NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

Beds And Buses: How Affordable Housing Can Help Reduce School Transportation Costs

A Report of the
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
In Collaboration With
Columbia Legal Services

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To this end, we employ three main strategies: impact litigation, policy advocacy, and public education. We are a persistent and effective voice on behalf of homeless Americans, speaking effectively to federal, state, and local policy makers. We also produce investigative reports and provide legal and policy support to local organizations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Even in the best of circumstances, the more frequently a child moves between residences and schools, the more disruption she faces in her pattern of learning and behavioral development.[1] When the child also faces homelessness, her education and development suffer, but so do her physical and mental health, her interpersonal relationships, and her resilience and resistance against risky activities.[2] In 1987, Congress passed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act ("McKinney-Vento"), which, among other rights and programs, provides a measure of stability for homeless students. McKinney-Vento requires school districts to keep homeless students in their schools of origin (i.e. the school the student last attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the student was last enrolled) if doing so furthers the best interests of these students. This determination is a child-centered decision based on, among other factors, the student's age, safety, educational well-being, and special instruction needs.[3] Upon the request of the student, parent, or the school district's McKinney-Vento liaison, the district must also provide transportation for the homeless student to her school of origin.[4] Evidence shows that the McKinney-Vento policies have helped reduce and reverse the effects of homelessness by providing a stable school setting for homeless students to learn, socialize, and grow.[5]

However, the available data also indicate that the costs to transport homeless students are very high. While anecdotal reports appear frequently in the news, in 2006, the Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation funded the first in-depth study of transportation costs for homeless students.[6] The study looked at the different modes of transport and their costs, the perceived benefits for students and staff alike, and the effect on students' academic performance. The study found a positive correlation between transportation to the school of origin and academic performance, and general satisfaction with the program.

While transportation must continue as an essential service for homeless students, a better option for the students, and more cost-effective resolution for the community, is preventing homelessness from forcing the family or youth out of the district in the first place. This paper proposes schools and communities work together to create more affordable housing to supplement exclusive reliance on McKinney-Vento transportation policies. When possible, housing a student and their family in their district of origin is a more efficient and more effective alternative to transporting students back to that district. For example, in the Seattle area, the costs to house unaccompanied homeless youth in supportive housing, or to place a homeless family in a two bedroom apartment with a Section 8 voucher, are less than or equal to the likely costs

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[1] T. Jellyman & N. Spencer, *Residential Mobility in Childhood and Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review*, 62(7) JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH 584-592 (2008) (hereinafter "*Residential Mobility"*).
[2] *See* J. Obradovic et al., *Effortful Control and Adaptive Functioning of Homeless Children: Variable-Focused and Person-Focused Analyses*, 31 JOURNAL OF APPLIED DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY 109-117 (2010); J.C. Buckner et al., *Characteristics of Resilient Children Living in Poverty: The Role of Self-Regulatory Processes*, 15 DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY 139-162 (2003).
[3] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B).
[4] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii).
[5] Daniel Carson et al., *Homeless Student Transportation Project Evaluation*, Washington State Transportation Center (TRAC), University of Washington (December 2006).
[6] *Id.* at vi and 18.

associated with providing special transportation.[7] Providing long-term, stable, affordable housing also has the effect of stabilizing the lives of formerly homeless students at home, and at school. Researchers have demonstrated that re-housing homeless children in stable, affordable housing allows them to "make up" the learning and development they may have lost while homeless.[8] Having a personal and private residence also avoids the problems associated with doubled-up habitation, a common arrangement for homeless families who seek temporary shelter with friends and family members. Therefore, it makes sense from the perspective of students, the schools they attend, and the communities that fund and support the schools, to advocate strongly for affordable housing policies in their communities.

The push for affordable housing is not easy. A critical factor that may determine the success or failure of these efforts is the active collaboration among key stakeholders. In the context of this paper, this includes school administrators, local government officials, students and parents, and affordable housing and homelessness prevention advocates. When these key groups work together toward a goal of stabilizing the educational and social lives of homeless children, the momentum creates innovative housing and education collaborations that benefit entire communities. This paper concludes with several of these examples from across the country.

I. HOUSING STABILITY IS VITAL FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT & ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

A. Homelessness Impairs Child Development & Academic Achievement

As Washington State[9] Governor Christine Gregoire, then Attorney General, acknowledged in a seminal 1997 court case, "…homelessness is a serious, widespread problem in our state … [which] has significant adverse effects upon the growth and development of children" and that "as low cost private housing has disappeared, the number of families who are homeless has increased."[10] Over a decade later, homelessness remains a serious, widespread problem in Washington, rooted—in part—in the lack of affordable housing for the state's families. As the Great Recession and foreclosure crisis continue to take their toll nationwide, homelessness and its damaging effects on the lives of children are getting worse. From the 2006-07 to 2009-10 school years alone, the homeless student population in Washington State has increased 30%, from 16,853 to 21,826 (see Table 1 below).[11] This trend, moreover, is both mirrored and magnified at the national level, where the total number of homeless students has soared 38%, from 679,724 in 2006 to 939,903 in 2010.[12]

