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ABSTRACT

A 1984 amendment to the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act instructs states to ensure that homeless students have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education as nonhomeless students. It provides local educational authorities increased flexibility to use funds, specify the rights of homeless preschoolers, give parents of homeless children and youth a greater voice in their children's school placement, and require educational authorities to coordinate with housing authorities. Researchers surveyed all state coordinators of education of homeless children and youth and visited school districts that did and did not receive McKinney grants. Data on four areas of state and local activity are provided: (1) changes in education and services to homeless children and youth under the reauthorized Act; (2) services and activities of the state Office of the Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth; (3) the McKinney Act subgrant award process, and how local education agencies with McKinney subgrants supplement services available to homeless children and youth and remove barriers to their school enrollment and success; and (4) establishment of programs and policies for homeless students in local education agencies. Recommendations of state coordinators and policy implications are included. (SM)

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THE EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAM: LEARNING TO SUCCEED

Volume I: Reducing Barriers for Homeless Children for Access and Achievement

FINAL REPORT

2002

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THE EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAM: LEARNING TO SUCCEED

Volume I: Reducing Barriers for Homeless Children and Youth for Access and Achievement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1987, Congress enacted the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act to confront the problems of homelessness in the United States. The act was amended in 1990 and 1994. Subtitle VII-B of the act, as amended in 1994, instructs states to ensure that homeless children and youth have equal access to the same, free, and appropriate public education as nonhomeless children and youth. The 1994 amendments provide local educational authorities with increased flexibility in the use of funds, specify the rights of homeless preschoolers to a free and appropriate public preschool education, give parents of homeless children and youth a greater voice in their children's school placement, and require educational authorities to coordinate with housing authorities.

This study is a follow-up to one completed in 1995, which looked at the educational provisions for homeless children and youth prior to the implementation of the 1994 amendments. It describes and analyzes four areas of state and local activity: (1) changes in education and services to homeless children and youth under the reauthorized McKinney Act; (2) services and activities of the state Office of the Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth, an office that the McKinney Act established in each state education agency (SEA); (3) the McKinney Act subgrant award process, and how LEAs with McKinney subgrants supplement the services available to homeless children and youth as well as remove the barriers to their enrollment and success in school; and (4) the establishment of programs and policies for homeless students in local education agencies (LEAs). Data collection for this study included a survey of all state coordinators of education of homeless children and youth and site visits to a sample of seven school districts that received McKinney grants and seven that did not receive McKinney grants.

Overview of the McKinney Act, Subtitle VII-B

Operating at an annual funding level of $28.8 million (FY 1998 and FY 1999), Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney Act is a relatively small program with broad provisions, goals, and objectives. The subtitle stipulates that

- All homeless children and youth have equal access to the same, free, and appropriate public education as nonhomeless children and youth.

- States must review and revise residency laws and "other laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and homeless youth."

- Students must not be separated from the mainstream school environment because of being homeless.

- Homeless students must have access to education and other services, including public preschool education, needed to ensure that they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging performance standards to which all students are held.

Each state is required to establish an Office of the State Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth. This office prepares and implements a state plan describing how the state will: (1) identify homeless children and youth; (2) assess their special needs; (3) facilitate coordination between SEAs and LEAs; and (4) coordinate with other education and child development programs to improve the provision of comprehensive services to homeless children and youth. Examination of the act's requirement that each state establish an Office of the State Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth indicated that 19 percent of state coordinators are supported full-time, and 81 percent are supported part-time with McKinney funds. For those state coordinators supported only part-time with McKinney Act funds, the remainder of their time is paid by other federal programs. Some state coordinators want the McKinney Act to require states with homeless populations above some minimum number to have a full-time coordinator for homeless education issues. Part-time coordinators, particularly those in states with large homeless populations, are often unable to fully meet all the demands of their position as defined by the act.

In 1998, states awarded an average of $433,337 in McKinney funding to LEAs in the form of subgrants. The range in average subgrant allocation was wide, with a high of $127,700 in Texas and a low of $1,350 in Utah.

