

Education and Urban Society

<http://eus.sagepub.com>

Educational Policy and Reform for Homeless Students: An Overview

Lynnette Mawhinney-Rhoads and Gerald Stahler
Education and Urban Society 2006; 38; 288
DOI: 10.1177/0013124506286943

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://eus.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/38/3/288>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Education and Urban Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://eus.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://eus.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND REFORM FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS

An Overview

LYNNETTE MAWHINNEY-RHOADS

GERALD STAHLER

Temple University

This article provides an overview of educational reform efforts that have been targeted toward assisting homeless students. The authors first review some of the difficulties and barriers that confront homeless children in terms of school access and academic success. The authors then examine four different types of educational reforms for homeless students—mainstreamed schools, supplemental supports, transitional schools (separate schools), and modified comprehensive schools—in relation to the existing barriers for homeless students. Using a case study approach, the authors briefly describe the first modified comprehensive school in the nation and the programs that are being implemented at the school. This article concludes that school reforms for homeless children need to be tailored to the specific context of the community and not be based on national one-size-fits-all reform policy. Recommendations are provided to assist in the planning of educational programs to enhance the academic success of the homeless student.

Keywords: *homeless students; school reform; educational barriers*

During the past 20 years, there has been an increasing recognition among policy makers at all levels of government that homelessness is an important national problem that affects thousands of individuals throughout America (Wright, Rubin, & Devine, 1998). A recent trend that has had particular impact on U.S. educational systems is the increase in homelessness among women and children (Williams, 2003). Historically, men have been the dominant gender among the homeless, but in the past 20 years, there has been an increase in the proportion of homeless families including single mothers with children (Wright et al., 1998). Although there is considerable debate among researchers as to why this subpopulation of the homeless has grown, some of the explanations include dwindling public services for homeless women and families, the crack epidemic, the rising rate of teen pregnancies, the high divorce rate, and the lack of household formations (Flohr, 1998).

EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY, Vol. 38 No. 3, May 2006 288-306

DOI: 10.1177/0013124506286943

© 2006 Corwin Press, Inc.

One of the major consequences of this trend is that homeless children are particularly at risk for poor educational outcomes, which can have life-long consequences for their future livelihood and economic independence. If school systems do not provide special educational interventions to address the particular educational barriers that these children face, then it is likely that these children will stay marginalized in the lowest economic rung of society.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the problem of educational barriers for homeless children, the recent public policies that affect these barriers, and the major trends in educational reform policies that are currently being used to address these barriers. One particularly innovative educational program that may serve as a model for school systems nationwide will also be described. It is not our purpose to provide an exhaustive analysis of policy or the history of educational policy regarding the homeless but rather to provide a broad overview with recommendations for further research and policy discussion.

BACKGROUND

Before any discussion on educational reforms for the homeless can be discussed, the current context of homelessness needs to be framed. The following section explains the various definitions of homelessness in the United States and some current trends concerning the homeless.

HOW IS HOMELESSNESS DEFINED?

There is no standard or uniform definition of *homelessness* that has been agreed on by researchers and policy makers (Stronge, 1993a). The concept and definition of *homelessness* has been the subject of debate for years. One of the consequences of defining *homeless* in narrow or restrictive terms is that individuals may not be classified as homeless if they move in and out of a homeless state, even if they are residentially unstable. Therefore, these individuals may not be entitled to special services that target the homeless. In addition, in our experience, many homeless individuals do not refer to themselves as homeless if they have a roof over their head, even if it is a temporary situation. Although many of these individuals may be chronically homeless, a far greater number of people cycle in and out of homelessness (Sosin, Piliavin, & Westerfelt, 1990). Therefore, the term *residential instability* may better characterize those who are homeless. However, given the need for specific criteria in the definition of *homelessness* for the application of educational resources, it may be preferable to employ a definition that is both more inclusive and more specific than residentially unstable.

The definition provided by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the first major federal initiative to address the problem of homelessness in America, may be most appropriate. The education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, a later iteration of the McKinney Act, includes a rather comprehensive definition of homelessness and was established to protect the rights of students in public schools (Sandham, 2000). According to the statute, the term *homeless child and youth* means

(A) individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence . . . and (B) includes: (i) children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason . . .; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; (ii) children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings . . .; (iii) children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, and (iv) migratory children . . . who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii). (McKinney-Vento Act, 2002, Section 725)

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE HOMELESS

Adopting this broad definition of homelessness, it becomes evident that the face of the homeless has evolved over time. In America, the Great Depression left millions of people in a state of poverty. It was estimated that one in four people were unemployed during this point in history (Wright, 1989). President Roosevelt's New Deal and World War II helped relieve these dire times through welfare reform and by providing the jobs that were so desperately needed (Stronge, 1992). For the next three to four decades, the homeless population was smaller and less visible because of a stable economy. The most visible homeless were older alcoholic White men, often concentrated in skid row areas of major cities (Wright, 1989).