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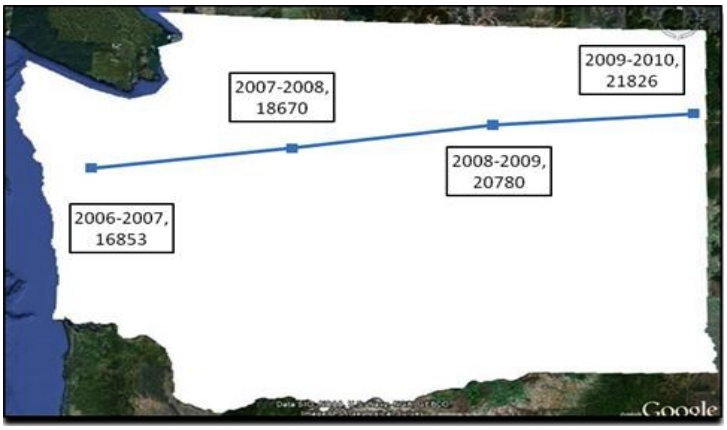
[7] *Infra* at 5.
[8] *Infra* at 6.
[9] This paper stems from an ongoing collaboration between the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and Columbia Legal Services to demonstrate the cross-sectoral benefits of effective implementation of the laws and policies protecting homeless families and students in the Seattle area, but the lessons and trends are nationally applicable.
[10] *Washington State Coalition for the Homeless v. Dep't of Social and Health Services*, 949 P.2d 1291, 1295-96 (S. Ct. of Wash. 1997).
[11] State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *School District Homeless Data Report*, *available at* http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/Resources.aspx.
[12] National Center for Homeless Education, *Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program: Analysis of 2009-2010 Federal Data Collection and Three-Year Comparison* (June 2011); NCHE, *Education for Homeless*

Researchers have documented the well-established link between homelessness and child development in a large body of peer-reviewed literature. Homeless children have worse physical health, are less likely to have a regular source of medical care, and are more likely to use emergency rooms when compared to poor, housed children and the general population.[13] They are delayed in educational achievement, especially in language.[14] Homeless children also experience more mental health and behavioral problems than the general population of children. Children who experience high rates of residential mobility more often exhibit indirect aggression and have more behavioral problems requiring psychological help.[15] Homeless adolescents in particular have higher rates of earlier instances of drug use, depression, sexual behavior, and teen pregnancy.[16] The residential mobility of homeless students also negatively affects their classmates, since exiting and entering students create disruptions and cause teachers to repeat lessons.[17]

Table 1
(Rise of Student Homelessness in WA, 2006-2010)



Children and Youth Program: Analysis of 2008-2009 Federal Data Collection and Three-Year Comparison (June 2010).

[13] Dr. Garth Alperstein et al., *Health Problems of Homeless Children in New York City*, 78 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH 1232-1233 (1987); D.S. Miller & E.H.B. Lin, *Children in Sheltered Homeless Families: Reported Health Status and Use of Health Services*, 81 PEDIATRICS 668-673 (1988); D.L. Wood et al., *Health of Homeless Children and Housed, Poor Children*, 86 PEDIATRICS 858-866 (1990); L. Weinreib et al., *Determinants of Health and Service Use Patterns in Homeless and Low-Income Housed Children*, 102 PEDIATRICS 554-562 (1998).

[14] E.L. Bassuk & L. Rosenberg, *Psychosocial Characteristics of Homeless Children and Children with Homes*, 85 PEDIATRICS 257-261 (1990); Wood et al., *supra* note 10.

[15] *Residential Mobility, supra* note 1.

[16] *Id.*

[17] E.A. Hanushek et al., *Disruption Versus Tiebout Improvement: The Costs and Benefits of Switching Schools*, 88 JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ECONOMICS 1721-1746 (2004) (hereinafter "*Disruption")*.

B. McKinney-Vento Stabilizes the Lives of Homeless Children by Keeping Them in Their Schools of Origin

Over 80% of Americans agree that education is a basic human right, and as such the federal, state, and local governments all have responsibilities to ensure it is available, accessible, adequate, and adaptable.[18] McKinney-Vento stems from a recognition of the severe distress that homeless children face in their daily lives and enshrines in federal law the goal of creating and maintaining a stable environment for them. Thus, when determining the school a homeless child should attend, "according to the child's or youth's best interest," the school district "shall to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child's or youth's parent or guardian."[19] By doing so, school districts provide educational opportunities for students, childcare for parents, and a supportive environment where children and youth can find confidence and self-esteem. McKinney-Vento thus helps ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness can enjoy school stability and access to all the educational services they need to be successful academically and socially.[20] In order for this provision to be effective, McKinney-Vento requires school districts to provide transportation for homeless students to the school of origin upon the request of a parent or guardian, or the McKinney-Vento liaison, and in a manner that is comparable to that provided to housed students.[21]

II. THE LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SHELTER RESULTS IN HIGHER TRANSPORTATION COSTS FOR COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A. Transporting Homeless Students from Distant Locations is Costly for Communities and the School Districts They Support

Providing transportation for homeless students who cannot find housing or shelter near their schools of origin, while a critically important service, can result in significant costs for school districts. Because of the instability that homelessness creates, a student and her family may relocate far from her school of origin. Nevertheless, if it is in the student's best interests to attend her school of origin, the school district must provide transportation.[22] School districts can be responsible for transporting students across district lines, and mileage and travel time are limited only in cases where long-distance transportation conflicts with a student's best interests.[23]

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[18] Opportunity Agenda, *Human Rights in the U.S.: Opinion Research with Advocates, Journalists, and the General Public*, 14 (2007); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force Jan. 3, 1976; Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, General Comment 13: The right to education, *para.* 6 (Twenty-first session, 1999), U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10 (1999),

[19] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(B). "School of origin" is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the student was last enrolled. 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(G).