Data collected from site visits indicate that districts with and without McKinney funds are finding ways to address at least some of the needs of homeless children and youth. However, LEAs with McKinney subgrants provide a broader range of educational and recreational services to homeless children and youth than do their non-McKinney counterparts. This is probably the result of a combination of factors, including the availability of McKinney dollars, dedicated district staff, and awareness of the requirements of the McKinney Act. In addition, districts with McKinney funds provide more professional development to district and school staff to increase the awareness of the rights and needs of homeless children and youth than do districts not receiving McKinney funds. Similarly, McKinney subgrantees are also more likely to have after-school activities and programs for parents than their non-McKinney counterparts.

The following sections highlight the study findings with regard to (1) state legislative and policy responses to McKinney Act requirements, (2) state services and activities provided under the McKinney Act, and (3) local services and activities under the McKinney Act.

State Legislative and Policy Responses to the McKinney Act Requirements

With few exceptions, state coordinators indicated that states have reviewed and revised their laws, regulations, and policies to remove obstacles to the education of homeless children and youth. However, the study reveals that significant barriers to homeless children and youth's education still exist. Most state coordinators want clarification of the McKinney Act and federal laws as they pertain to state and local responsibilities for immunizations, guardianship, transportation, and prekindergarten services.

Transportation

When asked about changes in state laws, regulations, or practices related to transportation, 18 coordinators reported that the lack of transportation still poses a barrier to school enrollment. Twenty-four coordinators named transportation problems as being among the top three barriers to school success for homeless children, and 19 reported transportation being among the top three barriers for homeless youth.

Guardianship Requirements

The McKinney Act stipulates that state plans describe procedures for ensuring that guardianship issues do not pose enrollment delays for homeless children and youth. However, only 14 states allow children to enroll in school unaccompanied by a parent or legal guardian. An additional four states allow only students in McKinney subgrant districts to enroll in school without a parent or guardian. Thirteen state coordinators, compared to 15 in 1995, reported that their state's requirement that a child or youth be enrolled in school by a parent or legal guardian constitutes a barrier to enrollment by homeless children and youth.

Immunization Requirements

In 1995, only 10 states allowed students to enroll in school without being immunized against certain diseases. This study shows that 29 states now allow students to enroll in school without immunization. An additional six states allow only students in McKinney subgrant districts to enroll in school without immunization. Some states that require immunization have developed effective methods for immunizing homeless students or obtaining their immunization records. In others, however, homeless children and youth who are not immunized or who cannot document their immunizations may experience a barrier to enrolling in school.

Attendance Policies and Secondary School Credit Accrual for Homeless Youth

During site visits, attendance policies and secondary school credit accrual emerged as remaining legal barriers for homeless youth. Such students who are unable to find stable shelter have difficulty meeting state or district mandates regarding the number of days they must attend school to stay enrolled, be promoted to the next grade, and receive a high school diploma. Several state coordinators thought that the McKinney Act should mandate a grace period that allows homeless children and youth without proper documentation to enroll in school without delay. Furthermore, secondary students' promotion and graduation may be jeopardized if they transfer schools in the middle of the year. Slow record transfers and different course requirements complicate credit accrual for these young people.

Barriers to Academic Success for Homeless Children and Youth

The most often mentioned barrier to success for homeless children and youth was their frequent moves from school to school. More than one-quarter of state coordinators reported that the lack of awareness and sensitivity among school administrators and teachers to the specific educational needs of homeless children and youth was a barrier to these students' school success. Another quarter said that homeless children's lack of an appropriate study area in which to complete school assignments (e.g., quiet, has a desk) was a barrier to school success. In addition, some state coordinators suggested that a longer award cycle for McKinney grants would allow districts to make continuous strides toward ensuring the enrollment and success of homeless children and youth.

State Services and Activities Provided Under the McKinney Act

Administrators responsible for state services and activities have concentrated on building awareness and sensitivity to the needs and rights of homeless children and youth and coordinating the efforts of agencies that serve this population. Nonetheless, these students' access to many educational programs is still limited. Most state coordinators want the coordinators of all federal programs, especially Title I, to receive clear and concise directives about their role in educating homeless students, including reserving funds for these students.

Awareness Raising and Sensitivity Training

Significant differences exist among and within states in the level of community awareness about issues related to the definition, condition, needs, and rights of homeless children and youth. Two of the most frequent methods used by state coordinators for raising awareness among school personnel are distributing materials and conducting staff development meetings.