In the 1970s and 1980s, families became a more prevalent group among the homeless. One reason for the increase was the considerable decline in the real purchasing power of public assistance (i.e., food stamps and disabilities support), which caused additional economic hardships for former recipients (Tower & White, 1989).

Today, a significant proportion of the homeless population is comprised of minority, single-mother households with multiple children. According to Burt, U.S. Interagency Council on the Homeless, and Urban Institute (1999), 23% of the homeless are children younger than 18 with a parent,

42% of whom are younger than 5 years of age (Burt et al., 1999). In addition, there is an overrepresentation of African Americans, with 40% comprising the homeless population—in comparison to the 11% representation within the general population. Egan (2002) reports that between 900,000 and 1.4 million children in America are homeless for a time in a given year. Thus, children are the fastest growing segment within the United States homeless population (Attles, 1997).

In times of economic prosperity, homelessness has been a problem invisible to the majority. However, there are indications that the number of homeless is growing rapidly, particularly in large cities. For example, Egan (2002) reports that in New York City

an average of nearly 32,000 people slept in shelters each night last month, up by 23% from a year ago—the largest 1-year increase since the city started keeping records in the 1970's, and possibly since the Great Depression. (p. 34)

Unfortunately, as the homeless population increases, more children have unstable living situations. These children are facing barriers to receiving an education.

EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

In recent decades, the homeless families have had to surmount a variety of obstacles for their children to receive an education, including barriers to accessing education and to achieving success once homeless students are in school. Residency requirements, medical records, and transportation commonly impede school access. Socioemotional issues that result from stigma, an unstable living situation, and the high likelihood of inconsistent attendance are serious impediments to academic success. The following explains how these barriers restrict access to schools and encourage socioemotional issues.

RESIDENCY

School districts usually require that students show proof of residency to attend a school. This is the most apparent barrier. When families are currently homeless, it is extremely difficult to prove residency (Foscarinis & McCarthy, 2000; Stronge & Helm, 1991). Many school districts do not consider living out of a car or in a temporary shelter outside of district lines to be an appropriate proof of residency. What occurs is that the issue of residency can block some students from attending certain schools or maintaining their status in their current school.

GUARDIANSHIP

According to the law in every state, any student can be admitted to a school district with a parent or guardian. However, access can be denied to a child who lacks a parent or legal guardian. Homeless children often reside with a family member who is not a legal guardian, so in these cases, children may be rejected from enrolling in school. A child who is a runaway and thus has no legal guardian available, may also be denied access. Some states, such as California, allow the child to be admitted while the school district tracks down the parent or guardian (Newman, 1999; Stronge & Helm, 1991), but most states have not adopted this policy.

MEDICAL RECORDS

Proof of vaccination is often required before enrollment. Homeless children and families, who are often transient and carry minimal belongings, frequently lose medical records. Additionally, many children in homeless families do not receive adequate access to health care professionals and therefore will not have required vaccinations. Lack of medical records or lack of access to medical care (and therefore not receiving required vaccinations) results in schools denying a student access to education (Stronge, 2000).

TRANSPORTATION

If homeless families are able to transcend the first three barriers and students achieve access to school, there are additional barriers to attain academic success (Stronge, 2000). Limitations on transportation to school can be especially problematic. Because homeless families are so often transient, a homeless child attending school and residing in a temporary shelter within a given school district might move 30 days later to another shelter outside the district boundaries. Although the student is still allowed to attend the school, the buses do not run outside the district. The student now has no transportation to school, which greatly hinders his or her ability to attend school and succeed academically. Inconsistent attendance or missing large amounts of instruction usually affect the student's grades and may prevent him or her from being promoted to the next grade.

Guardianship, medical records, and transportation can collectively create a barrier for access to a school. Other barriers that can affect homeless students' academic achievement concern socioemotional issues.

