

Delivering Educational Services to Homeless Students

The Challenges and Successes of Homeless Liaisons

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About this paper

- Report on research for New York State, in collaboration with a local advocacy and training organization in New York City
- Authors: Carol Ascher and Deinya Phenix
- Other team members: Jennifer Pringle, Advocates for Children; Dorothy Siegel, New York University
- Interdisciplinary

About this paper

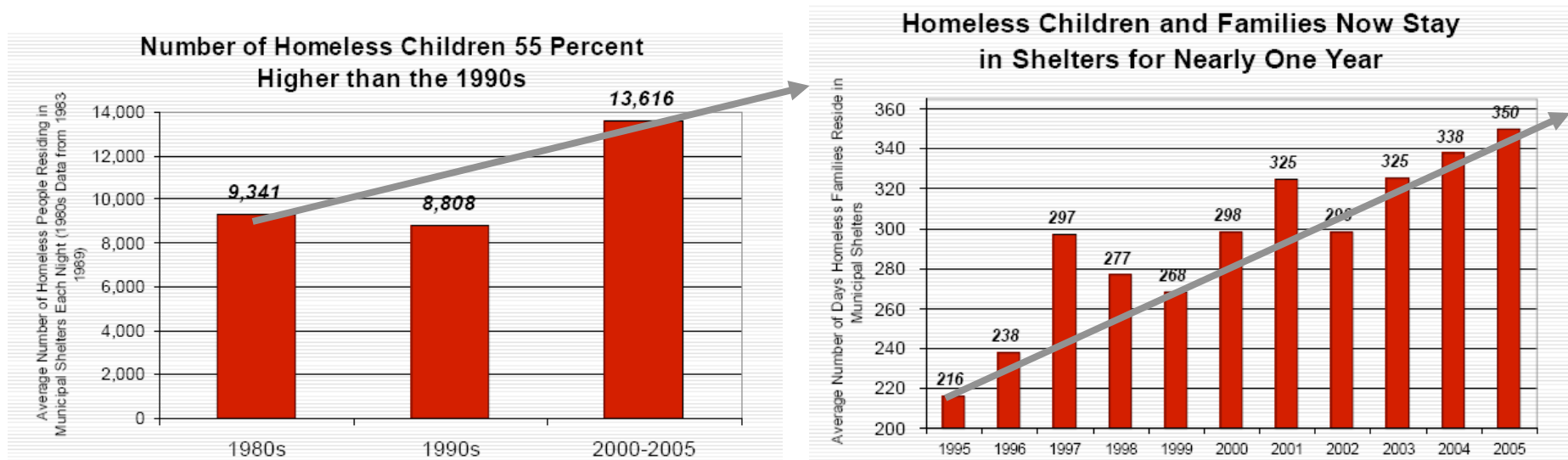
- Primary data: survey responses by district (Local Education Agency) staff throughout New York State
- “Homeless Liaisons” = Staff appointed as liaisons to assist homeless students and their families
- Survey and paper discuss challenges and promising practices that district and school administrators face in implementing the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Today's presentation

- Context of this research:
 - Background
 - McKinney-Vento Act
 - New York State demography and administrative structure
- Survey respondents: Who liaisons are
- Survey findings: What they said and important themes in the data
- Conclusions, recommendations and discussion
- Update on new work?

Context of this research: Background

Homelessness has become “a permanent feature of the poverty landscape” (Stern, 2006)



Source: Coalition for the Homeless, State of the Homeless 2006.

- Growth in homeless numbers, especially New York State (44% increase since the 90s; 55% higher for children)
- Thus, homelessness is a growing issue for school systems and schools
- Urban and rural problem

ABCs of the McKinney-Vento Act

A. **Entitles and protects:** Homeless children 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 in school without providing proof of residency, immunizations, or other documents normally needed for enrollment;
- Receive transportation to the school of origin or to the local school;
- Receive the same special programs and services provided to all other students; and
- Enroll and attend class in the school of their choice even while the parent and the school resolve disagreements about enrollment.