Twenty-one state coordinators in this study reported that developing their state consolidated plan had made state program administrators more aware of the McKinney-funded services to homeless children and youth. However, nine state coordinators reported that some districts were not aware that they had a homeless population. Other data collected -- in November 1998 to January 1999 from a national representative sample of districts in a study of local implementation of federal programs -- indicated that 77 percent of all districts nationwide did not know whether they enrolled homeless children and youth in their district.

Coordination and Collaboration

The McKinney Act directs states to coordinate their activities with school districts, agencies, and organizations that serve homeless children and youth. State coordinators indicated they coordinate and collaborate most with local education agencies, state government agencies, other offices within their state education agency, and homeless shelters. Nine state coordinators cited limited time and program-specific agendas as problems in coordinating or integrating the homeless program with other state programs.

The two collaborative activities that state coordinators said had the most impact were participating in an interagency task force or committee on homelessness and building programmatic linkages among programs, agencies, or organizations serving homeless children and youth. Sharing data

systems on homeless populations with other programs, agencies, or organizations was also a common strategy for improving services to homeless children and youth.

Access to Educational Programs and Services

A large proportion of homeless students still experience difficulty in gaining access to needed educational services. State coordinators rated the following programs as difficult for homeless children and youth in their state to access[1]:

- special education (33 state coordinators);
- Head Start or other publicly funded preschool programs (29 coordinators);
- gifted and talented programs (27 coordinators);
- Even Start or other family literacy programs (26 coordinators); and
- programs for students with limited English proficiency (25 coordinators).

Data Collection

The McKinney Act requires state coordinators to gather data on problems that homeless children and youth encounter in gaining access to public preschool programs and to public elementary and secondary schools. They must also report on schools' difficulties in identifying the special needs of homeless children and youth, progress that the SEA and LEAs in the state have made in addressing such difficulties, and the successes of programs under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney Act in ensuring that homeless children and youth enroll in, attend, and succeed in school.

Data collected from both McKinney subgrantee and nonsubgrantee districts suggest that state coordinators routinely collect data on school enrollment. The next most common types of data on homeless students routinely collected were data on preschool age children, difficulties or problems experienced by school districts in serving them, and educational needs. However, states collect more data from McKinney than from non-McKinney districts. For example, not only do states routinely collect enrollment data from McKinney subgrantee districts, but they also ask for data on achievement, districts' difficulties or problems in serving homeless students, the effectiveness of education programs and strategies, and education needs.

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[1] These data combine the "great difficulty" and "some difficulty" survey response categories.

Assistance from Other State-Level Agencies and Organizations

Other agencies and organizations assist state coordinators in two ways. First, they conduct professional development for educators and other school personnel that increase awareness of the needs and rights of homeless children and youth. Second, they coordinate activities of schools and agencies that serve homeless children and youth. They also assist by assessing the needs of homeless children and youth and providing before-school, after-school, and summer education programs. By collaborating with other agencies in these ways, state coordinators are able to carry out the McKinney Act mandate to develop relationships and coordinate with relevant education, child development or preschool programs, and other service providers to improve services to homeless children and youth.

District Services and Activities Under the McKinney Act

Districts deliver various services and activities in an effort to ensure that homeless children and youth receive a free and appropriate education. On a basic level, they usually work to identify homeless students, place them in school, and provide them with transportation to school. To enhance the education of homeless students, districts sometimes offer before- and after-school programs, work to ensure that homeless students have access to other educational programs, and provide parent education. Districts also tend to coordinate and collaborate with local social service providers and to work to increase knowledge about the education of homeless students by providing awareness raising and sensitivity training. Local liaisons, appointed by district officials, are responsible for coordinating and overseeing the enrollment of homeless children and youth in school, establishing procedures for the identification and placement of homeless children and youth, developing project guidelines, collaborating with local social service providers, evaluating the program, documenting services and activities, and disseminating information.

Identification and School Placement

Most McKinney subgrantees devote time and resources to identifying and placing homeless children and youth in school. Liaisons also noted the importance of shelter providers emphasizing school attendance. In several districts, liaisons depend on the collaboration of shelter staff to see that homeless students enroll in school.

