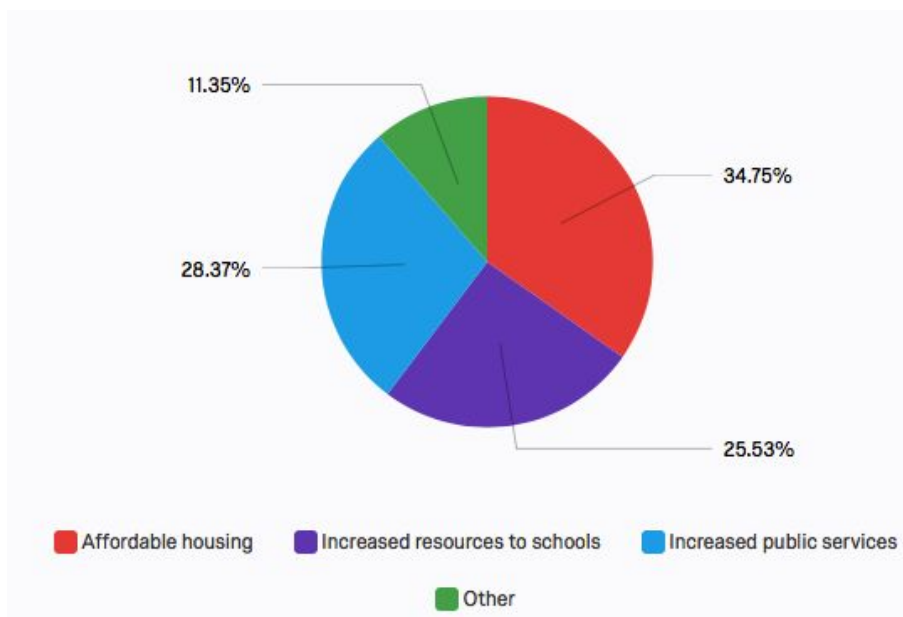


Figure 5: Necessary Resources

When asked, “What are some of the challenges you have noticed that homeless students face in the classroom?” several common themes appeared. First, most surveyed responded that homeless students perform below grade level in every subject. Second, because the subjects are responsible for many students, they do not have the time to individually catch each student up to where they should be performing. Third, multiple subjects also mentioned that many homeless students lack trust, which makes it difficult for them to build relationships with their teachers and peers. This is common among homeless youth as traumatic situations and constant discomfort may result in a lack of trust in peers and adults. (Schneir). Other responses were made by multiple subjects were: low performance as a result of distractions, lack of confidence, low energy, negative seeking behaviors, self-isolation, irregular attendance, heightened emotional sensitivity, hunger, and a lack of access to supplies.

When asked “In your experience working with homeless students, what barriers do they face at home that prevent them from coming to school?” many of the subjects commented that because of the transient nature of homelessness, many students move away from the school they are enrolled in. The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to provide transportation vouchers to homeless students if they move out of the district so that they can finish the school year without having to transfer. (McKinney-Vento). However, some students find it impractical and unnecessary to spend extra time commuting to school or are too embarrassed to tell the school, which leads to absence and dropouts. Other themes were: enrollment issues, lack of support, jobs, survival needs over education, violence, and overall stress. It was brought to my attention that this question was worded awkwardly and may have confused subjects because by definition,

homeless students do not have a home. It is possible that the phrasing of the question affected subjects' responses.

When asked, "Have you seen or used any teaching methods that are particularly effective in engaging homeless students in the classroom or tutoring space? If so, what are they?" almost all of the subjects focused on the importance of creating an environment in which the students are set up to succeed rather than pedagogical theory. Many subjects placed importance on making the students feel comfortable and confident in their abilities. They do this by being patient with the students and using positive reinforcement. Other main ideas included: extra care and attention, linguistic coaching, personalized curriculum, and giving students a voice.

When asked, "What resources would best serve the organization?" an overwhelming number of responses stated that there should be overall increased funding specifically targeted for resources to support homeless students and their families. Other specific resources included: healthy, nutritious meals, on site physical and mental health services, rest areas, free condoms and sex education, work opportunities, cell phones for parents, washer/dryer facilities, school supplies, hygiene items, technology that allows students to work remotely, and experienced faculty, mentors, and counselors.

When asked, "What policies do you think would bridge the academic achievement gap between homeless students and non-homeless students?" the most common response among the subjects was providing affordable housing to homeless and low income families. Other ideas included: academic services that can meet homeless students and families in convenient locations (such as shelters or libraries), support teachers to learn more about homelessness, tutoring services, mentoring programs, free lunch programs, increased funding allocated to homeless

students, better identification processes to determine which students are homeless and need assistance, and easier enrollment protocols.

Recommendations

While it is imperative to address how schools and educators can support their homeless students, the most effective solution to homelessness in any capacity is building permanent affordable housing in order to lift families and individuals out of homelessness. With the passage of Measure H and HHH, funding should be made available to house families with children and unaccompanied minors, and to provide necessary resources to prevent at risk families from homelessness. This recommendation is supported by the majority of the subjects surveyed who stated that homeless students need be affordably and permanently housed.

Los Angeles schools and educators can most advantageously and effectively increase their homeless students educational outcomes by making the effort to understand the realities of each student's family situation, living environment and individual needs. This will require extra time, energy and effort by educators and administrators, but it is only at this micro level that the school will be able to advocate for the resources that their students require. Is it transportation, food, supplies, a safe place to study, trauma counseling, math tutoring, a new pencil case in March, shoes? Determining and addressing the individual needs of the students may increase the likelihood of developing a relationship between the school and the homeless student or his/her family which will increase school attendance and, ultimately academic success.