[20] Patricia Julianelle & Maria Foscarinis, *Responding to the School Mobility of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness: The McKinney-Vento Act and Beyond*, 72 JOURNAL OF NEGRO EDUCATION 1 (2003).

[21] 42 U.S.C. §§ 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii) and (g)(4)(A).

[22] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii).

[23] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii).

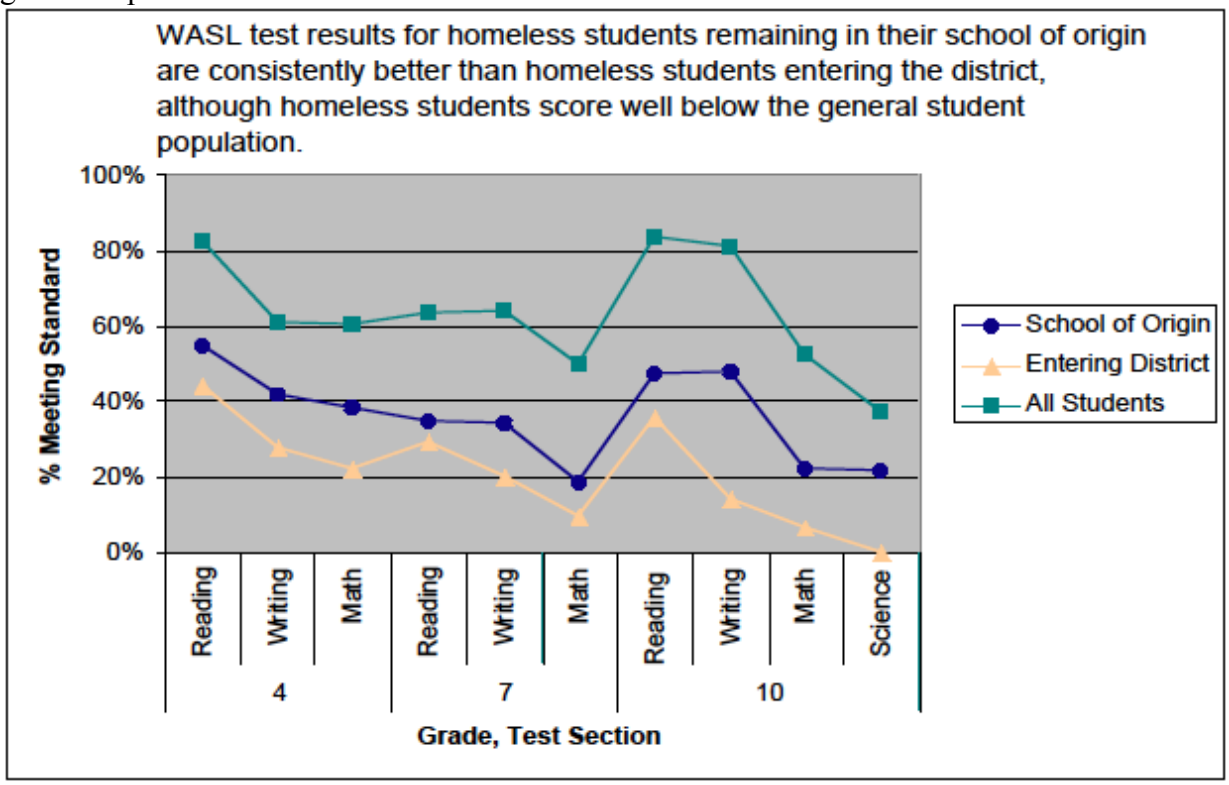
Moreover, since McKinney-Vento requires school districts to provide transportation comparable to that provided to housed students,[24] transportation must be made available for homeless students to attend summer school, athletic programs, and other extracurricular activities where such a service is provided to housed students.

In the state of Washington, school districts are well aware of the transportation costs. Between 2004 and 2006, the Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation conducted a study on the costs and consequences of implementing the McKinney-Vento program in eight educational service districts and school districts in urban, rural and suburban parts of the state.[25] The study found that homeless student transportation was understandably more expensive than transportation of the general school age population. The majority of homeless student trips (79 percent) cost the school districts from just under $3 per one-way trip to over $40 per one-way trip, as opposed to an average of just $.67 for the general student population.[26] Transportation of homeless students by school bus accounted for the largest percentage of student rides provided overall (38 percent), with costs ranging from $4.24 to $53.79 per one-way trip.[27] Public transit bus was the least costly method of transporting homeless students. However, the study found that the availability of public bus service with convenient routes, schedules, and transfers was not adequately reliable, and also, was used mostly for older students, accounting for 22 percent of total trips.[28] Where public bus service is available, it may nevertheless be an unsafe—and thus inappropriate—option if, for example, the student lives on or near an extremely busy intersection or in a dangerous neighborhood. Because school districts must eliminate barriers to the school enrollment and retention of students experiencing homelessness, public bus service under these circumstances would not be an appropriate way for school districts to discharge their McKinney-Vento duties.[29] In fact, the study documents a transportation coordinator who advised a high school student not to take public transit because the bus stop was in a dangerous section of town and the student would be boarding the bus in the dark.[30]

