

# **Delivering Educational Services to Students Experiencing Homelessness:**

**The Challenges and Successes of  
New York State LEA Liaisons**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2006 NYS-TEACHS LEA Liaison Survey was sent to nearly 800 liaisons in New York State early last summer, asking about their successes and challenges in implementing the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The Act sets out the rights and protections of homeless children and youth, and mandates that every district or local educational agency (LEA) appoint a liaison to assist homeless students and their families. The Survey asked LEA liaisons how their districts or schools are implementing the McKinney-Vento Act in a number of critical areas; the barriers they face in implementing the Act; and where they believe they have evolved strong practices for serving students who are homeless.

### **Findings**

The 2006 Survey results suggest a number of conclusions about liaisons, their districts and homeless students that are detailed below.

1. Because of limited funding, most LEA liaisons in New York State wear multiple hats. Acting as a LEA liaison represents less than a quarter of their responsibilities.
2. Although full-time LEA liaisons are rare, they are much more frequent in districts with McKinney-Vento funds, and liaisons spend more time on this issue when their districts receive McKinney-Vento funding.
3. LEA liaisons are generally familiar with the McKinney-Vento Act. While a majority of districts complies with its provisions, many fall short of compliance with the Act.
4. Attendance officers/registrars and staff in pupil personnel services carry out more of the mandated duties of a LEA liaison than do those working in other professional areas. Although attendance officers/registrars face potential conflicts of interest when they must both make residency determinations and assist parents in appealing these determinations, a solution reported by some respondents is appointing another individual to assist parents with the appeal.
5. Significant proportions of LEA liaisons are uncertain about such critical questions as:
  - a. When a student should be regarded as homeless;
  - b. Whether or not there are out-of-school homeless youth in their districts;
  - c. What services homeless students are entitled to; and
  - d. What funds are being, or might be, used to provide for homeless students.
6. Most districts identify at least some students who live with others due to losing their own homes (commonly referred to as “doubled-up”) as homeless; however, LEA liaisons report uncertainty, suspicion and conflict surrounding this new broader definition of homelessness.

7. General education students identified as homeless are usually placed in appropriate educational environments within a week, but special education students experience less timely placement, transportation difficulties, and delays in receiving other school services.
8. Not all homeless students in districts with federal free breakfast and lunch programs are receiving this mandated service.
9. Preschool-age homeless children, as well as older homeless youth, appear to be outside the radar of districts and their LEA liaisons.
10. Although liaisons in large districts experience more barriers to the documentation, administration and coordination of services for homeless students, large districts also provide more supports and services to these students than do all districts.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are directed towards the State Education Department and school districts.

#### **State Education Department should:**

1. Increase training for districts on the definition of homelessness.
2. Promote the availability and use of McKinney-Vento sub-grant funding to districts. This is especially important, given the relatively few number of districts that applied for McKinney-Vento funds in the past, and the significant challenges districts report in complying with the Act.
3. Provide training and better monitor use of Title I, Part A set-aside funding given the relatively low number of districts providing support services.
4. Ensure that in districts allocating McKinney-Vento or Title I set-aside funding to liaisons' salaries, an appropriate amount of time is being devoted to the duties of the LEA liaison and not diverted to other tasks.
5. Develop a model intake/data collection form for school-age children that asks for information about preschool age siblings to help districts better identify and serve this overlooked population.
6. Coordinate with other agencies collecting data on vulnerable children and youth.

**Local Educational Agencies, and particularly district leaders, should:**

1. Make clear to all district and school-level personnel that they must enforce the mandates of the McKinney-Vento Act.
2. Train relevant individuals, including LEA liaisons, teachers, social workers, nurses, and others in contact with homeless children, to make sure that they are aware of the availability and proper uses of Title I, Part A set-aside funding.
3. Improve the allocation of limited funding to maximize its effectiveness in serving students who are homeless.
4. Promote collaboration among such departments as pupil personnel services, transportation, and the Committee on Special Education, and ensure that bureaucratic obstacles do not create barriers to compliance.
5. Improve coordination between school districts and the Department of Social Services to better identify and serve students who are homeless.
6. Improve communication and contacts within and across districts so that transportation problems are quickly resolved, and homeless students are expeditiously enrolled in, and regularly attending, school.
7. Select and appoint staff members who are best suited to carry out the mandated responsibilities of liaison. Although our Survey results suggest that a staff member affiliated with pupil personnel services can effectively fulfill the responsibilities mandated by the McKinney-Vento Act, potential conflicts of interest must be worked out in advance. Appointing an appropriate staff member as a LEA liaison is especially important in large districts where obstacles and delays suggest the need for someone with the capacity and authority to operate effectively.

## I. Introduction

The 2006 NYS-TEACHS LEA Liaison Survey was sent to nearly 800 liaisons in New York State early last summer, asking about their successes and challenges in implementing the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001. The Act sets out the rights and protections of homeless children and youth, and mandates that every district or local educational agency (LEA) appoint a liaison to assist homeless students and their families. The Survey asked LEA liaisons how their districts or schools are implementing the McKinney-Vento Act in a number of critical areas; the barriers they face in implementing the Act; and where they believe they have evolved strong practices for serving homeless students. This report details the findings and recommendations based on the survey results.

## II. Homeless Children and Youth and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Over the past twenty-five years, as homelessness has become “a permanent feature of the poverty landscape,”<sup>2</sup> women and children have accounted for an increasing percentage of the homeless. Although homelessness among rural families and children has grown across New York State, big cities like Buffalo, New York, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers have experienced the greatest growth in homelessness.

Data is richest in New York City, where, according to the Coalition for the Homeless, this has been “the worst decade since the great depression,” with the number of homeless children at mid-decade 52 percent higher than in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> In 2005, more than 35,000 New York City children lived in homeless shelters with their families, and the length of time families stayed in the shelter system had increased since 2000. Tens of thousands of additional children and youth under the age of 17 were living in domestic violence shelters, youth shelters, and on the streets. Moreover, the 2000 census suggests that 125,000 families in New York City were living in the household of another person—that is, in a “doubled up” situation.<sup>4</sup>

In a period in which low-income and subsidized housing has dwindled, shelters are being closed, and homeless families and children are being encouraged to share space with relatives and friends, McKinney-Vento appropriately defines children and youth as homeless if they lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence including those who are doubled up or sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing or economic hardship, living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or emergency shelters, or if their nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for ordinary use as a regular sleeping accommodation.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 widens the definition of homelessness to include all children and youth “who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence,” including those *sharing the housing of others* because they have lost their housing or economic hardship.

The 2001 McKinney-Vento Act contains new and expanded protections. Critically, children and youth who are homeless have the right to:

- Go to school, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there;
- Choose between the local school where they are living, the school they attended before they lost their housing, or the school where they were last enrolled;
- Immediately enroll and participate in school without providing proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other documents normally needed for enrollment;
- Receive transportation to the school of origin or, to the extent that it is provided to permanently housed students, transportation to the local school;
- Receive the same special programs and services, if needed, provided to all other students served in these programs; and
- Enroll and attend class in the school of their choice even while the parent and the school resolve disagreements about enrollment.