SOCIOEMOTIONAL ISSUES

The circumstances of homelessness have serious social and emotional effects on children, which can impede academic achievement. It is common for homeless children's self-esteem to be affected by their situation. Tower and White (1989) explain that those who have "difficulty with their peers, who are isolated and perceive themselves to be different, who have feelings of failure and little sense of stability will not feel good about themselves" (p. 31; see also Boxill, 1990; Downer, 2001). Lack of peer acceptance, emotional instability, poor self-concept, and shame can hinder academic performance and success (Rafferty, 1999; Stronge, 1993a). Homeless children reportedly show greater noncompliant or aggressive behaviors (Boxill, 1990) as well as shorter attention spans and more sleep disturbances (Downer, 2001) than nonhomeless children.

In recognition that homeless children face barriers to educational access and success that are different from children in more stable housing situations, the federal government has enacted several policy and reform efforts, often in response to legal challenges in the courts.

REFORM POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Prior to the federal government developing policies for homeless children's education, some parents tried to confront the school systems themselves in court. During the mid- and late 1980s, the parents frequently challenged the residency barrier through litigation. In such cases as *Richards v. Board of Education in the Union Free School District* in 1985, *Mason v. Board of Education in the Freeport Union School District* in 1987, and *Delgado v. Freeport Public School District* in 1988, homeless mothers fought for school admittance for their children (Helm, 1993; Stronge, 1993b). In the Richards, Mason, and Delgado cases, mothers were fighting for their children to be readmitted to the school attended prior to becoming homeless. Because these cases preceded the McKinney Act, the jury opinions and the rulings varied. In the Richards case, the argument was upheld, and the student was able to attend the previous school. The reasoning behind this decision was the fact that "residence of homeless children was to be determined on a case-by-case basis" and the Commissioner of Education felt that Ms. Richards's actions to try to remain in the community deemed it legal to keep her child's school in the district (Helm, 1993, p. 327).

On the other hand, the Mason and Delgado cases turned out very differently. In the Mason case, the court did not side with the mother of four

children. The court determined that where the student lives currently (in this case, the children were in shelters) is where the children should be sent to school and not at the previous school district (Helm, 1993). Similarly, the Delgado case was not deemed justified because it was felt that Ms. Delgado did not have a connection to her previous community (Helm, 1993).

Following this past case, estimates made to Congress suggested that more than 50% of the homeless student population was not attending school (Indiana Department of Education, 2002; National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999). This alarming statistic helped provide the impetus for the Stewart B. McKinney Education of Homeless Children and Youth Act, passed in 1987.

The McKinney Act was the first federal act to provide homeless children with rights to an equal education to that of children in permanent housing and the first major federal initiative to focus on the elimination of educational barriers for homeless children (Butler, 1994). It concentrated on "ensuring the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth in school" (Indiana Department of Education, 2002, p. 1). In 1990, the act was amended to increase funding grants to educational agencies and to address other barriers (Epps, 1998; Helm, 1993; National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999). The 1990 McKinney Homeless Assistance Act specifically asked states to relax residency requirements, increase interagency cooperation, and specify that homeless children need to be mainstreamed into schools (Helm, 1993; Rafferty, 1999).

In 2002, the McKinney Act was reauthorized and renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. As with many policies during this year, the McKinney-Vento Act was placed under the larger No Child Left Behind Act. Part of the reauthorization movement focused on one particular reform effort to eliminate separate schools that cater only to homeless students. The reauthorization specified an elimination of separate schools because of their segregated nature. Although the McKinney-Vento Act (2002) does provide some funding for these schools, it prohibits any type of segregation of homeless students. Furthermore, the act specifically called for an evaluation of separate and modified comprehensive school reforms in San Joaquin and San Diego Counties in California and Maricopa County in Arizona (McKinney-Vento Act, 2002). The Secretary of Education and the State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths in each state must conduct this evaluation to determine if such schools are aiding homeless students or just segregating them.

Throughout the many years of litigation and policy development for homeless children, educational reform efforts have been established not only at the federal level but also at the state and local district levels. Although the types of reform efforts vary greatly across different levels, they may be categorized

TABLE 1
Outline of Homeless Education Reform

<i>Reform Effort</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Goal</i>
Mainstreamed	Incorporates homeless children into existing school contexts	Lessen or eliminate educational barriers
Supplemental support	Services beyond school hours	Enhance academic success of the homeless child through supplemental services
Transitional	Exclusive schools for homeless students, usually one-room schools housed in a shelter	Provide immediate services to homeless students
Modified comprehensive	Exclusive schools for homeless students with mainstreamed and supplemental support frameworks	Attend mainstreamed schools once achieve permanent residence

into four general types of approach. Three of these are *mainstreamed schools*, *supplemental support systems*, and *transitional schools* (Table 1; Stronge, 1993a). A fourth category might also be considered—*modified comprehensive schools*. Although these latter schools are sometimes placed in the *transitional schools* category, they are actually sufficiently different from transitional schools and to be considered a separate designation in terms of the comprehensiveness of services provided and program design.