At the same time, the results of the Washington study validated the benefit of the McKinney-Vento transportation policy. The study's researchers asked, "Did a relationship between staying in school of origin and academic performance exist among students in the pilot projects?" By comparing the performance of homeless students that stayed in their school of origin with those who moved, the study concluded that the test scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) of students who stayed in their schools of origin were "consistently better than those of homeless students who changed schools" and the grade point averages of homeless high school students who stayed in their schools of origin were higher than their counterparts who changed schools.[31] As one liaison put it: "It is expensive, but the benefit is phenomenal. Think of a 7-year-old child that changes schools in one year—that's when you're supposed to be learning to read. They don't learn to read! They get to have some things stay the same. Homelessness is always due to a crisis: it's a divorce, it's fleeing domestic violence, it's a family getting kicked

[24] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(4)(A).
[25] *Homeless Student Transportation Project Evaluation. supra* note 5.
[26] *Id.,* at vi.
[27] *Id.* at 9.
[28] *Id.* at 13.
[29] 42 U.S.C. §§ 11432(g)(1)(I) and (g)(7).
[30] *Homeless Student Transportation Project Evaluation, supra* note 5, at 13.
[31] *Id.* at 15-16.

out of their home because they don't have enough money. I don't think the financial cost is that great compared to the benefits."



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B. Transportation Costs are Increasing and are Likely to Continue Increasing

The high transportation costs that the Washington study documents are not particular to Washington but are common across the country.[33] Moreover, the general trend is that these transportation costs—in Washington and nationwide—will only increase as a result of the recession and ensuing (and continuing) foreclosure crisis.[34] Prior research has shown that family homelessness is more sensitive to economic cycles than individual homelessness.[35] One-year estimates of shelter use show that while individual homelessness is decreasing, family

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] For instance, the Springfield Public Schools in Massachusetts ended the 2009 year with a $7.5 million school transportation deficit, largely because transportation of homeless students cost as much as $800 per day for a single van. Jack Flynn, *Impact of Homeless Children on Area School Districts Can Be Significant,* Masslive.com (Mar. 20, 2010), *available at* http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2010/03/impact_of_homeless_children_on.html. In the Calhoun Intermediate School District in Battlecreek, Michigan, the annual cost of transportation ranges from a low of $900-$1000 (public transit), to $4,500 (gas reimbursement), up to a high of $11,000 per student (independent busing). Email from Pam K. Kies-Lowe, Michigan Department of Education, Homeless Education Consultant/State Coordinator, to author (Aug. 4, 2010, 14:36 EST)(on file with author). For the Delton Kellogg Schools in Michigan, the average cost to transport three homeless children 30 miles to and from a women's shelter was $4,640 per student for the 2009-2010 school year. E-mail from Steve Scoville, Delton Kellogg Elementary Principal/Homeless Liaison, to author (Aug. 4, 2010, 14:46 EST)(on file with author).

[34] *Supra* note 5, at 6. *See also*, B. Duffield & P. Lovell, *The Economic Crisis Hits Home*, The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (2008).

[35] D. Culhane et al., *Prevalence of Child Welfare Services Involvement Among Homeless and Low-Income Mothers: A Five-Year Birth Cohort Study*, 3 JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WELFARE 79-95 (2003).

homelessness is rapidly increasing, with almost 94,000 more family members in shelter at some point during 2010 than had been during 2007. The continued growth in the number of families staying in homeless shelters almost certainly reflects the ongoing effect of the recession.[36] What this research means for school districts and its students is unfortunately predictable: more students will face destabilizing settings as they and their families move from their homes to homelessness; and more schools will be providing transportation for more homeless students, often from outlying suburban and rural areas to their schools of origin.

III. AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS LESS COSTLY FOR COMMUNITIES

Fortunately, there is an alternative to the high cost of special transportation, and it is both more cost-efficient for the communities that fund school districts, and more stabilizing in the long-term for children: affordable housing. This is an idea with support from experts and from people on the ground. For instance, the authors of the Washington study incorporated into their report this suggestion from a transportation coordinator: "Enable the school district to provide housing close to the school with McKinney-Vento funding instead of transportation. This would be less costly to the district and more beneficial to the student."[37] Similarly, advocates have long argued that, "schools alone cannot lift the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. Investments in students' 'social capital' are essential to their academic achievement. Safe, affordable, and stable housing may be the most critical element of that social capital."[38]

Section 8 housing vouchers, for example, are a cost-efficient, affordable housing option that could be used in place of the high McKinney-Vento transportation costs. Under published Seattle Housing Authority voucher payment standards, the maximum cost to the city of a Section 8 voucher for a one-bedroom apartment is $790 a month, or $9,480 a year (because the listed numbers are the maximum costs, the average costs will be lower).[39] The maximum cost to Seattle of a Section 8 voucher for a two-bedroom apartment is $1,058 a month, or $12,696 a year; Seattle housing costs are the highest in the state, other cities face even lower costs. In the alternative, to house and support unaccompanied youth in five Washington youth housing programs costs on average $6,250 annually per resident.[40]