The identification of homeless children and youth in non-McKinney districts is generally not a systematic or formalized process. Most districts rely on homeless students to identify themselves during enrollment. Non-McKinney districts also use school social workers, counselors, teachers, and nurses to

identify homeless students who come to their attention because of behavioral, health, academic, or other needs.

Transportation to School

Most McKinney districts cannot cover the high costs of transporting students with their relatively small subgrants. Consequently, they are forced to seek other funding or limit their transportation services. Liaisons noted that occasionally neighboring districts refuse to pay for transporting students across district lines. Often in these situations, it is not clear who is required to pay for transportation, the district in which the student resides or that in which the student attends school. Because state coordinators have limited time to interact with districts, liaisons often resolve these issues themselves. Furthermore, in these situations, if non-McKinney districts surround the McKinney district, coordinators note that the McKinney district most often ends up paying for the student's transportation. In general, nonsubgrantee districts did not discuss the McKinney Act provision that requires districts to continue the child's or youth's education in the school of origin.

Before- and After-School Activities

Several of the subgrantee districts visited supplement homeless children's instructional programs with before- or after-school tutoring by teachers or volunteers from the community. Offered in schools and shelters as well as libraries and other community areas, these sessions provide homeless children one-to-one homework or other instructional assistance from a school. At the sites visited, before- and after-school programs usually took place in shelters, although schools, libraries, and other organizations also offer them.

Some nonsubgrantee districts also sponsor before- and after-school programs for homeless children and youth. After-school programs take place in schools, residential shelters, and community centers and feature help with homework, one-to-one tutoring, or other kinds of instructional assistance. However, transportation problems in some nonsubgrantee districts prevent these programs from reaching more than a limited number of homeless students. In general, shelter-based students are more likely to have access to such services.

Parent Involvement

In general, the subgrantee and nonsubgrantee districts in our study offer few services to the parents or guardians of homeless students. Some host monthly meetings with parents, while others send materials for parents to schools or offer occasional workshops.

Awareness Raising and Sensitivity Training

Most of the seven McKinney subgrant projects visited noted the importance of raising school staff awareness of the needs of homeless students. Districts send information to schools about how to recognize and meet the needs of homeless children and youth. Some sites go beyond disseminating materials to providing professional development and training.

The vast majority of state coordinators reported that they conduct awareness-raising activities, for employees of nonsubgrantee districts and, to a lesser extent, for school staff and community representatives from these districts. However, most of the nonsubgrantee districts visited do not conduct such sessions for either staff or parents, despite the fact that a few respondents mentioned that a lack of sensitivity among school staff was a challenge that homeless students faced at school.

The infrequency of awareness raising and sensitivity training in nonsubgrantee districts can be attributed in part to their relatively small homeless student populations and a lack of resources. Nevertheless, a small number of nonsubgrantee districts did overcome resource challenges and manage to sponsor awareness-raising activities, if only to a limited extent. In general, however, lack of awareness is a problem, and few practitioners and parents are aware of the rights of homeless students. This lack of awareness leads to a failure to enforce the McKinney Act provisions.

Coordination and Collaboration Among Local Social Service Providers

Most subgrantee districts visited have done a good job of setting up communication channels between school officials and shelter providers for the purpose of identifying and placing homeless children in school. Some districts also coordinate services and collaborate with agencies serving homeless children and youth.

Respondents from nonsubgrantee districts reported that school officials communicate with local service providers on an as-needed basis, and that, in most cases, social workers, teachers, and principals are the primary links to homeless students and their families. However, local service providers

participate in some sort of facilitating structure -- be it a network, coalition, or other vehicle for collaboration. The existence of such structures suggests that even in the absence of McKinney dollars, local communities can rise to the challenge of ensuring that the educational, health, and economic needs of homeless families are addressed.

Data Collection, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Data collection varied widely across the sites. At a minimum, each district receiving a subgrant must provide an "unduplicated count" of homeless students to its state department of education. Some subgrant districts do more, collecting data on the ethnicity of participants, the percent of identified students or families served, participation in services or activities by parents as well as students, student attendance, and student academic achievement. Often the kind and amount of data collected depend on the district's capacity to maintain data of any sort; it is difficult for districts that cannot easily access a student database to collect and maintain data on homeless students.