ABCs of the McKinney-Vento Act

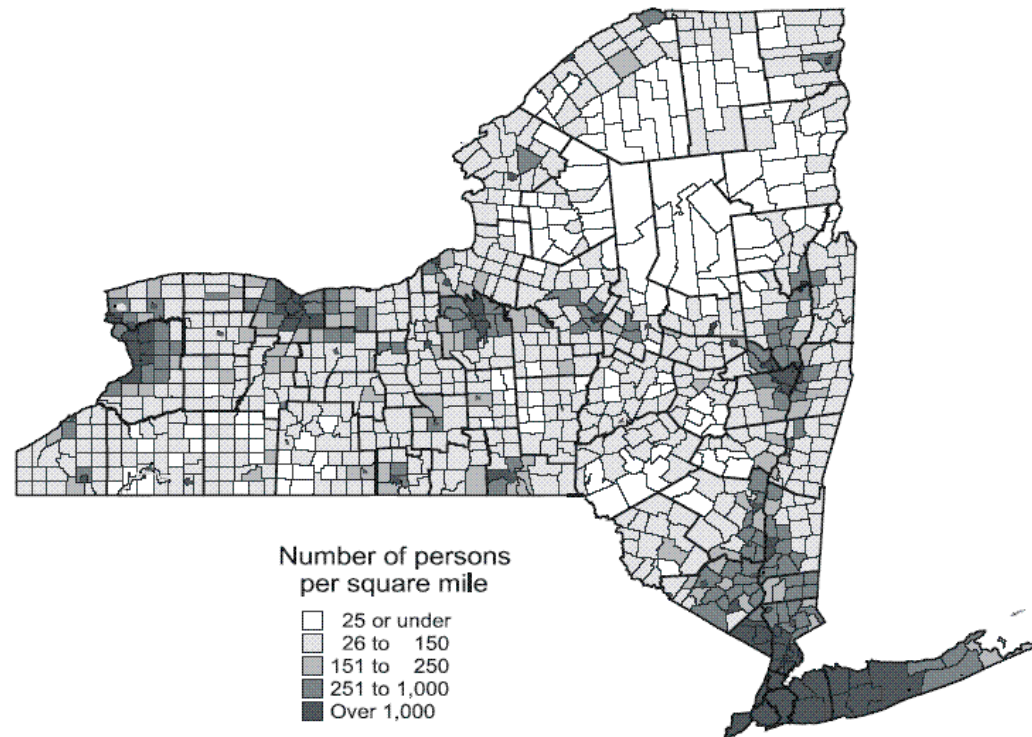
B. **Defines**: Children defined as homeless if they lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes those who are:

- sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing or economic hardship,
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or emergency shelters, or
- staying a nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for ordinary use as a regular sleeping accommodation.

C. **Includes a staffing directive**: Every LEA required to appoint an appropriate staff person to act as a liaison for homeless students and ensure that these rights are upheld.

NYS Geography, Demography and Administrative Structure

- 696 school districts
- Several major cities like Buffalo, New York, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers
- 38 Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) for groups of smaller districts
- NYC: 32 sub-districts (34 liaisons)



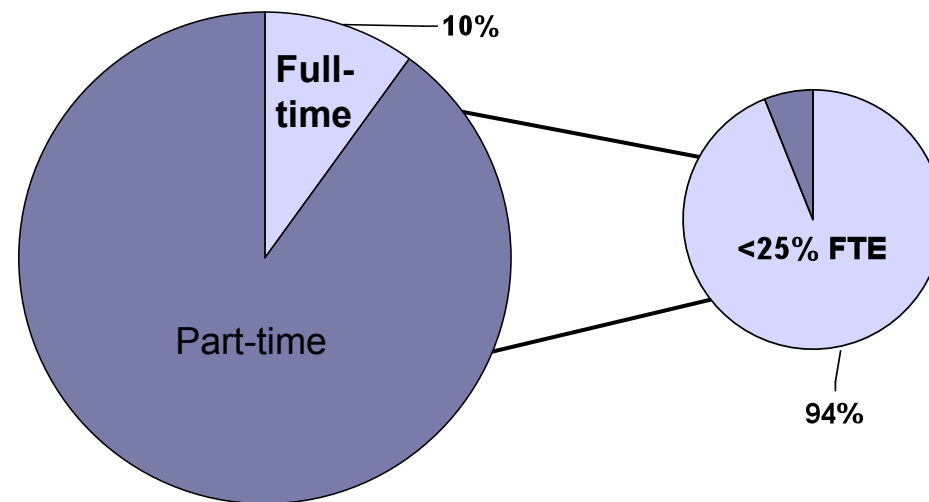
Survey of LEA Liaisons

- Developed in collaboration with the New York State Technical and Educational Assistance Center on Homeless Students, which is funded by the New York State Education Department
- Administered online in May-June 2006
- Sent to 789 liaisons
- 501 respondents (64% response rate)