By contrast, assuming that a school operates 180 days a year, the cost to school districts in the Washington study for two-way trips for a homeless student varied from a low of $50.40 to a high of $19,364 a year.[41] While the data provided are not entirely clear on the numbers of students receiving services by various modes at different price points, of seven districts surveyed, the three districts that used school buses as their sole means of transport averaged a cost of $13,775 per student annually, and three of the four other districts which used multiple forms of transportation had costs ranging from $9,000 to $12,600 for third party transit and/or taxi service

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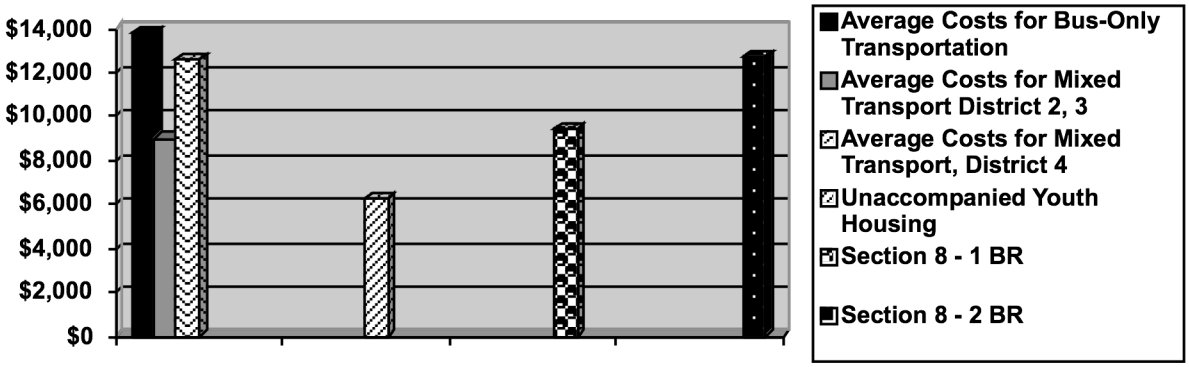
[36] HUD, *The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* ,11 (June 2011), *available at* http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2010HomelessAssessmentReport.pdf.
[37] *Homeless Student Transportation Project Evaluation, supra* note 5, at 18.
[38] *Disruption, supra* note 16.
[39] Seattle Housing Authority, Program Overview, http://www.seattlehousing.org/housing/vouchers/overview.
[40] Data from Cheryl Bayle, Community Services and Housing Division, Washington State Department of Commerce (May 23, 2011) (on file with author).
[41] *Homeless Student Transportation Project Evaluation, supra* note 5, at 12-13.

of their students.[42] Only in one district were annual transportation costs significantly lower across all forms of transportation. Since buses, third party, and taxis make up two-thirds of annual student rides, in most scenarios, the cost of housing a student in supportive housing ($6,250 per year) or housing an entire family with a Section 8 voucher ($9, 480 or $12,696 per year for a 1- or 2-bedroom apartment, respectively) and transporting that student with regular student transportation ($241.20) would be roughly equivalent to or even less than the likely cost of out-of-district transportation, and far more beneficial given the long term effects of stability for the children's education. For families with multiple children in 2 (or more) bedroom apartments, the savings would multiply accordingly.

Unfortunately, the available data do not make exact direct district-by-district or student-by-student comparisions possible, however, the table below demonstrates the rough equivalency or savings potential. As a narrative example, it would cost the local housing authority a maximum of $12,696 per year to house homeless family of mother and father with one high-school age child and one middle-school age child in a two-bedroom apartment with a Section 8 voucher. But, if the family had to to move outside the district for temporary housing, the costs to the district of transporting the two students separately would average in a range from $18,000 to $27, 550 depending on the type of transportation used.[43] So giving an entire family housing and all the cumulative benefits that endows costs 42 - 117% *less* than forcing that family to exit the district, have to deal with the stresses of homelessness, and transport the children back to their school of origin. In this situation, providing local affordable housing options clearly appears to be the preferable alternative for family and the community.

Table 2

Annual Cost Comparisons of McKinney-Vento Transportation and Affordable Housing Alternatives



[42] *See Homeless Student Transportation Project Evaluation, supra* note 5, at 10.

[43] It is not unreasonable to assume separate transportation, given different school starting times and potential after-school extracurricular activities.

IV. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROVIDES MORE LONG-TERM STABILITY FOR STUDENTS THAN TRANSPORTATION AND BENEFITS COMMUNITIES

A. Affordable Housing Eliminates Homelessness

As the Washington study demonstrates, McKinney-Vento has helped to reduce the achievement gap between homeless students and the general student population by keeping homeless students in their schools of origin. Despite this progress, the task remains to eliminate and not just mitigate homelessness. Affordable housing is a tool that does just that, and in the process, provides longer-term stability for formerly homeless children. Homeless families that receive subsidies are far less likely to return to shelters and far more likely to attain long-term stability.[44] In a study of families provided with Section 8 vouchers, housing retention was excellent. When higher rates of housing stability did not occur, providers suggested that failure to renew the vouchers was one reason for subsequent returns to shelters.[45] In another large-scale study of families in transitional housing in the Seattle area, the Sound Families Program, the results showed that these families made gains in employment, income, and attendance and school stability for children.[46]

B. Affordable Housing Reverses the Effects of Homelessness

While the deleterious effects of homelessness can be long-lasting, providing stable, affordable housing for children can provide them with the opportunity to "make up" what they may have lost while homeless. Researchers have shown that students with frequent residency changes have increased adverse effects on academic performance, rates of grade retention, and rates of high school graduation.[47] However, while students' performance dropped during transitions in housing and shelter usage, it partially recovered after they were re-housed, so that they no longer differed significantly from other poor housed children.[48] Similarly, in a comprehensive 15-month study of 1,100 homeless children ages 2-16 years, a similar pattern was observed in which behavior problems were initially elevated when the children were assessed in a shelter environment, but then moderated in severity over time as families became re-housed.[49]

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[44] *See* Wong et al., *Predictors of Exit and Reentry Among Family Shelter Users in New York City*, 71 SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW 441-462 (1997) and M. Shinn et al., *Predictors of Homelessness Among Families in New York City: From Shelter Request to Housing Stability*, 88 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH 1651-1657 (1998).