In November 2016, in response to the increasing number of homeless students and families, the Montebello Unified Schools District opened a resource center for homeless students

and families which supplies them with toothbrushes, backpacks, gently used clothing, and other essentials. (Montebello). Scaling this idea within LAUSD and other county school districts with school with homeless student populations would create a tremendous benefit and academic opportunities for homeless students and their families. For example, schools with homeless populations of more than five students could create a resource center stocked with school supplies, clothing, hygiene supplies and a washer/dryer. School could also arrange to provide homeless students with access to gym showers before or after school. Space permitting, access to a quiet space for homework or naps would also benefit the students academically.

In addition to HHH funds being made available for physical and mental health services to homeless families and students, schools with populations of homeless students should arrange for healthcare professionals to visit the school on a regular basis to provide dental exams, vision exams, check-ups, vaccinations, etc. to homeless students and their families. Schools with populations of homeless students should ensure that school counselors receive specialized training addressing the traumas and issues homeless students and their families experience in order to help them in address problems these students may be dealing with in a comfortable environment. Under the LAUSD HEP, schools are to provide medical, dental and mental health referrals. (LAUSD HEP). However, because transportation and scheduling appointments are significant barriers to a homeless student's ability seek medical or mental health attention based on a referral, have onsite access to health care, particularly preventative health care, would be a significant benefit to homeless students and potentially result in lower absenteeism which would benefit the school and the student. Providing onsite preventative health care could also benefit the student academically. For example, detection of vision issues which could affect reading, or

using time generally spent riding the bus to a mental health appointment could be spent on homework or after school exercise programs.

Hunger is a problem that plagues most homeless students at some point. Adolescents who experience hunger are likely to receive special education services, repeat a grade, develop conduct disorders and psychiatric and function problems. (APA). In order to give homeless students a chance at success, hunger should not be an issue that they face at school. In addition to the literature, the survey responses I received demonstrate that homeless students are hungry. Federally funded school lunch and breakfast programs, while imperative, are not sufficient. Los Angeles schools, in partnership with non-profits, corporate sponsors and local businesses should provide homeless students access to adequate nutritious meals and snacks.

Transportation is an issue that affects many homeless students. For some, it is because they do not have means to afford public transportation and they do not know where the nearest school bus stop is because they are transient. Transportation is a major obstacle that causes some homeless students to be absent or drop out. LAUSD schools should provide public transportation vouchers for homeless students both to and from school throughout the school year. In addition, LAUSD busses should stop at or near homeless shelters in the school district. If transportation was not an issue for homeless students, they could focus their time and energy on academics.

The transportation issue could also be aided by providing students with technology such as tablets so that they can work remotely from school, either at a shelter or in a public space such as a library or park. However, this would be costly and LAUSD would need to find a way to keep track of the devices so that they are not lost, stolen, or sold.

Based on the data gathered, it is imperative that any practices or interventions be trauma informed. The instruction, services, and policies that address education for homeless youth must take into account and respond to the multiple traumas experienced by homeless youth. (Schneir, 5). Paramount to a student's education success is an individualized assessment and implementation of of goals and objectives based on the student's identified education strengths and weaknesses. (Thistle, 7).

Finally, the California State Board of Education is responsible for creating rules and regulations for California schools. While the majority of the eleven members have some educational experience, few have served as teachers and actually experienced how students behave and interact in a classroom. It is important that teachers, especially those who work with vulnerable populations, such as homeless students, are included in the conversation about how to best support students. A committee should exist in which teachers from schools with different backgrounds (ie. urban, suburban, rural, high-poverty, low-poverty, etc.) are asked for their input on what educational policies should be in place in order to create equitable opportunities for homeless students, and those at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

Homelessness is at a crisis level in Los Angeles. As a result, thousands of children and youth are experiencing the traumas associated with homelessness and, as a result, their ability to receive an adequate education is significantly and negatively affected. While the implementation of McKinney-Vento provides homeless students and their families with educational rights, and places the responsibility of assisting these students on states and school districts, individual, specialized assistance at the school and classroom level is required to ensure that each homeless

student receives the resources that will enable him or her to succeed in school. My research focused on identifying the challenges encountered by homeless students, teaching methods employed to overcome these challenges and resources need to allow homeless students to thrive academically. My research findings, which are consistent with the literature addressing these issues, demonstrate that teachers and administrators feel as though they are not provided with sufficient resources to properly support this vulnerable population of students. Also consistent with the literature, my recommendations reflect that teachers and schools must identify the barriers and issues the homeless students in their particular schools are facing and nimbly respond to those issues. The greatest obstacle to homeless students' education is the lack of a stable home. With Measures H and HHH in place, and the focus on housing the homeless and providing homeless families and youth with increased resources, hopefully these students will not miss the opportunity to receive the education they need and deserve.

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Appendices

Survey Questions:

1. What is your primary role in educating homeless students?
2. How long have you been involved with homeless youth education?
3. On average, how many hours per week do you spend with homeless students?
4. What are some of the challenges you have noticed homeless students face in the classroom?
5. In your experience working with homeless students, what barriers do they face outside the classroom that might affect their school experience? (Other than housing)
6. Have you seen or used any teaching methods that are particularly effective in engaging homeless students in the classroom or tutoring space. If so, what are they?
7. In your experience working with homeless students, what barriers do they face at home that prevent them from coming to school?
8. What extra resources should be the highest priority for assisting homeless students?
9. What resources would best serve the organization?
10. What policies do you think would bridge the academic achievement gap between homeless and non-homeless students?