To ensure that these rights are upheld, McKinney-Vento requires that every district or local education agency appoint an appropriate staff person to act as a liaison for students in homeless situations.

### **III. The 2006 Survey of LEA Liaisons**

The 2006 Survey of LEA Liaisons was developed in collaboration with NYS-TEACHS, the New York State Technical and Educational Assistance Center on Homeless Students, which is funded by the New York State Education Department and is housed at Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. Understanding that LEA liaisons must respond to an annual LOUISE survey<sup>5</sup> administered on behalf of the State Education Department, we avoided duplicating questions asked in LOUISE. However, in several instances we use data from LOUISE and BEDS<sup>6</sup> to validate and supplement our own findings.

Because we designed our Survey to include liaisons working in districts and Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), we use the terms district and LEA interchangeably to denote the administrative unit for which LEA liaisons are responsible.

The 2006 Survey of Liaisons was available on-line between May 19, 2006 and July 7, 2006. The Survey was voluntary, confidential and anonymous. To encourage participation, respondents who completed the survey could enter a separate unlinked website to take part in a lottery for one of 30 gift cards for Walden Books or Borders.

Seven hundred eighty-nine LEA liaisons in New York State were invited to participate in the survey. This includes 34 liaisons in New York City (for the purpose of the McKinney-Vento Act, each of New York City's 32 community school districts and 2 citywide districts is counted as a separate district). Of the 789 LEA liaisons, 501 liaisons responded to the survey, for a response rate of 64 percent.

Respondents were allowed to skip questions, and many liaisons who reported no homeless students in their districts tended to skip a number of questions. Since most respondents skipped some questions, the number of responses varies throughout the survey.

### **a. Characteristics of Respondents and their Districts**

Of the 501 respondents to the on-line survey, 94 percent perform their duties in a district, and 6 percent in a BOCES.

LEA liaison respondents are predominantly (61%) from small districts with fewer than 2500 students. Seventeen percent (17%) are from districts serving 2500-4500 students, 15 percent are from districts serving between 4500 and 10,000 students, and only 7 percent are from districts with over 10,000 students. This is generally consistent with the size range of all New York State districts, as reported in the New York State School Report Card database.

Notably, less than 10 percent of all survey respondents (39 individuals) report acting as LEA liaison full-time. Moreover, when part time liaisons were asked how they actually spend their time, only two individuals (both in relatively small districts of 2500-4500 students) reported spending over 50 percent of their time on this issue. Among those reporting that they are part-time LEA liaisons, 94 percent say that acting as LEA liaisons consumes less than 25 percent of their jobs.

*“In my role as [a pupil personnel administrator], the ‘homeless liaison’ portion constitutes a very small portion of my responsibilities. There is so much to learn with little time to accomplish the task!”*  
LEA liaison

Since McKinney-Vento funds can be used to support the salaries of LEA liaisons, we analyzed liaisons’ status and time spent in the role of LEA liaison by whether or not liaisons report working in funded districts. (As we make clear later in the report, responses to whether the district receives McKinney-Vento funding may not be entirely accurate.) Not surprisingly, districts with McKinney-Vento funds are much more likely to have full-time liaisons. While nearly 40 percent of all LEA liaisons are full-time in the 39 McKinney-Vento funded districts, only 3.5 percent are full time in the 423 unfunded districts.

Since liaisons perform multiple duties, we also asked how much time they actually spend as liaisons. Again, even part-time liaisons are more likely to spend their time carrying out the duties of a LEA liaison when their districts receive McKinney-Vento funding.

**Table I: Time Spent as LEA liaisons  
in McKinney-Vento Funded and Unfunded Districts**

	Percentage of time spent by part-time liaisons carrying out their duties as liaison			
	Less than 25%	25-50%	51-75%	Over 75%
Funded	60.0	36.7	0.0	3.3
Unfunded	97.3	2.4	0.3	0.0
All Districts	94.7	4.8	0.2	0.2
N	413	21	1	1

As Table I above makes clear, 97.3 percent of liaisons in unfunded districts, and 60 percent in funded districts, spend less than 25 percent of their time carrying out the duties of a LEA liaison. Even in funded districts, only about 5 percent of liaisons spend over a quarter of their time on these responsibilities. Thus, the multiple responsibilities assumed by LEA liaisons may be undermining the ability of liaisons to fully meet their mandated responsibilities.

District size also appears related to the other roles assumed by LEA liaisons. While administrators are more likely to act as LEA liaisons in larger districts, special education personnel are more likely to act as liaisons in smaller districts. It is also noteworthy that a number of respondents used our open-ended question to point out that they wear multiple hats.

Finally, 12.5 percent of the respondents, across small and large districts, say their districts have staff in addition to LEA liaisons whose primary responsibility is working with homeless students. Moreover, a small percentage (5.7%) report that some of the responsibilities of a LEA liaison are performed by another agency (including shelters, advocacy agencies, or departments of social services) on behalf of the LEA.

**b. Responsibilities Assumed by LEA liaisons**

The McKinney-Vento Act mandates that LEA liaisons perform the following roles:

- Identify children and youth in homeless situations in their LEA;
- Enroll these children in school;
- Ensure that homeless students receive the educational services for which they are eligible, including preschool programs, and are referred to medical, dental, and mental health services;
- Inform parents or guardians of homeless children of educational opportunities;
- Post notices of the educational rights of homeless students in schools, shelters, and other locations where such students receive services;
- Assist parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth when disputes about enrollment and/or transportation arise; and
- Arrange transportation for homeless students.

Throughout our survey, we asked liaisons about their mandated responsibilities. Although LEA liaisons are expected to understand their mandated roles, we understand that individual LEA liaisons may not have been faced with situations that prompt them to assume all these responsibilities. Significantly, no mandated activity was identified by *all* respondents as part of their responsibilities. This suggests that liaisons identified only those activities they have had an opportunity to perform.

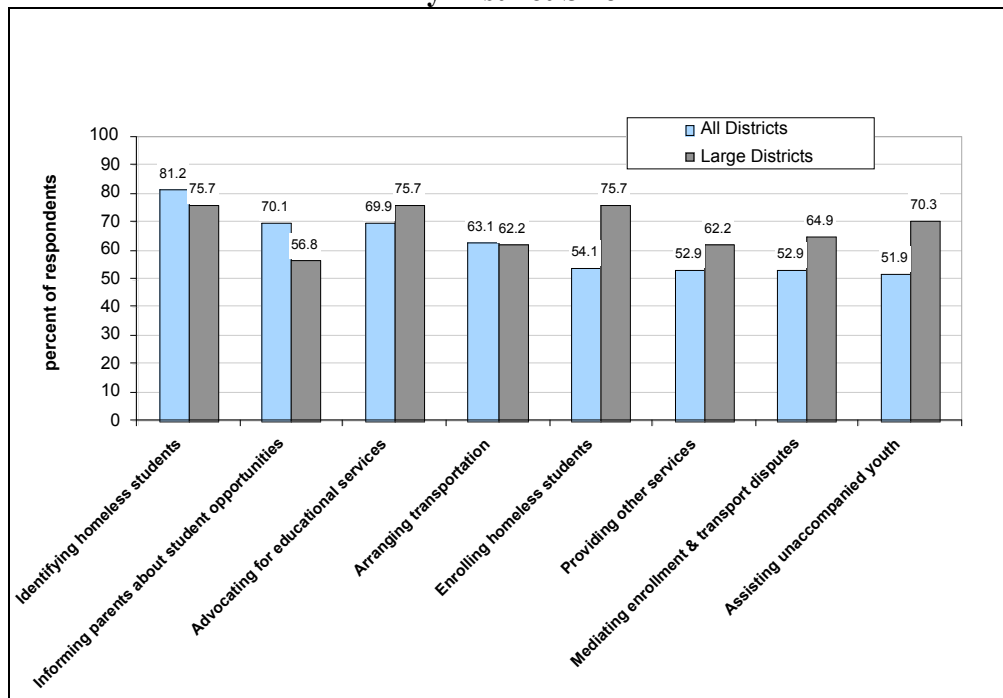
Of the 438 liaisons responding to questions about their activities,