MAINSTREAMED SCHOOLS

The McKinney-Vento Act is based on the policy position that considers mainstreamed schools the preferred educational reform. Such schools incorporate homeless children into existing school contexts. The main underlying policy assumption is that the only difference between homeless and domiciled children is their lack of permanent housing (Stronge, 1993a). Most mainstreamed schools have altered their policies to lower or eliminate barriers for homeless children to gain access to schools (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002).

Two additional educational values also underlie this policy: socialization and stability. Mainstreamed schools, it is assumed, promote student socialization; children will presumably develop and hone their social skills if they are in a mainstreamed school. The National Coalition for the Homeless (2002), a strong supporter of this reform effort, affirms that a diverse school population in a mainstreamed environment “play[s] a key role in the socialization

process that helps prepare children to function in society as adults” (p. 3). The socialization philosophy posits that mainstreamed schools give more of a natural social environment for child development. The underlying stability assumption suggests that even when a homeless child’s living arrangements change, the school environment stays the same, thus creating an important stable environment. Having a daily routine and seeing the same faces in the classroom will provide a sense of calm in the child’s chaotic lifestyle (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002).

When mainstreamed schools adapt their programs to accommodate homeless students, a second category of reform efforts occurs, which includes extended support services.

SUPPLEMENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Supplemental support services are specifically targeted at homeless children and deliver services beyond school hours (Stronge, 1993b). Support services reforms are intended to promote the child’s academic success and physical and emotional well-being. Although many school districts offer supplemental support services for a variety of students, this particular reform effort is directed at the homeless child. The design of supplemental support services is based on the concept of *after-school programs* directly targeting the special needs of homeless students.

Supportive services can be academically based and thus aim to foster academic success by providing tutoring, study areas, or school supplies (Belcher & DiBlasio, 1990; DaCosta Nunez, 1996; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002; Stronge, 1993b). Another supportive service, counseling, is aimed at promoting emotional well-being. Counseling may be offered to both child and parent (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002; Stronge, 1993b). These services deal with any type of socioemotional issue that may obstruct the child’s academic success.

Tucker (2000) explains that academic and counseling services, along with other, related supplemental services reforms, share a philosophy of “building bridges of understanding, developing new perspectives, illuminating new options, providing new resources, and stretching existing resources” (p. 229). A third reform effort, which takes some of these values into account, has implemented the reform in an alternative way.

TRANSITIONAL SCHOOLS

Transitional schools are also called separate schools in the McKinney-Vento Act. In this reform effort, mainly established by shelters, the student

body is made up exclusively of homeless students. The school is commonly in one room with mixed age groups and abilities. Transitional schools aim to provide a temporary education that will help the children transition into a mainstreamed school. The underlying philosophy is to provide an education without any barriers (Lively & Kleine, 1996), and these reform efforts are guided by the idea of immediacy of service and temporary placement (Stronge, 1992, 1993b).

Transitional schools are usually physically attached to a shelter, which gives immediate educational services while eliminating the transportation and residency barriers. Because guardianship and medical records are not issues at the shelter, two additional barriers are eliminated. This type of model is predicated on the idea that no matter what the quality of the services, homeless children are at least receiving some form of an education. Even if they do not attend a transitional school for the entire year, they will have fewer educational gaps resulting from frequent absenteeism.

Although all three reforms have benefits and advantages for homeless children and families, each approach addresses only some of the barriers. A more comprehensive approach may benefit this population to a greater extent than any single reform. Perhaps the most promising recent reform effort is one that incorporates the mainstreamed schools, supplemental supportive services, and transitional schools into one comprehensive approach—modified comprehensive schools.

MODIFIED COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS

Modified comprehensive schools are usually categorized with transitional schools, but they properly constitute a unique reform effort that goes beyond the transitional school. As educational institutions targeted at homeless children, modified comprehensive schools are similar to transitional schools, but they are not housed at a shelter nor are they one-room schools. They do, however, follow the framework of a mainstreamed school with one grade per classroom.

This new reform effort also incorporates the idea of supplemental supportive services. Mentoring, academic services, counseling, food, and medical supplies are commonly offered. Modified comprehensive schools are structured like mainstreamed schools to supposedly smooth the transition. After the families seek permanent residence, the children are expected to attend the mainstreamed schools.