States differ in the manner and frequency with which they monitor subgrants. Some districts submit monitoring reports to the state that include information about the number of homeless children and youth and the programs and services the district provides to them. Other districts receive monitoring visits from the state; one district noted that this occurs twice yearly while another reported a visit every other year. A few subgrantees said that they were not monitored by the state.

INTRODUCTION

The 1987 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was enacted to confront the problems associated with homelessness in the United States. The act was amended in 1990 and 1994. Subtitle VII-B of the act, as amended in 1994, mandates state action to ensure that homeless children and youth have equal access to the same, free, and appropriate public education as their nonhomeless counterparts. The 1994 amendments to the McKinney Act provide local educational authorities with increased flexibility in the use of funds, specify the rights of homeless preschoolers to a free and appropriate public preschool education, give parents of homeless children and youth a greater voice regarding their children's school placement, and require educational authorities to coordinate with housing authorities. In FY 1998 and FY 1999, Congress appropriated $28.8 million to the McKinney program and stipulated that no state appropriation would be less than $100,000.

Under Section 103(a) of the McKinney Act, children and youth are defined as "homeless" if they lack "a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence," or if their primary nighttime residence is (1) a supervised shelter (e.g., welfare hotel, congregate shelter, runaway shelter, or transitional housing for people with mental illness) designed to provide temporary accommodations; (2) an institution (other than a jail or prison) that provides temporary accommodations for people who are intended to be institutionalized; or (3) a place that has not been designed for, or been ordinarily used as, sleeping accommodations for people. Other categories of children and youth such as migratory children, those living in foster care, children of "doubled-up families" who share a living space, and those who live in trailer parks or camping areas may or may not be classified as homeless. States can assess cases on an individual basis, using such criteria as whether these living arrangements are voluntary.

The provisions of Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney Act are broad and stipulate that (1) all homeless children and youth have a right to the same, free, and appropriate public education as other children and youth; (2) states must review and revise residency laws and "other laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and homeless youth;" (3) students must not be separated from the mainstream school environment because of being homeless; and (4) homeless students should have access to education services to enable them to meet the same challenging student performance standards to which all students are held (McKinney Act, Section 721).

The McKinney Education Program for Homeless Children and Youth awards grants to state education agencies (SEAs) to provide services to homeless children and youth, to establish an Office of Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth, and to award subgrants to local education agencies (LEAs) to help homeless children and youth enroll in, attend, and succeed in school. The

Office of Coordinator prepares and implements a state plan describing how the state will provide for the education of homeless children and youth. State coordinators are responsible for: (1) identifying homeless children and youth; (2) assessing their special needs; (3) facilitating coordination between SEAs and LEAs; and (4) coordinating with other education and child development programs to improve the provision of comprehensive services to homeless children and youth.

In addition, the state coordinator is required to gather reliable, valid, and comprehensive information on the nature and extent of the problems homeless children and youth have in gaining access to public preschools and elementary and secondary schools. Under the law, the state coordinator is responsible for estimating the number of homeless children and youth in the state and the number being served with McKinney funds.

To receive McKinney subgrants, LEAs apply to the state. States award subgrants on the basis of need, determined primarily by the number of homeless children and youth enrolled in the LEA and the ability of the LEA to meet the needs of this population. However, each LEA in the state -- regardless of whether it receives a McKinney subgrant -- has responsibilities under the Act.

In 1995, Policy Studies Associates (PSA) completed an evaluation of the McKinney program, although data were collected prior to the 1994 reauthorization. That study surveyed state coordinators and conducted site visits to a sample of six SEAs and eight local school districts. The 1995 study found that states had revised their laws, regulations, and policies to improve access to education. States awarded almost three-quarters of their funds to subgrant projects, which supported a variety of activities, including before- and after-school programs, awareness raising and sensitivity training, transportation, and identification and school placement of homeless children. Yet, despite these successes, many challenges remained. For example, though access to school had improved significantly, access to specific educational services (e.g., gifted and talented programs) remained a problem for a large proportion of homeless children and youth. Another barrier to access concerned guardianship and immunization requirements. Though important for health and safety, guardianship and immunization requirements were often at variance with efforts to ensure access. Yet another significant barrier was that states and districts had few resources to address homeless youths' transportation needs, particularly when transportation across district lines was at issue. Finally, concerns about liability and safety led some secondary schools to refuse to admit homeless youth altogether.