LEA Liaison Respondents

- 94% from regular districts
- Size range consistent with range in administrative data
- <10% full-time liaisons
- Of those who were part-time, 94% spent less than 25% of their time as a liaison

| Size of District | Percent |
|--|---------|
| small LEAs (less than 2500 students) | 61 |
| medium LEAs (2500-4500 students) | 17 |
| large LEAs (4500-10,000 students) | 15 |
| very large LEAs (over 10,000 students) | 7 |



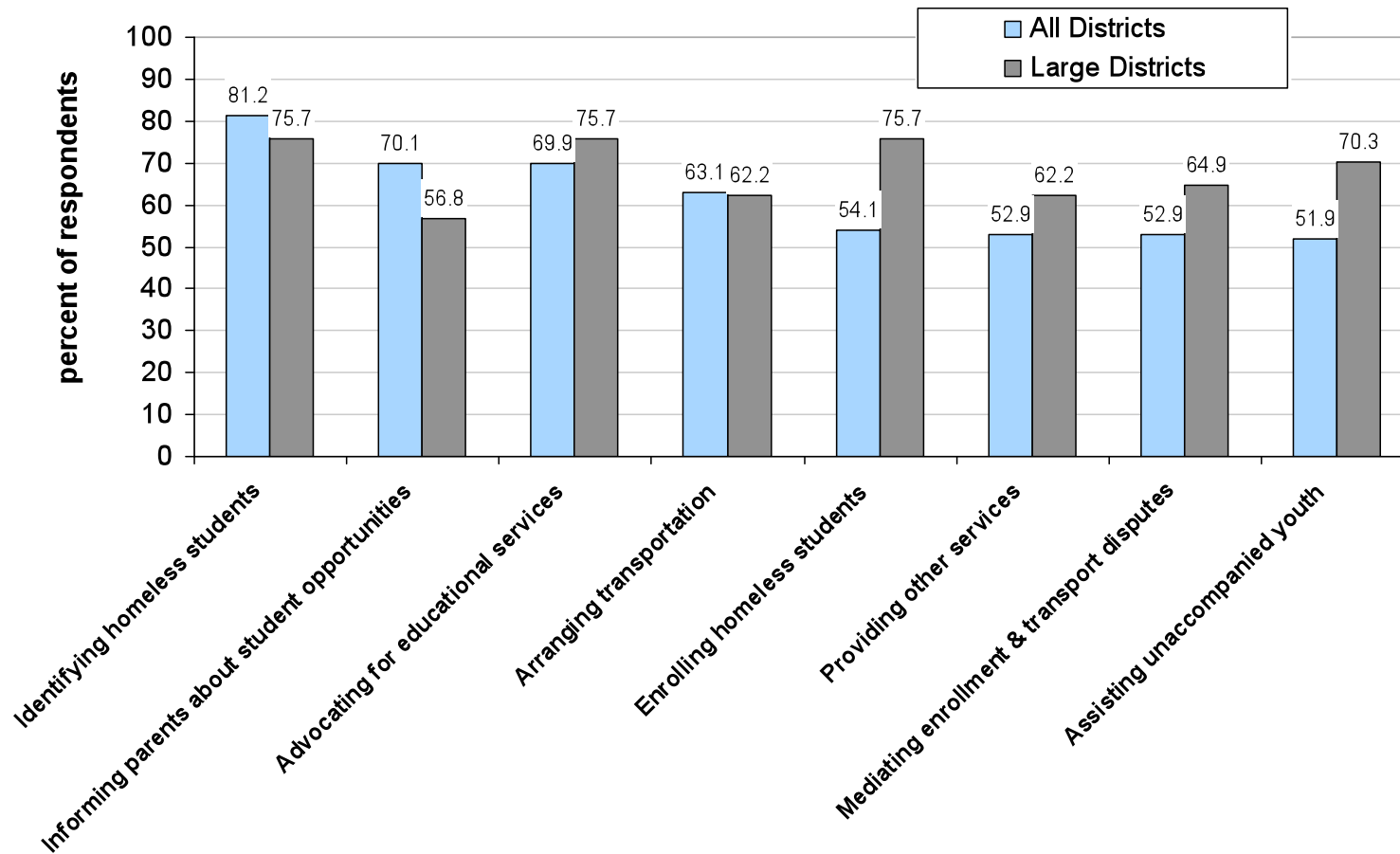
Other Roles Performed by Liaisons

- School or district administrator (36%)
- Pupil personnel services staff (19%)
- Guidance counselors (14%)
- Special education personnel (8%)
- Attendance officer/registrar (4%)
- Title I coordinator (3%)
- Other (16%, including 6 superintendents/asst superintendents, 3 school nurses, and several “all of the above”)

Liaisons are stretched thin, and usually have little authority to influence district policy or operations.

“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!”

Of their mandated responsibilities, which did liaisons tend to do?



Of each of the activities that homeless liaisons are mandated to perform, not one was universally conducted.

Barriers and Challenges faced by Liaisons: Identifying homeless students



- Counting students within and between districts
 - Knowledge of students living outside of LEA (1/3 of liaisons “don’t know”)
 - Awareness of temporary housing arrangements
 - Pre-school-age and older homeless youth are outside the radar of LEAs
- Stigma and uncertainty about the definition of homelessness affects counts of 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.”*

“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.”

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

Barriers and Challenges: Documentation

- Between 35% and 42% of liaisons report documentation as a barrier to immediate enrollment of homeless children.

Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Barriers Due to Documentation Requirements

| Type of Documentation | Always a barrier | Sometimes | Never a barrier |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 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 |

Barriers and Challenges:

Other Administrative Barriers

- A range of administrative and coordination problems are barriers to the immediate enrollment of homeless students. These problems tend to be more frequent in large districts.

Percentage of Liaisons Reporting Administrative Barriers in All and Large LEAs