- ✓ 91.8% report identifying homeless children and youth;
- ✓ 79.2% say they advocate for educational services for homeless students and inform parents or guardians of homeless students about their educational opportunities; and
- ✓ 71.2% report arranging transportation for homeless students.

Enrolling homeless students (61.6%), mediating enrollment and transportation disputes (59.8%), providing other services to homeless students (59.8%), and assisting unaccompanied youth (58.9%) were less commonly reported to be part of their roles.<sup>7</sup>

Figure I below illustrates the responsibilities of LEA liaisons, sorted in descending order. Since liaisons in large districts report a different distribution of responsibilities than liaisons in all districts, the graph shows this comparison.

**Figure I: Responsibilities Assumed by LEA liaisons  
By District Size**

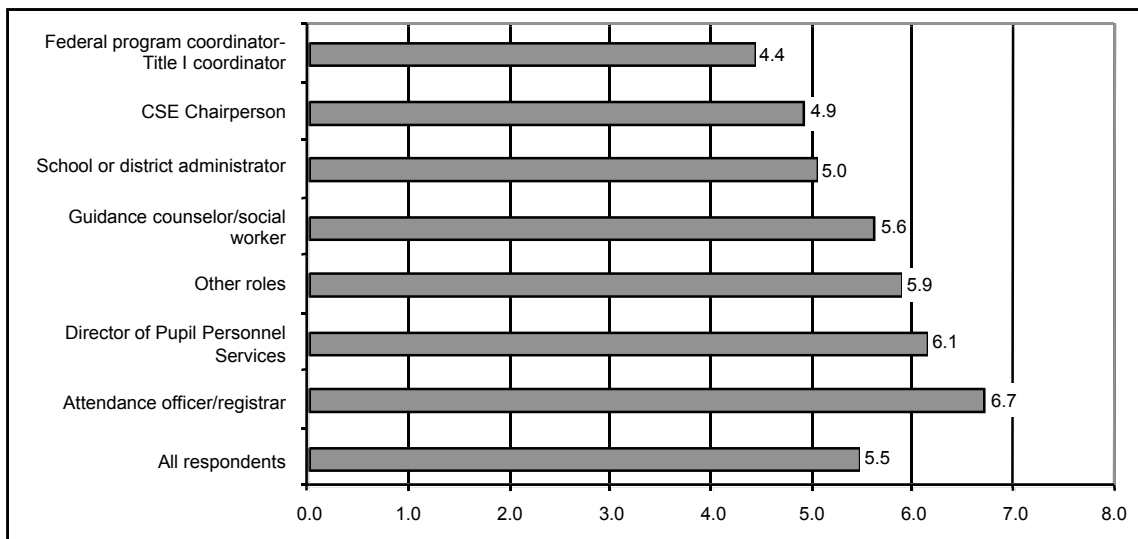


As Figure I above shows, liaisons in large districts are less likely to identify homeless students and inform parents about students’ educational opportunities than liaisons as a whole. On the other hand, LEA liaisons in large districts are more likely than all liaisons to enroll homeless students, assist unaccompanied youth, mediate disputes, and perform other services.

Part-time LEA liaisons generally assume one of several other professional roles, including school or district administrator, attendance officers/registrars, pupil personnel services staff, guidance counselors, special education personnel, or Title I coordinators. Although individuals in every professional role take on each of the seven mandated responsibilities, LEA liaisons also appear to take on the mandated activities with different frequency, depending on these other roles.

As Figure II below makes clear, LEA liaisons who also work as attendance officers/registrars perform an average of 6.7 of the mandated roles, with individuals who also work in pupil personnel services following with an average of 6.1 roles. At the other end, liaisons who are also federal grants/Title I officers assume an average of 4.4 of the mandated roles.

**Figure II: Average Number of McKinney-Vento Responsibilities Assumed by LEA liaisons according to their Other Roles**



Variations in the number of mandated responsibilities assumed by LEA liaisons working in various professional roles suggest potential differences in effectiveness among liaisons, depending on their other responsibilities. This suggests that, if districts want to maximize services to homeless children, they should evaluate the other roles that LEA liaisons hold. Although there may be conflicts in giving the position of LEA liaison to individuals acting as attendance officers/registrars or staff in pupil personnel services, our survey results show that these individuals are also most likely to fulfill a range of critical tasks.

## IV. The Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Identifying students who are homeless is a critical function of LEA liaisons for two reasons. First, the protections and services outlined by McKinney-Vento are dependent on accurate and timely student identification, which alerts teachers, counselors, social workers and others in the school to the student's need for attention and services. Second, McKinney-Vento funding to districts depends in part on the number of reported homeless students.

Nearly half of all liaisons (49.8%) reported that uncertainty about the definition of homelessness always or sometimes presented an administrative problem in their districts. This is probably the result of the expanded definition of homelessness to include "doubled up" students in the reauthorized McKinney-Vento Act. But it may also be the result of more subtle factors that influence whether or not a student provides information suggesting homelessness or is perceived as "legitimately" homeless.

*"The confusion of 'doubling up' has affected how we proceed, although all students are provided equal services. The designation was perhaps not [always] made that they were 'homeless,' versus living with a relative."*

*LEA liaison*

Our 2006 Survey asked LEA liaisons to estimate the number of homeless students in their district. (It is important to understand that the high percentage of respondents noting problems in defining homelessness also casts doubt on the actual numbers of homeless students reported.) Over 70 percent of all LEA liaisons (N=491) reported that there are homeless students in their districts, with 53.8 percent reporting between 25 and 50 homeless students, and 16.5 percent reporting over 50 students. At the high end, 2.8 percent (14 liaisons) reported having more than 300 homeless students.

*"We are in an area with few public services and no shelters, motels, etc. It is difficult to reach out to families who MIGHT be in a difficult situation. Many families are very proud and would not identify themselves as or claim to be homeless."*

*LEA liaison*

Table II below analyzes respondents' estimates of the number of homeless children in their districts by district size. Not surprisingly, the number of homeless students increases with district size. Small districts are most likely to report no, or fewer than 25, homeless students in their districts.