The current study, conducted under a contract with the Planning and Evaluation Service of the U.S. Department of Education (ED), has evaluated state and local efforts to serve the educational needs of homeless children and youth and has identified barriers that affect these students' enrollment, attendance, and school success. This study, a follow-up study to one completed in 1995, describes and analyzes four important areas of state and local activity: (1) the changes in education and services to

homeless children and youth under the reauthorized McKinney Act; (2) the services and activities of the state Office of the Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth, an office that the McKinney Act established in each state; (3) the McKinney Act subgrant award process, and how LEAs with McKinney subgrants supplement the services available to homeless children and youth as well as remove the barriers to their enrollment and success in school; and (4) the establishment of programs and policies for homeless students in LEAs that do not receive McKinney subgrants.

Overview of the Study Design

The 1995 evaluation of the McKinney Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program compiled baseline information on the status of education for homeless children and youth. Since the data for that evaluation were collected and analyzed, the program has been reauthorized as part of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. The scope of legislative changes affecting homeless children and youth makes it important to take another careful look to examine how schools, districts, and states are (1) helping the children and youth served by the McKinney Act enroll in and attend school and (2) helping those students succeed academically once they have arrived at school.

Among other new provisions, the reauthorized program calls for increased coordination among federal programs (including Title I, special education, and Head Start programs) at state and local levels to ensure that homeless children and youth receive an appropriate public education. State McKinney Act coordinators also are directed to take the lead in fostering coordination among state and local agencies, including housing and human services as well as education agencies. According to changes to the Title I program under the Improving America's Schools Act, homeless children are automatically eligible for Title I services. Title I, the largest federal K-12 program, provides extra funding to school districts based on poverty levels to provide supplemental academic assistance to low-performing students.

This study has investigated (1) the extent to which states have successfully removed the barriers that impede homeless students' access to a free, appropriate education, (2) how states and school districts use McKinney Act funds to address the educational needs of homeless children and youth, and (3) how nonsubgrantee school districts comply with the McKinney Act in the absence of federal funding. Specific questions include the following:

- How have state or local laws, regulations, programs, or policies affecting the education of homeless children and youth changed? What types of education programs do homeless children and youth have the most difficulty accessing? What efforts has the Office of the Coordinator in each state made to coordinate services and increase linkages and communication among education and noneducation agencies and organizations that serve homeless people, particularly homeless children and youth? What have state

coordinators done to support local school districts in their efforts to serve the educational needs of homeless children and youth?

- To what extent have states and selected school districts successfully removed the barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth in school? What state policies and practices still impede school access, attendance, and success for homeless children and youth? What do representatives of states recommend as ways to better meet the needs of homeless children and youth?

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a combination of methods, including a survey of all state coordinators of education of homeless children and youth and site visits to a sample of 14 local school districts, seven of which were McKinney subgrantees.

Survey of State Coordinators of Education of Homeless Children and Youth

The survey, directed to state coordinators in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories[2] was conducted by telephone in the summer of 1998. The survey gathered information from state coordinators about state policies and procedures for the education of homeless children and youth. Information was also gathered on state coordinators' efforts to:
(1) identify and place homeless children and youth, (2) identify homeless children's educational needs, (3) coordinate and collaborate with other social service agencies working with the homeless population, (4) provide support to LEAs serving homeless children and youth, and (5) involve homeless parents in the education of their children. Fifty-one state coordinators[3] completed the survey -- a response rate of 95 percent.

Site Visits

To provide illustrative examples of trends that emerged from the nationally representative survey data, PSA conducted site visits to 14 school districts, seven of which were McKinney subgrantees, between October 1998 and February 1999. The visits featured interviews with district officials, district

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[2] Throughout the report, all these will be referred to as "states."

[3] Homeless coordinators from the following states and territories did not respond to the survey: Alabama, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Palau.

liaisons for homelessness issues, school principals and teachers, and other local social service providers; the study team also visited schools and shelters serving homeless children and youth.

Site selection was based on recommendations from a technical work group and the need to achieve some distribution among the following demographic variables: geographic region, estimated population of homeless children and youth, level of project funding, and size of district or state.