The main philosophy behind modified comprehensive schools is the immediate removal of barriers and the lack of stigmatization. Modified comprehensive schools function as transitional schools by theoretically removing all of the typical barriers that homeless children face in obtaining

access to schools. Problems with medical records, guardianship, and residency are not supposed to prevent a homeless child's admission to the schools (Woods, 1997; Woods & Harrison, 1994). The transportation barrier is eliminated by using outreach services to bus the students to school from their temporary residence. Thus, these schools seem to be comprehensive in nature, and incorporate the advantages of all three types of reform efforts.

Modified comprehensive schools are designed with the purpose of eliminating virtually all of the barriers. On the other hand, there is controversy about isolating homeless students in schools separate from nonhomeless children. The school isolates the students from the mainstreamed population. Some argue that this isolation is the strength of the school because it makes children feel unashamed because everyone is in the same situation. Although others state that the segregation is unhealthy for homeless children because it is segregating them from the rest of the population, a step backwards to separate but equal.

To understand the debate behind the new reform of modified comprehensive schools, it is important to understand how the schools function. The Thomas J. Pappas School in Maricopa County, Arizona, is a leading example of this educational service model—one that is both comprehensive and innovative and therefore warrants additional discussion. The Pappas School serves 750 homeless children from kindergarten through 12th grade (Fonda, 2000). Three sites comprise the school; two are located in Phoenix and the third in Tempe (Janofsky, 2000).

In 1988, Sandra E. Dowling founded the original school (Woods & Harrison, 1994), which expanded into the three sites. The first site is an alternative high school that has incorporated a program for pregnant teen mothers. The second site, also a high school, focuses on dealing with students who have an addiction using a 12-step recovery program. The third site, a grade school, is the main site (Woods, 1997). The mission of the Thomas J. Pappas School (2002), "to develop within all students the leadership qualities necessary to fulfill their roles as responsible citizens of a changing world" (p. 1), is demonstrated through the school's design and programs. In March 2002, the lead author conducted a site visit of the main school, examined school materials and documents, made observations, and informally interviewed staff and teachers. The following briefly summarizes and describes some of the important elements of the school program.

THE CLASSROOMS

Each classroom has 25 to 30 students per class, a number that fluctuates frequently. A student's average stay in the school is approximately 3 to 5 months.

THE MEDICAL CLINIC

The school has a full-functioning medical clinic on the premises, with nurses who assist the children and are responsible for its general functioning. Ten certified doctors from the community volunteer time and services. Screenings, exams, and vaccinations can be conducted on-site. A mobile dentist also comes occasionally. If other services are required, the on-site outreach program coordinates them.

FOOD PROGRAM

All the food is provided through the Phoenix School District. Breakfast and lunch are given to all students; even those who arrive late are allowed to eat breakfast before going to class. Students are required to eat all the food provided to ensure that they are receiving two nutritious meals.

DONATION ROOMS

Three rooms are each designated for specific types of donations: toys, clothes, and food. The toy room houses gifts from the local community, including toys, games, and other items for students of various ages. Once a month, the school celebrates student birthdays for that month. During the birthday parties, the students receive a gift of their choice from the toy room. Aside from the toy room, there is also a clothing room. The community donates new clothing and handmade quilted blankets and bedding, often in massive amounts. Students are allowed to pick additional clothing as needed. A full-time staff person keeps the clothing room in order. Last, there is the food room. If a student's family is in great need of food or other essentials at home, he or she may request a box of food from the outreach program, and the family can usually obtain the supplies the same day.

Donations take a great deal of staff time to collect, store, and distribute. One Saturday a month, the Make-a-Difference Program, a nonprofit service organization, comes to assist staff members in making up food boxes. The supplemental assistance is especially needed during November and December when donations increase because of holidays and tax deductions.

BUSING SERVICES

The school is administratively within the Maricopa County School District, with children bused in from all over the Phoenix area. A branch of the Outreach Program handles the extensive busing services. All children are given free transportation to the school. Unlike most school districts, there are few bureaucratic delays in accommodating fast-changing student needs.

Because homeless children move frequently, their busing needs likewise change. For example, during the lead author's visit to the program, a mother with two children in the school moved. The next day the student requested a change and was dropped off at the new stop at the end of that same day to the new location. The Outreach Program may process 20 to 40 changes daily, out of 700 to 800 students bused in 7 to 9 buses, each covering about 300 miles daily.