**Table II: Percentage of LEAs Reporting Estimated Number of Homeless Children and Youth by LEA Size**

<b>Number of Children and Youth Identified as Homeless</b>	<b>Fewer than 2,500 students</b>	<b>Between 2,500 and 4,500 students</b>	<b>Between 4,500 and 10,000 students</b>	<b>More than 10,000 students</b>	<b>All Districts</b>
None	41.9	13.1	8.2	8.3	29.6
Fewer than 25	53.5	63.1	58.9	27.8	54.0
Between 25 and 50	3.0	11.9	12.3	8.3	6.3
Between 50 and 100	0.7	7.1	11.0	11.1	4.0
Between 100 and 300	0.0	3.6	8.2	19.4	3.2
Between 300 and 500	0.3	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.8
More than 500	0.7	1.2	1.4	16.7	2.0
N=501					

Two major data collection sources in New York State, BEDS and LOUISE, also ask districts for the number of homeless students. In Table VI below we compare our survey responses to these other data sources. While we asked about preschool-age students identified as homeless, a question asked on Louise, but not on BEDS, liaisons reported knowing relatively little about this group.

**Table III: Estimated Numbers of Homeless Students by Grade Level in the 2006 Survey, LOUISE and BEDS**

<b>Grade level</b>	<b>2006 Survey</b>	<b>LOUISE, 2005</b>	<b>BEDS, 2005</b>
Preschool	561	1758	No information
Elementary school	5048	5860	3328
Middle school	4290	2699	1675
High school	4701	3062	1859
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14600</b>	<b>13379</b>	<b>6862</b>

Table III demonstrates the lack agreement on the number of homeless students in different grade levels across data sources. While there is a year's difference in data collection, this is unlikely to be the sole cause of the discrepancies. Instead, discrepancies may be the result of different individuals completing the different surveys, some respondents rounding up or down, as well as communication problems between schools and district-level data gathers/reporters.

There is likely a significant undercounting of students experiencing homelessness across all data gathering sources.

Despite gathering data from a smaller number of districts, our survey respondents report more homeless students than are reported in either LOUISE or BEDS. This difference is most obvious at the middle and high school levels. But LOUISE data also shows more homeless students than BEDS data across all grade levels. Since it is likely that all three data sources under-report homeless students,<sup>8</sup> both funding and programming decisions based on these numbers are unlikely to be adequate to meet the needs of homeless students.

The 2006 Survey also asked respondents whether homeless students attending school within the LEA reside within the district. Nearly 12 percent (11.6%) of liaisons reported serving homeless students who live outside the district. However, over a third of the liaisons reported not knowing. This suggests that the percentage of homeless students who live outside districts may be greater than estimated, and that some homeless students may not be getting the transportation services to which they are entitled.

Many liaisons are unaware of whether homeless students are residing outside of the district, suggesting that not all of these students are receiving the transportation services to which they are entitled.

A critical question in New York and elsewhere is the type of temporary housing in which homeless students reside. According to LOUISE, 11,379 students were in shelters in 2005, 1,932 were doubled up, 22 were unsheltered, 612 were living in hotels and motels, and 54 were in unknown circumstances.

Our 2006 Survey also asked liaisons where homeless students in their LEAs are housed. However, liaisons were asked to check any temporary housing used by students in their districts. Table IV below analyzes their answer by district size. Note, the percentages in this Table do not show how often a specific temporary housing type is used within a district, but only whether LEA liaisons report that the type of temporary housing is in use in their districts.

**Table IV: District Size and Percentage of Respondents Identifying Use of Temporary Housing Type for Students**

	Fewer than 2,500 students	2,500 to 4,500 students	4,500 to 10,000 students	More than 10,000 students	All Districts
Students doubled up with others	61.1	87.3	87.7	90.3	71.6
Students housed in hotels/motels	32.5	59.6	66	82.1	46.5
Students housed in domestic violence shelters	16	41.2	52	89.7	32.4
Students housed in homeless shelters	18.6	38.9	51.9	75.9	32.2
Students housed in shelters or transitional living programs for homeless and runaway youth	12.9	39.6	44	74.1	27.3
Students with unknown housing status	10.1	13.2	8.1	27.8	11.6
Students unsheltered (in cars, parks, campgrounds, etc.)	10.3	10.4	8.2	3.8	9.4
N=391					

Several important trends are suggested by Table IV. First, across all district sizes, almost as high a proportion of liaisons report having students in domestic violence shelters as in homeless shelters.

Second, unsheltered students (those in cars, parks, and campgrounds) appear to be a particular problem of small districts.

Third, districts with more than 10,000 students are significantly more likely to report the use of a variety of shelter types, hotels/motels, as well as students in doubled up situations, than are small districts. While this is probably the result of the higher incidence of homelessness, it is likely also related to the greater availability of temporary residence options for homeless children and families.

*“We are a very small district. We can respond very quickly to a homeless situation that arises with minimum hassle. But again, as a small district, we have no shelters. DSS [Department of Social Services] won’t put families with kids into the motels because they are isolated and inaccessible without a car, so our homeless referrals are few.”*  
*I.F.A liaison*

It is also important that over a quarter (27.8%) of LEA liaisons in large districts of over 10,000 students report having students whose housing status is unknown. This compares with between 8 and 13 percent of smaller districts who report students with “unknown housing status.” The much higher percentage of liaisons in large districts who don’t know where students are housed

suggests that in the anonymity of large districts, significant numbers of students identified or suspected as being homeless may not be fully tracked, and that their educational and other needs may not be met.

Since doubled up students are notoriously hard to discover, one of the positive surprises of the survey is the high percentage of LEA liaisons (72%) who report homeless students in their districts are doubled up. This suggests that liaisons have become more sensitive to the issue, because of either media accounts of this growing problem or training efforts, and that more services may be going to these students. However respondents' comments on open-ended questions surveys indicate some resistance by school staff and the community to the broader definition of homelessness. Even with increased trainings and or sensitivity, a lack of support from the district and/or community may continue to make it difficult for liaisons to identify and serve doubled up students who are homeless.

*“The doubled up families being homeless is creating a stir in our district. Sometimes the stir is very negative.”  
LEA liaison*

Relatively high percentages of respondents also report that there are *no* homeless students in the various types of temporary housing, and small but significant percentages of respondents report *not knowing* whether homeless students reside in these various types of facilities. This indicates that LEA liaisons may not be aware of the housing arrangements of all homeless students, and that some (or many) homeless students may not be identified. Moreover, the liaisons' uncertainty about the types of temporary living arrangements of their students may compromise the ability of their districts to provide the most effective services to homeless students.

## **V. Challenges to Immediate Enrollment and Regular Attendance of Students who are Homeless**

The McKinney-Vento Act mandates that homeless students be immediately enrolled and allowed to participate in school *without* providing proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other documents normally needed for enrollment in a public school. The Act also mandates that homeless students receive transportation to the school of origin or, if it is provided to permanently housed students, to the local school, and that they receive the same special programs and services provided to all other students served in these programs. These and other protections all require a range of careful and prompt decisions by individual educators, as well as collaboration among public school departments and between public school personnel and representatives of other agencies.

### **a. Documentation Requirements**

Our 2006 Survey suggests that public schools in New York State have made progress in moving students past potential documentation barriers, and that a majority of LEA liaisons are complying with Mc-Kinney Vento's stipulation that homeless students need not show documentation for enrollment in school, but that many districts fall far short of compliance with the Act.