Study of Local Implementation of Federal Programs

According to data collected between November 1998 and January 1999 from a national representative sample of districts in a study of local implementation of federal programs, 77 percent of all districts nationwide were not aware of having homeless children and youth in their district. Due to this lack of awareness, data from the implementation study were not included in the report.

Organization of This Report

The remainder of this report is organized into four sections. The first addresses state policies, rules, and regulations affecting the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth. The second section discusses the role of the state coordinator regarding identification, awareness-raising efforts, data collection, coordination and collaboration with the service-provider community, and support to local education agencies serving homeless children and youth. Next, the report focuses on the services provided to homeless children and youth through LEAs. Finally, it presents recommendations of state coordinators and policy implications.

STATE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY RESPONSES TO THE McKINNEY ACT

In passing the McKinney Act, Congress recognized that many state, district, and school policies presented obstacles to school participation for homeless children and youth. The McKinney Act requires that states review and revise their attendance laws and "other laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and homeless youth" (McKinney Act, Section 721). The 1995 evaluation of the McKinney Homeless Children and Youth program reported that states had successfully revised policies to eliminate enrollment barriers created by state residency and school records requirements. However, in the 1998 survey, many coordinators reported difficulties resolving barriers posed by transportation, guardianship, and immunization requirements. This follow-up evaluation sought to explore states' responses to these and other barriers.

Consistent with the findings of the 1995 evaluation, interviews with state coordinators in 1998 revealed that, with few exceptions, states have continued to review and revise their laws, regulations, and policies to remove obstacles to the education of homeless children and youth. Many states have changed their laws, creating special statutes for homeless children and youth or revised their laws in such a way that policies no longer prevent homeless children and youth from enrolling in school. In some cases, a state's policies were already sufficient to allow the enrollment of homeless children and youth. In other cases, states have relaxed the enforcement of certain policies -- for example, by encouraging districts to be lenient in applying enrollment policies to homeless children and youth.

The survey of state coordinators confirmed that, although some states have successfully reduced many of the legislative barriers to enrollment posed by state policies on transportation, guardianship, and immunization, these areas still emerged as difficult. Since 1994, the number of state coordinators reporting that transportation and immunization were barriers to school enrollment for homeless children and youth dropped by approximately 50 percent. Table 1 compares state coordinators' responses from the 1994 and 1998 surveys.

Table 1. State policies as barriers to school enrollment for homeless children and youth, as reported by state coordinators*

Which state policies still pose barriers to school enrollment for homeless children and youth?		
	Number of State Coordinators Reporting Policies as Barriers	
	1994	1998
Transportation	30	18
Legal guardianship requirements	15	13
Immunization requirements	15	6

*. N=51

Table reads: When asked, "How did your state change its laws, regulations, or practices since 1994 to eliminate transportation as a barrier to the enrollment of homeless children and youth?" 18 state coordinators reported that transportation still poses an enrollment barrier in their state.

The following discussion addresses state legislative responses to the McKinney Act. We divided the discussion of issues into three sections: issues that still pose barriers to enrollment; new issues that present barriers for enrollment; and issues that are barriers to academic success for homeless children and youth.

Unresolved Legislative and Policy Issues: Transportation, Guardianship, and Immunization Requirements as Barriers to School Enrollment

The McKinney Act specifically calls on states to remove enrollment barriers for homeless children and youth created by state policies. While state coordinators reported improved success since 1994 in revising state policies to eliminate barriers, many coordinators still reported difficulties resolving barriers posed by transportation, legal guardianship, and immunization requirements. Transportation barriers have been difficult to overcome because transportation depends heavily on local district resources. To ensure the safety and welfare of children and to protect themselves from liability and over-enrollment, schools require a parent's permission for many enrollment and education decisions, as well as documentation that students' immunizations are up-to-date.

Transportation

Transportation remains the most prominent enrollment barrier for homeless children and youth, although substantial progress has been made in this area. In 1994, 30 state coordinators identified transportation as a barrier, compared to 18 in 1998. Between 1994 and 1998, 10 states either created state laws, made efforts to enforce state laws, or relaxed enforcement of state laws to eliminate this barrier. In addition, recognizing the magnitude of the transportation problem, almost half of states provided additional funds -- either McKinney, other federal, or state funds -- to support districts' transportation efforts on behalf of homeless students. Survey data suggest that McKinney districts are more successful than non-McKinney districts in leveraging funding from outside sources to cover transportation costs. For example, state coordinators in 33 states said that the McKinney districts in their states relied on funding from either federal programs, private sources, or other sources to finance transportation for homeless children and youth, compared to state coordinators in 25 states speaking of their non-McKinney districts. Table 2 describes these finding in more detail.

