

The School Counselor and Children Experiencing Homelessness

(Adopted, 2010)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize the effects homelessness/displacement has on children's mental and physical health, and academic functioning. School counselors collaborate with community stakeholders, advocate to remove barriers to academic success, and implement educational and prevention programs to promote successful performance and interactions within the school environment.

The Rationale

Families with children make up 34% of the homeless population; more than 1.35 million children are identified as homeless annually (The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007). Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to miss school and repeat a grade than other students from families with low-income (Buckner, 2008). They have a significantly higher prevalence of developmental delays in communication, receptive vocabulary, and visual motor skills as well as performing below grade level performance in reading or mathematics (Gewirtz, Hart-Shegos, & Medhanie, 2008). In addition, students who are homeless have an increased incidence of mental and physical health concerns, with two times the rate of depression as the general population, and as much as four times the prevalence of disruptive behavior disorders as housed students from lower income families (Gewirtz et al., 2008).

Institutional barriers within schools, such as transportation, immunization and physical examination requirements, residency and birth certificate requirements, and lack of school records, impede homeless families' ability to enroll their children in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 outlined the rights of homeless students, and created directives for schools to ensure students are able to enroll and succeed in school (Hernandez, Jozefowicz-Simbeni, & Israel, 2006).

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors:

- advocate for students and collaborate with their parents/guardians to reduce barriers related to school enrollment and academic success
- establish educational and preventive programs for homeless parents and children
- collaborate with school and community personnel, and coordinate appropriate support services
- increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, and the rights of homeless students.
- advocate for appropriate educational placement

Summary

School counselors promote awareness and understanding of the issues students face when experiencing homelessness. School counselors collaborate with students, parents/guardians, and community stakeholders to overcome the barriers to academic, career, and personal/social success associated with homelessness.

References

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