Our Survey identified several documentation requirements as *potential* barriers to homeless students, and asked how often each acted as a barrier. As Table V below shows, a substantial majority of respondents report that the availability of documentation is *never* a barrier to the immediate enrollment of homeless students.

**Table V: Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Barriers Due to Documentation Requirements**

<b>Documentation</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
Proof of Residency	3.4	37.3	58.3
Parent or Guardian	2.3	36.7	61.0
Parent or guardianship documentation	2.8	38.9	58.3
Academic records	2.0	31.5	66.5
Immunization documentation and other health records	3.3	38.5	58.2
Special education records	2.3	36.8	60.9
Birth certificate or passport	2.3	32.2	65.6
Other documentation	0.7	10.3	89.0
N=403			

Less positively, proof of residency, parent or guardianship documentation, and academic and health records, are still barriers “sometimes” or “always” for a substantial minority of respondents. This suggests several possibilities. First, some LEA liaisons could probably benefit from more information and training on McKinney-Vento requirements, including that homeless students be enrolled immediately, with or without documentation. Second, school or district leadership, may be preventing liaisons and/or others from upholding the provisions of the Act, which would indicate the need for continued monitoring by the New York State Education Department.

**b. Administrative Barriers**

The 2006 Survey asked respondents about a range of administrative problems that potentially act as barriers to the immediate enrollment and regular attendance of homeless students. As we have already noted, half of all LEA liaisons (49.8%) reported that confusion regarding the definition of homelessness was always or sometimes an administrative barrier.

In addition, a significant proportion (28.5%) of all LEA liaisons identified the availability of special education placement as a barrier. Since the reauthorized IDEA requires immediate provision of comparable services for any student transferring into the district, provided the student has a current Individual Education Plan, or IEP, this suggests both a legal and an educational problem.

Table VI below shows the administrative barriers identified by LEA liaison in placing homeless students. Because large districts stand out as unique, we compare districts with more than 10,000 students with all districts.

**Table VI: Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Administrative Barriers  
in All and Large Districts**

<b>Administrative Barriers</b>	<b>All Districts</b>	<b>Over 10,000 students</b>
Confusion regarding the definition of homelessness	53.0	56.7
Transportation between districts not readily available	35.6	69.0
Special education placement not readily available	29.0	69.0
Special education transportation not readily available	20.0	44.4
School or district administrators refusal to enroll students immediately	16.7	44.8
Transportation within the district not readily available	15.2	39.3
School or district administrators are not supportive	14.5	48.3
Clothing and/or school supplies are unavailable	8.9	22.2
Other administrative problems or obstacles	8.8	20.0
N=406		

Table VI suggests that nearly every barrier is more likely—sometimes more than twice as likely—to occur in large districts. Even the definitional problem of homelessness is reported at a slightly higher rate by liaisons in large districts. Significantly, 69 percent of LEA liaisons in districts with over 10,000 students report that availability of special education placement and transportation between districts are administrative barriers, compared to 29 percent and 36 percent respectively in all districts.

While greater transportation services and more numerous and varied special education services in large districts should facilitate compliance with the Act, coordination problems and the bureaucratic procedures developed in large districts can act as obstructions to the kinds of rapid responses needed by homeless students. This conclusion is supported by the following section.

**c. Coordination Problems**

Lack of coordination among individuals and agencies has been frequently noted as a barrier to identifying and/or enrolling homeless students, as well as to ensuring their consistent attendance. Although a solid majority of respondents in all districts reported that the coordination problems listed in the Survey are never a barrier, several coordination problems were sometimes concerns to a significant minority of LEA liaisons. Table VII below shows coordination problems reported to be barriers by LEA liaisons in large and all districts.

*“Working with Liaisons from other school districts can be difficult. Not all districts adhere to McKinney-Vento and/or not all districts have a knowledgeable Liaison.”  
LEA liaison*

**Table VII: Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Coordination Barriers  
in All and Large Districts**

<b>Coordination Barriers</b>	<b>All Districts</b>	<b>Over 10,000 students</b>
Department of Social Services	46.1	63.0
Liaisons in other LEAs	37.4	64.3
Child welfare	31.3	46.6
Agencies providing training, case management, advocacy, and/or parent support	30.2	37.0
School-based staff	28.9	44.4
Housing agencies	26.8	30.8
Agencies or nonprofits providing tutoring and other academic supports	23.7	38.5
Homeless shelters	22.9	34.6
School transportation office	16.0	40.7
Committee on Special Education	15.3	48.3
Preschool and/or Head Start	13.7	28.0
Other agencies	8.9	21.4
N=394		

Table VII makes clear that large districts have significantly greater coordination problems than all districts. Moreover, the most prevalent coordination problems in large districts are with departments of social services and with other LEAs. Nearly two-thirds of liaisons in large districts report these problems compared to just over a third of liaisons in all districts. Large districts are also around three times more likely than all districts to experience barriers in coordinating with the committee on special education (48% v. 15%) and coordinating with the school transportation office (41% v. 16%).

For all districts, the greatest coordination problems, in descending order, are with: the Department of Social Services (46%), liaisons in other LEAs (37%), and child welfare agencies (31%).

*“I am a member of several community groups addressing the needs of our homeless population. We have also developed a group of local homeless liaisons who meet regularly and work together to problem solve and share information.”  
LEA liaison*

**d. Length of Time Needed to Place Students who are Homeless**

LEA liaisons were asked in the 2006 Survey how long it takes to conclude a range of activities critical to placing homeless students in an appropriate school environment. As Table VIII below suggests, most liaisons conduct the necessary administrative activities in less than a week. However a substantial number indicate lengthy delays in providing students with needed services.

**Table VIII: Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Length of Time Needed to Place Homeless Students in Appropriate Educational Environments – All Districts**

	<b>Less than a week</b>	<b>Between a week and a month</b>	<b>More than a month</b>
Place in appropriate special education environment	69.2	28.7	2.1
Provide special education transportation	84.2	15.3	0.5
Obtain administrative support in enrolling students	92.1	7.4	0.5
Provide transportation within the district	94.9	4.8	0.3
Provide transportation between districts	77.7	21.7	0.5
Provide appropriate clothing and/or school supplies	88.9	10.3	0.8
Other problems or obstacles	91.4	5.3	3.2
N=383			

Table VIII also illustrates that placement for special education students presents the biggest challenge for all districts. Nearly a third (31%) of all liaisons report that placement in an appropriate special education environment takes more than a week, and sometimes more than a month. Similarly, providing transportation for special education students appears to be more protracted than providing transportation for general education students, with 10 percent fewer respondents (84% v 95%) reporting that they arrange transportation for special education students within a week.

Finally, over 10 percent of liaisons report that providing appropriate clothing and/or school supplies takes between a week and a month. Since students cannot participate in class without clothing and school supplies, even a delay in a minority of instances means a serious loss of learning time for some homeless children.

**e. Challenges**

Several respondents used the open-ended questions to complain that their role is poorly understood, and that they are not necessarily “in the loop” either with public school administrators or social service agencies. One complained of not being informed by Social Services when students are placed in motels.