Many reasons for student absenteeism arise because of homelessness, but transportation does not appear to be one of the factors because of the flexible and responsive busing services. However, in the event that a child is absent for more than 3 days, a teacher puts in a request to the Outreach Program to identify the reasons for the absence. Outreach staff then conduct a home visit to evaluate the child's current status.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGRAMS

Homeless children experience many hardships, and many have suffered through domestic violence, parental drug or alcohol abuse, or emotional trauma. The Pappas School provides psychological services, with two full-time school psychologists offering regular services. Students can receive one-on-one counseling or group therapy. Members of Nanna's Children, a local service program, also volunteer their time, working with students using play therapy.

SUPPLEMENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES

The 21st Century Community Learning Center is a national grant-funded nonprofit organization that provides supplemental support services Monday through Thursday, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., consisting of tutoring, arts and crafts, and other programs. The Pappas School also has a volunteer mentor program. Each student is paired with a volunteer, who usually spends two 1-hour sessions with the student every month. The mentor may eat lunch or spend individual time with the student, as scheduled with teachers, but may not take him or her off the premises (Woods, 1997).

DISCUSSION

We have described some of the difficulties homeless children face in obtaining access to schools and to succeeding in schools. We have also reviewed briefly some of the governmental responses to this problem and have described four types of reform efforts. A critical question concerning

these reform efforts is their effectiveness, including their cost effectiveness. We have suggested that the modified comprehensive approach, as embodied by the Thomas Pappas school with its substantial mix of services and flexible design, appears to be an innovative approach to addressing so many of the needs and overcoming so many of the barriers to providing high quality education for homeless children. But there are also many questions that have not been answered about this type of program. Does this type of educational model make a measurable difference in the lives of children and families, and does it actually lead to better educational outcomes? Are the expenses associated with a comprehensive approach cost efficient and cost effective? Can this the type of program be replicated in other school districts with a large need for homeless services?

The policy emanating from the McKinney Act and the majority of national homeless education groups (e.g., the National Coalition for the Homeless) largely support mainstreamed schools reform. The mainstreaming effort is appealing because it does not treat the homeless child as an outsider or outcast, as it aims to incorporate the child into normal schools. Mainstreamed schools make up the majority of U.S. public schools, so supporters feel that this normality should be appropriate for the homeless child. On the other hand, most mainstreamed schools neglect the additional assistance that a homeless child usually needs, even when mixed in with other students. In school districts where supplemental services are provided to appropriately address the homeless child's specific needs, they are generally limited and not offered in all schools.

Transitional schools contribute to homeless children's success by encouraging education to continue even in times of acute hardship. Having a school connected to a shelter should encourage students to continue their education while reducing absenteeism, but a one-room, mixed-grade, mixed-ability school often provides limited support for socialization and limited academic services and resources. However, some argue that this type of school is a step backward, reverting to antique forms of education. Modified comprehensive schools have converted the older, transitional school idea into a new reform.

Modified comprehensive schools appear to be particularly appropriate because of the attention they provide to homeless children's needs. By incorporating elements from the other three reforms, supporters argue the comprehensiveness directly aims at the barriers; if those barriers are quickly eliminated, the homeless student will be educationally sound when transferred to a mainstreamed school. Yet the question of constitutionality remains; for some argue that segregating a homeless child from mainstreamed schools does more harm than good.

There is a grievous need for research to inform decisions about reform. Thus far, no formal research has been conducted on these reform efforts. As mentioned before, the 2002 reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act (2002) specifically required an evaluation of modified comprehensive schools in Maricopa County, Arizona; San Diego County, California; Orange County, California; and San Joaquin County, California. These four counties were picked because each has a large number of modified comprehensive schools, including the Pappas School discussed earlier, which is comprised on three schools in the district. The evaluations will address the effectiveness of these schools. Although the act ensures evaluation of modified comprehensive schools, the other types of reform efforts also need assessment. The lack of research and evaluation may be an intrinsic flaw in the act. Encouraging the evaluation of one reform in turn neglects the others, and the resulting one-sided view may impede further educational improvements. Homeless families and educators are left to ask: Are any of the reform efforts effective? To what degree are they effective? Are the barriers and issues hindering student access and success being overcome? Although all four efforts are well developed, current support for reforms is largely based on speculation in the absence of any empirical evidence of efficacy and effectiveness. For educators, policy makers, and homeless families, further research is vitally needed to determine how well all reform efforts have met homeless children's needs and what service mix is effective or should be modified.