[45] D.J. Rog et al., *Implementation of the Homeless Families Program: 1.Service Models and Preliminary Outcomes*, 65 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 502-513 (1995a); D.J. Rog & J.C. Bucker, *Homeless Families and Children in* TOWARD UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS: THE 2007 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH (2007).

[46] Northwest Institute for Children and Families University of Washington School of Social Work, *Early Exits: Lessons Learned from Families Asked to Leave Supportive Transitional Housing Programs* (2006).

[47] Edward Scanlon & Kevin Devine, *Residential mobility and youth well-being: Research, policy, and practice issues*, 28 JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WELFARE 119-138 (2001).

[48] Y. Rafferty et al., *Academic Achievement Among Formerly Homeless Adolescents and Their Continuously Housed Peers*, 42 JOURNAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY 179-199 (2004).

[49] J.C. Buckner et al., *Predictors of Homeless Children's Problem Behaviors Over Time: Findings From the CMHS/CSAT Homeless Families Program*, AMERICAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY (In Press).

Additionally, moving homeless families into affordable housing has a clear, positive impact on the family dynamic. By living closer to their children's schools of origin, parents are better able to participate in school activities and engage with teachers and school administrators. As Kerbow has noted, "[d]rawing families, particularly those new to a school, into open and personal relationships creates an incentive for a family to remain at that school and to resolve conflicts that may arise."[50] Families that move into their own stable housing are also able to leave the confines of doubled-up living arrangements. During the 2009-2010 school year, almost three-quarters of homeless children enrolled in schools (72 percent) were living doubled-up as their primary nighttime residence (which qualifies as homeless under the federal Department of Education definition[51]), a 33% increase over the past three years.[52] Across a number of studies, residential crowding—an inevitable consequence of doubled-up living situations—has been associated with social withdrawal, elevated levels of aggression, psychological distress, poor behavioral adjustment in school, and lower levels of social and cognitive competency. Parents in crowded homes talk less to infants, are less responsive to young children, and are more likely to engage in punitive parenting than other parents.[53] And, parents who suffer from substance abuse, unemployment, and mental and physical health ailments are not often linked to available resources if they live in crowded, doubled-up settings. But once in stable, affordable housing, these parents will have the privacy to seek out and receive appropriate treatment.

V. SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND HOUSING AGENCIES SHOULD COLLABORATE TO PROVIDE AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES

The intersection of the McKinney-Vento Act's requirement of access to education for homeless children and youth, and the need for affordable housing for families was explicitly noted in 1992 with the enactment of the Cranston-Gonzales National Affordable Housing Act. The Cranston-Gonzales Act stipulates that, "state and local housing agencies are responsible for developing the comprehensive housing affordability strategy . . . to minimize educational disruption for homeless children. Such coordination should ensure that homeless children have access and reasonable proximity to available education and related support services and 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."[54] Similarly, under the HEARTH Act, HUD Continuums of Care are required to collaborate with school districts to assist in the identification and enrollment of homeless children and youth, and under McKinney-Vento, liaisons are required to collaborate with community service providers.[55] Schools are not housing providers,

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[50] David Kerbow et al., *Student Mobility and Local School Improvement in Chicago*, JOURNAL OF NEGRO EDUCATION (Winter 2003).
[51] 42 U.S.C. §11434A(2)(B)(i).
[52] National Center for Homeless Education, *Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program: Data Collection Summary from the School Year 2009-10 Federally Required State Data Collection for the McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001 and Comparison of the 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10 Data Collections* 4,15 (2011).
[53] G.W. Evans, *Child Development and the Physical Environment,* 57 ANNUAL REVIEW OF PSYCHOLOGY 423-451 (2006).
[54] *Cranston-Gonzales National Affordable Housing Act,* 42 U.S.C. §12704.
[55] HEARTH Act, Sec. 427(a)(1)(B)(iii); 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A).

but for many newly homeless families, or those at risk of homelessness, the school homeless liaison may be their entry point into a broader world of service provision. Homeless liaisons have a duty to ensure the enrollment and retention of homeless students,[56] and in many cases, the best way to do that would be to provide immediate access to local housing resources. Thus, the McKinney-Vento and Cranston-Gonzales Acts both recommend a close collaboration between schools and housing authorities.

While Cranston-Gonzales' mandate has been unevenly implemented at best, a number of model practices do exist. On a federal level, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has recently proposed a program in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to help stabilize families experiencing homelessness as part of their new Housing and Services for Homeless Persons Demonstration.[57] The collaborative program will specifically target resources that can help identify families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, provide housing assistance, income support, and services to make sure the families are stably housed, and provide the family with the tools necessary to reach full self-sufficiency.[58].