## VI. Provision of Services

The 2006 Survey asked LEA liaisons what proportion of homeless students receive a range of services critical to their success in school.

### a. Frequency of Provision of Services

As Table IX below makes clear, a majority of liaisons report that at least some (and sometimes most or all) homeless students receive nearly all of the services we listed. The notable exception is shelter-based tutoring or remedial services, where half of all liaisons report that no homeless students receive these services. However, districts that reported homeless children living in shelters also tended to report that they provide shelter-based tutoring or remedial services.

**Table IX: Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Support Services Received by Homeless Students**

<b>Support Services</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>Most</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>None</b>
Free lunch	49.4	14.8	7.5	14.5
Free breakfast	46.5	15.1	7.5	16.6
Attendance outreach	26.5	6.8	16.2	28.4
Counseling &/or psychological services	25.2	15.4	29.5	17.2
School-based tutoring or remedial services	21.5	14.0	29.0	18.5
Support for extra curricular activities	16.8	10.1	26.9	23.9
After-school programs	15.4	4.0	31.5	28.2
Clothing & school supplies	14.0	5.0	31.9	24.0
Medical services	11.2	6.6	21.1	30.1
Other	6.6	1.3	4.0	43.0
Shelter-based tutoring or remedial services	5.9	4.5	11.2	50.0
N= 388				

Free breakfast and lunch are the most common services received by homeless children and youth across all districts, with only 14-15 percent of liaisons reporting that no homeless students receive free breakfast or lunch in their districts—presumably because the districts do not participate in the program. What is puzzling, however, is that 23 percent of LEA liaisons report that only *some or most* homeless students in their LEA are receiving a free breakfast and lunch. Since *all* homeless students are entitled to the federal free lunch and breakfast programs if their district participates in such programs, *all* students in these districts should be receiving these services.<sup>9</sup>

Nearly 30 percent of liaisons indicated that none of the students experiencing homelessness receive attendance outreach and after-school programs. Since districts are required to set aside a portion of their Title I, Part A funds specifically to provide educationally-related support services to homeless students, the significant number of liaisons reporting negative responses is worrisome.

In Table X below we compare the responses of liaisons in large districts with all respondents on the provision of support services. For simplicity, we combine “some,” “most” and “all” responses, identifying only whether the district offers *any* of a particular service.

**Table X: Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Students Receive Support Services in Large and All Districts**

<b>Support Services</b>	<b>More than 10,000 students</b>	<b>All districts</b>	<b>Percentage difference between large districts and all districts</b>
Shelter-based tutoring or remedial services	66.7	21.2	45.5
After school programs	83.9	53.6	30.3
Clothing and supplies	83.9	54.7	29.2
Medical services	66.7	38.1	28.6
Attendance outreach	76.7	49.2	27.5
Support for extra curricular activities	74.2	53.6	20.6
School-based tutoring or remedial services	83.3	64.5	18.8
Free breakfast	83.3	68.6	14.7
Counseling and/or psychological services	80.6	67.1	13.5
Free lunch	80.6	71.4	9.2
N=388			

As Table X makes clear, large districts tend to provide all the support services at a higher rate than do all districts, with tutoring, after-school programs, clothing and school supplies and medical services provided at much higher rates. That is, although liaisons in large districts report more barriers to provision, they also report meeting the needs of homeless students with more services.

**b. Challenges**

In the open-ended responses, liaisons complained that superintendents and financial officers often act as “obstacles” in getting services for homeless students, and that counselors and other school staff often bypass them in discussions concerning homeless students.

**VII. Preschool Students**

Districts are to ensure that all preschool-age homeless children have access to any preschool services provided by the LEA, according to the McKinney-Vento Act. However, only 284 districts in New York have pre-k programs.

The 2006 Survey asked LEA liaisons how their LEA or district identifies homeless preschool age children. The top three sources for this information, according to liaisons, were: the names of

siblings of school-age students on the school or district intake form (56%), communication with Departments of Social Services (47%), and information from shelters (25%). However, 12.6 percent of the respondents report that their districts don't identify preschoolers who are homeless, and 17 percent say that they don't know how their district identifies preschool-age children who are homeless. Despite the McKinney-Vento's mandate that liaisons ensure that preschool age children have access to services, it is clear that homeless preschool-aged children and their needs are often invisible within public school systems.

According to LEA liaisons, relatively few homeless preschoolers are served by preschool programs in New York. Only 6 percent of all respondents report that their districts serve over a third of all homeless preschoolers in a preschool program. As important, 52 percent of respondents say they don't know how many preschool-age students are served by preschool programs in their districts.

Those preschool-age children who do attend a preschool use a range of programs, according to LEA liaisons, as Table XI below suggests.

**Table XI: Preschool Programs Attended by Homeless Children**

<b>Type of Preschool Program</b>	<b>Percentage of liaisons reporting homeless children enrolled in preschool programs</b>
Don't know	43.2
Head Start	26.8
Preschool programs in public schools	24.9
Preschool programs in other settings	21.9
Other	13.6
Even Start	7.3
No program available for this age group	4.6
N=370	

Table XI also makes clear that nearly half of all liaisons simply don't know what preschool programs homeless children of preschool age attend or if they attend preschool at all. Since responsibility for preschoolers is not clearly defined as part of LEA liaisons' mandated roles, this is not a surprising finding.

Homeless students tend to fall behind other students academically, and preschool has long been known to give disadvantaged children the additional preparation they need. To fulfill their mandated responsibility for preschool-age children who are homeless, districts need to assign the LEA liaison or another designated individual in the district as the individual responsible for ensuring that these preschoolers have access to either a district pre-kindergarten program or Head Start or Even Start services.

## VIII. Special Education Students

Children who are homeless are much more likely than students with stable residences to be in special education programs. For example, in New York City, about 20 percent of all students in shelters receive special education services, double the special education rate throughout the city.<sup>10</sup>

As we have seen, LEA liaisons report that special education students experience greater delays than general education students both in placement in an appropriate educational environment and in receiving necessary transportation. Moreover, these delays are particularly problematic in large districts. In addition, when asked about school-age students (6-17) who are out of school, 10.3 percent of liaisons checked awaiting special education as a cause. This compares to only 3.4 percent who checked awaiting general education placement.

In the belief that LEA liaisons who are otherwise involved in special education might be more responsive and efficient in assisting homeless special education students, we compared the time it takes these liaisons to place homeless special education students in an appropriate environment and to provide them with special education transportation with the time it takes LEA liaisons with other specialties. However, LEA liaisons with special education roles report about average lengths of time to conduct both activities. There appears to be no advantage to homeless special education students to have a LEA liaison whose other role involves special education.

*“Although children are enrolled immediately, it is often difficult to obtain records, especially IEPs, from other districts. This causes children to be placed in classes that might not meet their needs.”*  
LEA liaison

Liaisons who also have special education roles appear to be no faster than other liaisons in providing services to homeless students who need special education services.

## IX. Services for Older Youth

LEA liaisons were asked whether in their districts there are older homeless youth (through 21 years old) who have not received a diploma but are not attending school. While just 7 percent report the existence of such older out-of-school youth, 40 percent report that there are no older homeless youth not attending school, and 50 percent say that they don't know. The high percentage of “don't knows” raises questions about whether some LEA liaisons may not know that there are older homeless youth not in school in their districts.