When analyzing reforms, it is also important that researchers and evaluators keep in mind the characteristics of specific localities, as different areas may have different needs. One locality may require a mainstreamed school and another, a transitional school. In essence, locally based models that are tailored to the unique local context, not one-size-fits-all state or national reforms, are what will ensure homeless students access and success. Locally based reforms can also stop the cycle of mass production in educational reform. Each homeless student is an individual with differing needs. Locally based reform can reintroduce the human element into homeless education services. On the other hand, reform efforts in the United States are moving away from locally based reform efforts and focusing more on a nationally based reform. For example, in 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind reform legislation that applies to the nation as a whole. This reform is based on the idea of schools, administrators, and teachers being held more accountable to the government, taxpayers, parents, and students. Smaller locally based reform efforts that would benefit homeless students are becoming more unlikely because of the emphasis being placed on national policies concerning public education.

It is imperative that researchers analyze and incorporate the successful segments of each reform. The ideal reform may very well be a compilation of elements of each type. Finding the right formula to ensure access and success may require policy makers to become more flexible.

In conducting research and policy reform analysis, policy makers, researchers, and evaluators should try to avoid quick fixes and ideology in favor of examining objectively what most benefits the targets of educational reform—that is, they should be examining what best meets the myriad of needs of homeless children and what policies and institutional arrangements best surmount the barriers to access and success in schools for this population of students.

In addition to conducting further research and evaluation on the effectiveness of the current approaches to best providing educational services to homeless students, there are three steps that may enhance homeless children's access to and success in schools using a locally based model of reform: conducting local forums, formulating guidelines for local reforms based on these forums, and evaluating and monitoring these efforts.

CREATE FORUMS IN THE LOCAL AREA

Effective reform depends on the locality. School districts (ideally fueled with current research) should hold open forums for local homeless families, which will provide an opportunity to hear parents' and students' perspectives and assist school administration in choosing reforms based on community needs. The forums should be held in an accessible location, ensuring that the majority of homeless families can express their opinions. We certainly recognize that issues can arise with gaining parental assistance. For example, transportation, child care, and other immediate needs may make it harder for all parents to participate at a forum. These issues and others that limit involvement for the general homeless population within the school area should be taken into consideration when planning a forum.

DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL REFORM

The open forum and the collective efforts of the community and school administration will generate helpful information and guidance. A committee of school administration officials and homeless students' families should create guidelines for specific, local reform. These guidelines would consist of procedures and strategies to assist local schools in understanding and implementing appropriate policies, and thereby help assure that homeless student access and success can be symbiotic with overall school goals.

EVALUATE, MONITOR, AND MODIFY EFFORTS

It is essential to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of reform efforts and then modify the program according to how well the program is working. Administrators often view evaluation as a luxury when considering allocation of scarce funds. However, assessing program implementation, examining whether reforms are meeting homeless children's needs, and evaluating the impact of reforms on school access and success are activities critical to informing policy and management decisions. Continuing evaluation, so essential to keeping reform viable and aiding in ensuring quality, should be a constant in this type of educational program, for which success has rarely been assessed or validated. School administration and politicians must also allow sufficient time for implementation and critical evaluation.

CONCLUSION

There is a massive amount of fragmentation in reform approaches and a lack of communication among policy makers, school districts, and homeless families. The reform efforts we have described represent a beginning for changing the current unfortunate status of homeless children's education. Research is one of the tools that will help to bridge the communication gap, assess effectiveness, and provide future guidance to ensure homeless children's effective education through the application of locally based educational reforms.

REFERENCES

- Attles, H. S. E. (1997). *The effects of homelessness on the academic achievement of children*. New York: Garland.
- Belcher, J. R., & DiBlasio, F. A. (1990). *Helping the homeless: Where do we go from here?* Lexington, MA: Lexington.
- Boxill, N. A. (1990). *Homeless children: The watchers and the waiters*. New York: Haworth.
- Burt, M. R., U. S. Interagency Council on the Homeless, & Urban Institute. (1999). *Homelessness: Programs and the people they serve: Findings of the national survey of homeless assistance providers and clients, technical report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.
- Butler, S. S. (1994). *Middle-aged, female and homeless: The stories of a forgotten group*. New York: Garland.
- DaCosta Nunez, R. (1996). *The new poverty: Homeless families in America*. New York: Insight.
- Downer, R. T. (2001). *Homelessness and its consequences: The impact on children's psychological well-being*. New York: Routledge.
- Egan, J. (2002, March 24). The hidden lives of homeless children. *The New York Times Magazine*, 32-37.