This program has yet to be funded, but HUD, HHS, and the DOE have noted the benefits of such a collaborative effort for homeless students and school districts. HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) noted that stable housing positively impacts a child's ability to excel in school.[59] This collaborative initiative can effectively address the overarching issues of providing homeless children with an education, lowering the schools' costs of services to these families, and reducing homelessness and poverty. Furthermore HUD's proposed initiative would provide state and local authorities with the incentive to adopt similar collaborative programs—as the program requires states to demonstrate that they have created a well-designed and collaborative program between the local TANF agency, local public schools, and other community partners in order to receive Housing Choice Vouchers from HUD.[60]

Below is a summary of various state-implemented programs that illustrate that collaboration between school districts and local housing authorities benefits both students and school districts.

A. The Front Door Project – Tacoma and Sumner, Washington

The Front Door Project was a collaboration between two Washington State school districts (Tacoma and Sumner), as well as the Tacoma Housing Authority, Bates Technical College, Washington Women's Education and Employment, and the Helping Hand House, a local non-profit dedicated to providing transitional housing for homeless families and individuals. The project was a pilot program funded by a three-year grant through the Homeless Grant Assistance Program (a Washington State-funded grant program) and received additional funding to continue to support families through August 2011.

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[56] 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A).
[57] U.S. DEP'T OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT, OVERVIEW OF NEW AND CROSS-CUTTING INITIATIVES, HOUSING & SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PERSONS DEMONSTRATIONS (2010), *available at* http://hud.gov/offices/cfo/reports/2011/cjs/has-homeless-demo2011.pdf.
[58] *Id.*
[59] *Id.*
[60] *Id.*

Counselors and liaisons in these school districts help families applied for housing, and provide services to the families after an initial screening process. Helping Hand provided housing services and rental subsidies to identified families. As the participant's income increases, s/he assumed more of the support costs with the goal of being able to pay full rent and support the household. The agencies in collaboration met monthly to review the status of each family and discussed the services each family will need in order to gain or maintain stability.

To be eligible, a family must be homeless or at risk of homelessness; have at least one child attending Daffodil Elementary School in the Sumner school district; reside in the catchment area of Daffodil Elementary School; and have a head of household willing and able to work.

In addition to promoting the academic gains and behavioral improvements that follow from stable housing, Front Door has minimized transportation costs for participating students. The approximate cost of transporting out-of-district students to Sumner school district via private bus service is $3/mile, a rate that, in the 2009-2010 school year, yielded a total expense of approximately $150,000 to serve fewer than 25 homeless students with long-distance commutes.[61] Additionally, the district spent $110,000 on over two hundred homeless students in need of shorter distance transportation.[62] Front Door Project families, by contrast, receive rental assistance in order to remain in affordable housing near their school, thereby relieving the school district of the need to use McKinney-Vento sub-grants to provide special transportation for them. The Front Door Project's budget for rental assistance was approximately $272,000 per year and targeted to help 35 adults and 55 children per year, placing the costs on par with transportation, but with far greater benefits to the entire family and community.[63]

Lessons Learned: By bringing other community agencies directly into the schools to work with homeless and at-risk families, Tacoma and Sumner are on the leading edge of effective housing and education policy. By identifying homeless and at-risk students, the housing and social service agencies are able to provide much-needed resources to these children and their families. Equipped with these resources, parents are able to eventually assume financial responsibility for their own housing. This residential stability translates into stability in school for the students, who are then able to take full advantage of their schools' resources. Such stability, together with reduced transportation costs, shows that close collaboration between school districts and other social service agencies benefits all involved.

B. It's All About the Kids Collaborative Program – Minneapolis, Minnesota

This Minnesota program involves a unique collaboration between the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA), the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) and the state and local government to provide services to aid homeless families in finding permanent and affordable housing close to their children's schools.

[61] Interview with Marilee Hill-Anderson, McKinney-Vento Grant Program Manager, Sumner School District (Apr. 27, 2011).
[62] *Id*.
[63] Gary Aden, Homeless Grant Assistance Program 2007 Project Summary (Oct. 2007).

The Kids Collaborative model begins with social workers at one of the MPS identifying families in need of permanent, affordable housing. The MPS social worker refers such families to the Lutheran Social Service (LSS) which, using the Housing First approach, educates the families about tenant rights, provides housing search training, and offers various other family support services. Once families find appropriate housing, the MPHA provides Housing Choice vouchers or rental subsidies to make the cost of housing more affordable. The LSS continues to provide case management support for the families as they move in and get settled in their new neighborhoods. Additionally, the LSS works with the owners of the housing properties that rent to the families.

The Kids Collaborative program is responsible for successfully housing 441 children and youth (approximately 141 families) near their schools. As a result, MPS has reported increased parental involvement in children's education, which in turn has resulted in increased family stability. Although the Kids Collaborative program serves a small, but growing, group of 60 individuals, it is saving money for the MPS by reducing McKinney-Vento transportation costs.

Lessons Learned: The Kids Collaborative Program is an excellent example of the positive effects that affordable housing has on family stability, as well as academic achievement for children. By providing stable housing and a network of social service providers, parents are able to participate more intimately in the academic lives of their children. In this way, with schoolteachers, administrators, and parents monitoring the progress of their students, educational progress will become the norm rather than an aspiration.