Liaisons were also asked to check those reasons why these older youth are out of school. Relatively few liaisons responded to this question. Table XII shows that most out of school homeless youth are assumed to be truant or to have dropped out of school.

**Table XII: Reasons Older Homeless Youth are Out of School**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Percentage of liaisons reporting reason<sup>11</sup></b>
Dropped Out	78.0
Truant	39.0
Other	26.8
Awaiting general or special education placement	0.0
Awaiting transportation	0.0
N=41	

Among the 27 percent of liaisons who checked “other,” the reasons for older youth being out of school included: recent immigration, drug rehabilitation, and youth intentions (“youth not intending to return”). No liaison reported that educational placements or transportation was the reason older youth are out of school, suggesting either that placements are expeditious with this age group, or, more likely, that the public school system may not be devoting sufficient resources to ensuring that older youth who are homeless stay in school.

## **X. Funding and Policy Needs**

The McKinney-Vento Act distributes federal funds to pay for two major areas of activity. In the words of the Act, these funds are: 1) to “ensure that homeless children and youth have access and reasonable proximity to available education and related support services; and 2) [to] raise the awareness of school personnel and service providers of the effects of short-term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness.”

The federal government apportions McKinney-Vento funds to states based on the amount of funding that the state receives to educate disadvantaged students under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The McKinney-Vento Act also mandates that the state distribute at least 75 percent of this money to LEAs or school districts to assist with the cost of implementing the Act.

Eighty-seven districts in New York State applied for McKinney-Vento funding, and 78 received between \$20,000 and \$100,000 per year for a three year allocation (2004-2007). We correlated grant amounts with size of the homeless population served; the correlation was statistically significant but not strong (.42). While districts with fewer than 100 homeless students tended to receive approximately \$1,000 per student, a few districts with as many as 1,000 homeless students received as little as \$100 in McKinney-Vento funds per homeless student.

Of the LEA liaisons responding to the 2006 survey, 10.5 percent or 49 report that their district receives a McKinney-Vento sub-grant from the New York State Education Department, 75.5 percent report that their district does not receive a sub-grant, and a significant 13.9 percent say that they don't know whether or not their district receives this money.

Respondents in large districts are most likely to report receiving McKinney-Vento sub-grants, with 40 percent of all respondents from districts serving over 10,000 children receiving McKinney-Vento sub-grants. The percentage receiving these grants decreases steadily with district size.

It is therefore not surprising that the percentage of LEA liaisons who don't know whether their LEA receives this funding is highest in the smaller districts, which also have the fewest students identified as homeless. While 17.3 percent of LEA liaisons in the smallest districts don't know whether their district receives McKinney-Vento funding, compared to a 13.9 percent average for all districts, a much lower percentage, 8.6 percent don't know about this funding source in the large districts.

Since *all* districts may apply for these federal dollars, the “don't know's” in districts with fewer than 100 homeless students suggests that districts who could use the resources are not tapping into a potential funding source. In fact, 28 percent of the districts that received these federal dollars in 2005-2006 were those reporting fewer than 100 homeless students. For small rural districts with homeless students and high transportation costs, McKinney-Vento funding could make an important contribution to serving homeless students.

Table XII depicts how liaisons report their districts' use of McKinney-Vento funding, in descending order of usage. However, while 49 liaisons report receiving McKinney-Vento funds, 59 report how they spend the funds. Thus, the table below may describe how liaisons spend, or want to spend, McKinney-Vento or other funds.

**Table XIII: District Use of McKinney-Vento Funding**

<b>Funds spent on:</b>	<b>Percentage of liaisons who report use of funding<sup>12</sup></b>
Support services (tutoring, counseling)	64.4
Supplies for homeless students	61.0
Professional development & training	52.5
Transportation	44.1
Salary for LEA liaison	37.3
Assisting with immunizations	28.8
Assisting with appeals pursuant to Education Law 310 of a final determination regarding enrollment	18.6
Early childhood education programs	11.9
Don't know	16.9
Other	42.4
N= 59	

Probably the most important finding from the above table is that only 37 percent of McKinney-Vento funded districts are using these funds for the salaries of LEA liaisons. This is probably because the grants are relatively small, and it explains why liaisons overwhelmingly report working only part-time in the role of liaison and wearing multiple hats. On the other hand, nearly 17 percent say they don't know how the funds are being used. Assuming that McKinney-Vento funds exist in these districts, a significant minority of liaisons doesn't know whether these funds are being used appropriately or effectively.

## **XI. Best Practices**

Respondents were offered open-ended questions in which to write about the identification, enrollment, and service activities they believed were particularly successful or they were proud of. The LEA liaisons used these opportunities to describe their thoughts and individual practices, as well as activities taking place in the district or across districts, as well as ideas they hoped to put into practice.

Several respondents focused on the moment of enrollment. One wrote, "Training of front-desk secretaries that enroll new students is imperative. Also, working with teachers to increase their awareness of the criteria for a homeless student." Another described changing the registration form to help the registrar know if the student may be homeless.<sup>13</sup> A third said, "Some people are of the opinion that it is a conflict of interest to have the Attendance/registrar and the LEA liaison as the same individual. I feel that it is the opposite. I have immediate knowledge of their existence and can support them from the beginning to end of their enrollment."

Since individuals working in pupil personnel services were most likely to perform most of the mandated duties of a LEA liaison, it may be worthwhile to use these individuals as liaisons and establish procedures for potential moments of conflict.

*"We have an effective school social worker-guidance-psychologist team that is trained and helps coordinate homeless issues at the building level, particularly at the intake."  
LEA liaison*

Two liaisons described their own efforts to make homeless students more visible. "I have given presentations to all faculty and staff, as well as an orientation for new teachers to the district, to make them aware of what to look for that might indicate a homeless student." And, in a similar vein, "I send out reminders to our staff on a periodic basis to help them to continuously look for students that may be homeless."

Several liaisons spoke of going outside the district to better identify homeless students. "We identify students locally by working together with school and community organizations. It helps being in a small community where everyone knows each other." Another wrote, "I conduct registration each summer on-site at our biggest shelter. We have designated a specific social worker to work with our homeless population. Her office is located at Central Registration,

where she can meet with each family as they enter our district.” A third reported, “We have also developed a group of LEA liaisons who meet regularly and work together to problem solve and share information.”

Several respondents discussed speakers or trainings offered in their districts on issues related to enrolling homeless students and ensuring their regular attendance. One LEA liaison suggested that it was important to meet regularly to exchange information and develop face-to-face relationships with those involved in enrolling and working with homeless students.

Another LEA liaison wrote of the importance of keeping consistent liaison personnel and offering frequent professional development workshops. Part of these workshops would involve making clear information available about community resources.

*“I am a member of several community groups addressing the needs of our homeless population. We have also developed a group of local homeless liaisons who meet regularly and work together to problem solve and share information.”*  
LEA liaison

A number of general and specific suggestions for improvements in the provision of services to homeless students were suggested by LEA liaisons, with some already implemented and others in the idea stage. The suggestions included case management teams or case conferencing, and local and community-wide action teams. Several liaisons had conducted and/or suggested visits to homes or shelters where students are housed.