- Epps, A. M. (1998). *Children living in temporary shelters: How homelessness effects their perception of home*. New York: Garland.
- Flohr, J. K. (1998). *Transitional programs for homeless women with children: Education, employment training, and support services*. New York: Garland.
- Fonda, D. (2000, June 26). From homeless to a full scholarship. *Time*, pp. 1-3.
- Foscarinis, M., & McCarthy, S. (2000). *Removing educational barriers for homeless students: Legal requirements and recommended practices*. In J. H. Stronge & E. Reed-Victor (Eds.), *Educating homeless students: Promising practices* (pp. 135-159). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Helm, V. I. M. (1993). Legal rights to education of homeless children and youth. *Education and Urban Society*, 26, 323-339.
- Indiana Department of Education. (2002). *Education for homeless children and youth (EHY) program*. Retrieved on September 28, 2002, from <http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/alted/homelesslingpg.htm>
- Janofsky, M. (2000, September 19). Debate weighs merits of schools for homeless. *New York Times*, p. A12. Retrieved on January 31, 2006, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/national/19SCHO.html?ex=1138856400&en=59c2bea38c640381&ei=5070>
- Lively, K. L., & Kleine, P. F. (1996). *The school as a tool for survival for homeless children*. New York: Garland.
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. § 722-725, § G (2002).
- National Coalition for the Homeless. (1999). *Education of homeless children and youth: NCH fact sheet*. Retrieved September 28, 2002, from <http://nch.ari.net/edchild.html>
- National Coalition for the Homeless. (2002). *School segregation and homeless children and youth*. Retrieved on January 24, 2002, from <http://nch.ari.net/unequal.html>
- Newman, R. (1999). *Educating homeless children: Witness to a cataclysm*. New York: Garland.
- Rafferty, Y. (1999). Legal issues in educating homeless children. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 5, 19-33.
- Sandham, J. L. (2000). Barriers to the education of homeless cited. *Education Week*, 12, 11.
- Sosin, M., Piliavin, I., & Westerfelt, H. (1990). Toward a longitudinal analysis of homelessness. *Journal of Social Issues*, 46(4), 157-174.
- Stronge, J. H. (1992). *Educating homeless children and adolescents: Evaluating policy and practice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Stronge, J. H. (1993a). Educating homeless students in urban settings: An introduction to the issues. *Education and Urban Society*, 26, 314-322.
- Stronge, J. H. (1993b). Emerging service delivery models for educating homeless children and youth: Implications for policy and practice. *Educational Policy*, 7, 447-465.
- Stronge, J. H. (2000). Educating homeless children and youth: An introduction. In J. H. Stronge & E. Reed-Victor (Eds.), *Educating homeless students: Promising practices* (pp. 1-19). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Stronge, J. H., & Helm, V. M. (1991). Legal barriers to the education of homeless children and youth: Residency and guardianship issues. *Journal of Law and Education*, 20(2), 201-218.
- Thomas J. Pappas School. (2002). *Mission statement*. Unpublished work.
- Tower, C. C., & White, D. J. (1989). *Homeless students*. Washington, DC: National Education Association Professional Library.
- Tucker, P. (2000). Enhancing collaboration on behalf of homeless students: Strategies for local and state educational agencies. In J. H. Stronge & E. Reed-Victor (Eds.), *Educating homeless students: Promising practices* (pp. 225-245). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

- Williams, J. C. (2003). *"A roof over my head:" Homeless women and the shelter industry*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado.
- Woods, C. J. (1997). Pappas school: A response to homeless students. *Clearing House*, 70, 302-304.
- Woods, C. J., & Harrison, D. (1994). A magnet for homeless students: The Thomas J. Pappas Regional Education Center. *Clearing House*, 68, 123-126.
- Wright, J. D. (1989). *Address unknown: The homeless in America*. New York: A. de Gruyter.
- Wright, J. D., Rubin, B. A., & Devine, J. A. (1998). *Beside the golden door: Policy, politics, and the homeless*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Lynnette Mawhinney-Rhoads is a Ph.D. candidate in Urban Education at Temple University. Her research endeavors focus on homeless educational reform and social networks among teachers. She currently teaches English at Cumberland County College in New Jersey.

Gerald Stahler, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and associate professor, as well as recent chair of Temple University's Department of Geography and Urban Studies. His research interests and publications focus on developing and evaluating community interventions for social problems, particularly substance abuse among homeless populations.