| Administrative Barriers | All LEAs | Over 10,000 students |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Confusion regarding the definition of homelessness | 53.0 | 56.7 |
| Transportation between LEAs 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 LEA administrators refusal to enroll students immediately | 16.7 | 44.8 |
| Transportation within the LEA not readily available | 15.2 | 39.3 |
| School or LEA 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 |

Uses of McKinney-Vento Funding



- Note: McKinney-Vento grants are relatively small (\$100k/district)
- Only 37% of M-V-funded LEAs use these funds for the salaries of LEA liaisons
- Nearly 17% say they don't know how the funds are being used.
- 13% said they didn't know if their district gets M-V funding at all.
- Disconnect

| Funds spent on: | Percentage of liaisons who report use of funding |
|--|---|
| 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 |

Respondents were asked to check all that apply. Thus, these percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

Sound Practices

- Working in groups with other liaisons and with other agencies
- Training of pertinent administrators and educators
- Targeted use of McKinney-Vento and other funding

“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.”

“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.”

“I have given presentations to all faculty and staff, as well as an orientation for new teachers to the LEA, to make them aware of what to look for that might indicate a homeless student.”

Recommendations

| To the State Education Department: | To Districts/LEAs: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Provide more training■ Promote the availability of McKinney-Vento funding■ Advocate for more funding■ Provide better monitoring■ Coordinate with other agencies collecting data on vulnerable children and youth | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Improve the use of limited funding■ Select staff that are best suited to carry out the mandated responsibilities and ensure that liaisons are not diverted to other tasks■ Improve coordination with other agencies, e.g., the local Department of Social Services |

Discussion

- NCLB realities: Accountability without resources
- Liaisons in particularly difficult place
- Legal and moral responsibility, dilemma
- Invisibility of vulnerable pupils

Further Reading

- Stern, Leonard. (2006). *Moving Out, Moving Up: Families Beyond Shelters*. New York: White Tiger Press.
- Coalition for the Homeless. (2006). *State of the Homeless 2006*. New York: Coalition for the Homeless.
- 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.