C. Next Step Housing Program – Mesa County, Colorado

The Next Step Housing Program was created in 2006 as a collaborative effort between the Mesa County School District (MCSD), the Grand Junction Housing Authority (GJHA), the Mesa County Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Mesa County Workforce Center (MCWC). With financing from the Colorado Division of Housing and grants from various local agencies, Next Step provides safe and affordable housing for homeless families. The Next Step program also offers school-based assistance including projects developed to improve children's school attendance rates, academic performance, and graduation rates.

During the 2004-2005 school year, 527 children in MCSD were identified as homeless. Sixty-three percent of these children lived in "doubled-up" accommodations with their families, impacting family stability, and therefore the child's ability to achieve in school. The Next Step seeks to address this issue in family homelessness by providing affordable housing for homeless families who are at or below the Area Median Family Income (AMI).

Lessons Learned: The Next Step Housing Program is a model that should be embraced for its focus on alleviating doubled-up living situations. Doubling-up is unfortunately all too common among homeless families, and its negative consequences on family life, child behavior, and educational achievement have been well documented.[64] By working with human services and housing authorities, school districts are able to move these families into stable environments and

[64] *Supra* note 44.

connect them with social services of which they may not have been previously aware. This smart approach is grounded in a recognition that there are multiple causes of homelessness, and therefore, its elimination requires many public agencies to work together.

D. Homeless Task Force – Rutherford County, Tennessee

In Rutherford County, Tennessee there is no public transportation. In order to transport students, the Rutherford County Schools (RCS) must rely on gas reimbursement and traditional school buses to transport homeless students. In 2009, the RCS identified 851 homeless students in the school district. As of 2009, the County only had three shelters, all located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 25 miles from some of the schools.

The RCS Homeless Liaison, Kim Snell, works to raise community awareness of homelessness among families, children and unaccompanied youth. Recognizing that a lack of shelters in her district forced many students who lost their housing to travel long distances to school, this liaison actively worked with shelter providers and government agencies through the Housing Task Force, a local program under the HUD Continuum of Care to obtain resources to create new housing options. She also encouraged agencies to apply for funds through the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) to locate shelters in areas near the Rutherford County schools. With help of the Housing Task Force, two new shelters have opened in the towns of Smyrna and LaVergne, much closer to a number of County schools. .

Lessons Learned: Ms. Snell's creative and tireless advocacy to increase local shelter resources by working with local government agencies is an important first step, and should be emulated. However, although shelters provide homeless families with roofs over their heads and more privacy than doubled-up residential arrangements, they are no substitute for the essential family integrity that a home provides.. Advocates and communities should take the next step to create more permanent affordable housing as well.

CONCLUSION

As the rate of family homelessness increases, the number of children impacted rises along with it. Compared to stably housed children, homeless children encounter a greater range of physical, academic, and emotional risks to their well-being. Among the desperate challenges homeless children must face, including inadequate nutrition, limited access to healthcare, anxiety and depression, is their inability to obtain a quality education.

Education is a basic human right, and the federal, state, and local governments all have responsibilities to ensure it is available, accessible, adequate and adaptable.[65] The McKinney-Vento Act at its core works to open access to education for homeless children and youth. Transporting students to and from the district where they lost their housing is the number one challenge to homeless children and youth's ability to access education. Due to mounting financial burdens on school districts, in order to stay in compliance with the Act, collaboration between school districts and local housing authorities and other local service providers is a viable

[65] *See* note 17, *supra*.

and encouraged strategy to this dilemma. Collaborative programs like the ones described above take the financial burden off school districts and provide benefits to whole homeless families, not just the students. Many work to resolve the root cause of homelessness: lack of affordable housing.

Adequate and affordable housing is also a human right.[66] Unfortunately, in many jurisdictions around the country, housing policies determined by zoning agencies, city councils, or county boards discourage the creation of affordable housing, leaving school districts to bear the financial costs of their policy failures. When local families, pushed to the brink of homelessness by job loss or other circumstances, are unable to find affordable housing nearby, they are forced to look for shelter outside the district. In this situation, when in the students' best interests, the children in these families will continue to attend their schools of origin, and the districts will pay for their transportation. Given the options, this result is best for the child, but far from ideal—as compared to not moving at all, it results in a greater disruption to the students' and families' lives, and a greater cost to the entire community..

School staff and administrators, concerned students and parents, and the community at large should therefore become advocates for increasing incentives for the development of affordable housing and shelters in their communities, and liaisons and community agencies should collaborate as much as possible. Given the increase in family homelessness, and the increase in social and economic costs associated with homeless youth, there is too much at stake to not take appropriate action now. Early access to quality education in the lives of children is the greatest indicator for later academic success and social adaptation. Since homelessness leads to less early academic achievement,[67] whether homeless students and their families obtain affordable housing will determine the course of their future welfare. Creating more affordable housing options and community shelters is an area where moral sense and fiscal sense coincide, and everyone in the community, housed and homeless alike, can benefit from positive action.

[66] *See* Opportunity Agenda, *supra* note 17; International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights, *supra* note 17; Committee on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights, General Comment 4: The right to adequate housing (Sixth session, 1991), U.N. Doc. E/1992/23, annex III at 114 (1991),

[67] Y. Rafferty et al., *Academic Achievement Among Formerly Homeless Adolescents and Their Continuously Housed Peers*, 42 JOURNAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY 179-199 (2004).