Specific programs suggested included after-school math and literacy programs in shelters and other community-based sites, shelter-based parenting groups, and summer enrichment programs.

## **XII. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The 2006 NYS-TEACHS Liaison Survey suggests that liaisons are working individually and collectively with others in their school systems, across districts, and with social service agencies to solve the problems facing homeless children and youth. Nevertheless, it is clear that the identification of homeless students and the provision of services to this group of vulnerable children must be improved.

### **Findings**

Analysis of the 2006 Survey suggests a number of conclusions about liaisons, their districts and students experiencing homelessness.

1. Because of limited funding, most LEA liaisons in New York State wear multiple hats. Acting as a LEA liaison represents less than a quarter of their responsibilities.

2. Although full-time LEA liaisons are rare, districts with McKinney-Vento funds are more likely to have full-time liaisons, and liaisons spend more time on this issue when their district receives McKinney-Vento funding.
3. LEA liaisons are generally familiar with the McKinney-Vento Act. While a majority of districts complies with its provisions, many fall short of compliance with the Act.
4. Attendance officers/registrars and staff in pupil personnel services carry out more of the mandated duties of a LEA liaison than do those working in other professional areas. Although liaisons who are attendance officers/registrars face potential conflicts of interest when they must both make residency determinations and assist parents in appealing these determinations, a solution reported by some respondents is appointing another individual to assist parents with the appeal.
5. Significant proportions of LEA liaisons are uncertain about such critical questions as:
  - a. When a student should be regarded as homeless;
  - b. Whether or not there are out-of-school homeless youth in their districts;
  - c. What services homeless students are entitled to; and
  - d. What funds are being, or might be, used to provide for homeless students.
6. Most districts identify at least some students who live with others due to losing their own homes (commonly referred to as “doubled-up”) as homeless; however, LEA liaisons report uncertainty, suspicion and conflict surrounding this new broader definition of homelessness.
7. General education students identified as homeless are usually placed in appropriate educational environments within a week, but special education students experience less timely placement, transportation difficulties, and delays in receiving other school services.
8. Not all homeless students in districts with federal free breakfast and lunch programs are receiving this mandated service.
9. Preschool-age homeless children, as well as older homeless youth, appear to be outside the radar of districts and their LEA liaisons.
10. Although liaisons in large districts experience more barriers to the documentation, administration and coordination of services for homeless students, large districts also provide more supports and services to these students than do all districts.

## **Recommendations**

Below are several important changes at the state and LEA-levels that if implemented could result in improved identification, more expeditious enrollment, and better provision of educational services to students who are homeless.

**State Education Department should:**

1. Increase training for districts on the definition of homelessness.
2. Promote the availability and use of McKinney-Vento sub-grant funding to districts. This is especially important, given the relatively few number of districts that applied for McKinney-Vento funds in the past, and the significant challenges districts report in complying with the Act.
3. Provide training and better monitor use of Title I, Part A set-aside funding given the relatively low number of districts providing support services.
4. Ensure that in districts allocating McKinney-Vento or Title I set-aside funding to liaisons' salaries, an appropriate amount of time is being devoted to the duties of the LEA liaison and not diverted to other tasks.
5. Develop a model intake/data collection form for school-age children that asks for information about preschool age siblings to help districts better identify and serve this overlooked population.
6. Coordinate with other agencies collecting data on vulnerable children and youth.

**Local Educational Agencies, and particularly district leaders, should:**

1. Make clear to all district and school-level personnel that they must enforce the mandates of the McKinney-Vento Act.
2. Train relevant individuals, including LEA liaisons, teachers, social workers, nurses, and others in contact with homeless children, to make sure that they are aware of the availability and proper uses of Title I, Part A set-aside funding.
3. Improve the allocation of limited funding to maximize its effectiveness in serving students who are homeless.
4. Promote collaboration among such

Given that the McKinney-Vento Act is largely an unfunded mandate, districts should examine all funding sources—including McKinney-Vento sub-grants, Title I set-aside funds, 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds, Academic Intervention Services, Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention funds, and allocations for Academic Intervention Services—and develop comprehensive plans to comply with law and meet the academic needs of students who are homeless.

departments as pupil personnel services, transportation, and the Committee on Special Education, and ensure that bureaucratic obstacles do not create barriers to compliance.

5. Improve coordination between school districts and the Department of Social Services to better identify and serve students who are homeless.
6. Improve communication and contacts within and across districts so that transportation problems are quickly resolved, and homeless students are expeditiously enrolled in, and regularly attending, school.
7. Select and appoint staff members who are best suited to carry out the mandated responsibilities of liaison. Although our Survey results suggest that a staff member affiliated with pupil personnel services can effectively fulfill the responsibilities mandated by the McKinney-Vento Act, potential conflicts of interest must be worked out in advance. Appointing an appropriate staff member as a LEA liaison is especially important in large districts where obstacles and delays suggest the need for someone with the capacity and authority to operate effectively.

District leaders should conduct annual meetings with representatives of the Department of Social Services to formalize how data should be shared about homeless students. A regular working group should also be convened with representatives of the Department of Social Services, Youth Bureau, community service providers, and others to discuss common challenges and solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey on which this report is based was conducted while Ascher and Phenix were at the Institute for Education and Social Policy, Steinhardt School of Education, New York University. The researchers are currently at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, New York office.

<sup>2</sup> Stern, Leonard. (2006). Introduction. *Moving Out, Moving Up: Families Beyond Shelters*. New York: White Tiger Press, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Coalition for the Homeless. (2006). *State of the Homeless 2006*. New York: Coalition for the Homeless.

<sup>4</sup> Advocates for Children. (2006, September). Up Against the Odds: New York City's Homeless Children Lose Out in School. New York City: Advocates for Children of New York.

<sup>5</sup> LOUISE is NYSED's electronic data collection system for information related to the education of children and youth who are homeless. All districts that receive McKinney-Vento funds, larger districts, and several districts in Suffolk County must complete LOUISE on an annual basis.

<sup>6</sup> BEDS, NYSED's primary electronic data collection system, includes several questions regarding to the number, grade level, and housing situation of homeless students, that all districts must complete.

<sup>7</sup> Since liaisons were asked to check those activities that they perform, liaisons who skipped the question are calculated as not performing the activities.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in New York City alone, there were 19,328 children ages 6-17 in the family shelter system in 2004-2005. This excludes students in Runaway and Homeless Youth programs and those in doubled up situations who are covered by McKinney-Vento. Advocates for Children. (2006)., p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> The federal government has attempted to make the provision of free meals to students who are homeless more accessible by allowing liaisons to submit a list of the names and dates of birth of such students rather than have the students fill out applications. It is crucial that liaisons are informed of this provision in order to assure that homeless students receive the nutritional benefits that the law provides to them.

<sup>10</sup> Advocates for Children. (2006)., p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Respondents were asked to check all that apply. Thus, these percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

<sup>12</sup> Respondents were asked to check all that apply. Thus, these percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

<sup>13</sup> Please note that all districts receiving Title I funds must have an enrollment form or residency questionnaire that addresses a student's housing status.