Partnering with Families of Highly Mobile and Homeless Students

Every school year, millions of students change schools for a variety of reasons. While families living in poverty have the highest mobility rates, foster children and children in military families also move frequently. Mobility can negatively affect a student's learning, achievement, social supports, physical and mental health. Building strong systems of support between schools, communities and families can help strengthen mobile families and provide students with the supports they need to succeed.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Youth Program ensures that all children and youth have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education as children and youth who are not homeless, including pre-school education.

State and local educational agencies are required to develop, review and revise policies to remove barriers to the enrollment, attendance and success in school that homeless and highly mobile children and youth may experience. Local educational agencies also must provide children and youth who are homeless and highly mobile with the opportunity to meet the same challenging state content and state student performance standards to which all students are held.

Sample Action Steps

- School districts can provide reduced class sizes in buildings/classrooms with the highest mobility rates.

- Teachers or family-school liaisons can contact new families immediately in-person or by phone and give them all the information they need. By interviewing families, educators can more fully understand and appreciate families' circumstances and explain the options that are available for their child.

- Discuss the impact of school transfers with families, as well as what the school and family can do to help the student through the transition.

- Have information packets ready for families who enter after the beginning of the school year.

- Provide more detailed information in the school records of highly mobile students to allow future teachers to better determine academic and course enrollment options.

- Have a system for forwarding complete records to new schools or districts quickly. Provide packets to help families organize their student's academic records.

- Provide school brochures to local shelters to encourage children's attendance by providing parents with information about enrollment procedures and transportation.

- Provide opportunities for homeless parents to meet with teachers and support staff to share information about their child and to receive information about their child's progress in school.

- Discuss barriers faced by the family and help link the family to service providers.

- At homeless shelters, provide teams consisting of staff and, perhaps, parents of homeless students to answer questions, help fill out forms, provide general support to parents and check on students who are absent frequently.

- Provide tutoring, homework help or credit recovery after school at the school building or at community locations (e.g. homeless shelters, churches) to help students with their academic progress. Provide snacks or full meals.

- Ensure that at least one adult in the school (a teacher, administrator or support staff member) is committed to serving as a supportive, caring adult in the child's life while he or she is attending the

school. This adult should connect with the child regularly.

- Help to coordinate services between the school, shelters, health care providers and housing organizations to address needs of these families.
- Partner with community agencies to provide:
- Nutritious meals, including dinner for students who participate in after-school activities;
- Storage space for personal belongings;
  - ❏ Clothing (second-hand or new) solicited from apparel companies;
  - ❏ Personal hygiene items and bathing facilities;
  - ❏ Health services or clinic referrals; and
  - ❏ Information on public assistance and services.

Resources

What You Need to Know to Help Your Child in School
This brochure from the National Center for Homeless Education explains the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness and informs parents about ways in which they can support their children's education during times of mobility. Available in English and Spanish/Disponible en inglés y español. (link)
http://www.serve.org/nche/index.php

Classrooms with Revolving Doors: Recommended Practices for Middle Level and High School Teachers of At-Risk and Highly Mobile Students
This information brief highlights challenges and offers recommendations to teachers based on exploration of the literature and case studies of award-winning classroom teachers with a variety of students who moved frequently.

National Center for Homeless Education, http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/eff_teach_mh.pdf

Classrooms with Revolving Doors: Recommended Practices for Elementary Teachers of At-Risk and Highly Mobile Students
This information brief highlights some of those challenges and offers recommendations to teachers based on our exploration of the literature and case studies of award-winning classroom teachers with a variety of students who moved frequently.

National Center for Homeless Education, http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/eff_teach_elem.pdf

Colorado Educators Study Homeless and Highly Mobile Students
A collection of case studies provides insights and experiences with successfully educating homeless and highly mobile students. Appendices include surveys for schools, students and families.
Colorado Department of Education and The Center for Research Strategies, 2005. Retrieved June 16, 2009.
http://www.cde.state.co.us Search: *Homeless Study.*

Helping Homeless Students, Principal Leadership Magazine, Vol. 4, Number 8, May 2004
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/nassp_homeless.aspx

Web sites

National Center for Homeless Education, http://www.serve.org/nche/index.php

Ohio Department of Educatio web page regarding homeless students under the McKinney Vento Act. http://www.education.ohio.gov Search keyword: *homeless*.

Sources

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