Three factors combine to make school transportation a difficult problem for states to resolve through laws and regulations. First, school transportation is primarily a local issue. Second, the provision of transportation for homeless children and youth often requires the infusion of significant and new resources, and these can be hard to locate. Finally, even if policies and resources can be located to provide transportation, the other survival needs of homeless families often make the logistics of transportation difficult. That is, when a family moves to find food or shelter, the proximity of the shelter site to educational transportation services is usually not the family's primary concern. Data collected during our site visits confirm that the transportation of homeless students to their schools of origin is an ongoing challenge for districts, due to high costs, scheduling problems complicated by students' mobility, and questions about district responsibility for transporting students.

Table 2. State funding for transporting homeless children and youth to school, as reported by state coordinators*

In your state, who funds transportation to school for homeless children and youth?		
	Number of State Coordinators Reporting by Type of District	
	McKinney	Nonsubgrantee
LEA	43	40
McKinney grant	34	2
SEA	20	20
Other federal sources	12	10
Private sources	12	8
Other	9	7

* N=51

Table reads: Forty-three state coordinators reported that local education agencies in their state are a funding source to transport homeless children and youth to school in McKinney districts.

Guardianship Requirements

Although the number of state coordinators reporting that guardianship requirements pose a problem for homeless children and youth remained almost constant between 1994 and 1998, almost one-quarter of respondents did report that their states took steps to eliminate this barrier. In 1998, 13 state coordinators, compared to 15 in 1995, reported that state requirements for legal guardianship still pose a barrier to the enrollment of homeless children and youth. However, 12 states either changed existing laws, created new ones, enforced existing laws, or relaxed state laws to assist homeless students.

The 1995 evaluation revealed several concerns about guardianship policies, which emerged again during this study. Schools and other agencies remain apprehensive about eliminating guardianship requirements because of liability questions and because of fears that nonhomeless students would abuse the policies to enroll in schools with popular academic or extracurricular activities. The issue of legal guardianship, however, was not prominent during site visit discussions with local liaisons, social workers, and other staff members. These respondents reported that guardianship was seldom a barrier to homeless students' enrollment.

Immunization Requirements

Since 1994, states have made the most progress in eliminating barriers to enrollment to school for homeless children and youth in the area of immunizations. According to the survey, only six state coordinators identified immunization requirements as a barrier, compared to 15 in 1994. Some coordinators explained that immunization requirements were difficult to eliminate because state policies follow the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and seek to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for all students. In 1998, one-quarter of state coordinators reported that their states made changes to laws or regulations to eliminate immunization requirements as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth in school. Since 1994, 12 states either created a system to provide immunizations to homeless students, created new state laws or regulations, or changed existing laws or regulations. In addition, 10 coordinators reported state efforts to either enforce or relax existing laws in this area. Successful strategies for minimizing this barrier include providing immunizations on school sites, coordinating with a local health agency, or verifying immunization records by telephone.

Survey results suggest that there is little difference between McKinney and non-McKinney districts in their immunization requirements for homeless students, although McKinney districts were more likely than their nonsubgrantee counterparts to make special allowances for the homeless. For example, state coordinators in 24 states reported that McKinney districts in their states made special allowances for homeless students to enroll in school without delay, compared to non-McKinney districts in 19 states. Coordinators in 10 additional states noted that both their McKinney and non-McKinney districts provided either homeless students or all students with immunizations so that they could enroll in school without delay. Respondents in approximately the same number of states said that their McKinney and non-McKinney districts enroll students regardless of their immunization status. Table 3 outlines these findings.

Table 3. State immunization requirements for school enrollment, as reported by state coordinators*

In your state, what best characterizes the current circumstances for most school districts regarding immunization requirements for school enrollment?		
	Number of State Coordinators Reporting by Type of District	
	McKinney	**Nonsubgrantee**
Special allowances have been made to enable homeless children and youth to enroll in school without delay, but they must be immunized within a certain period of time	19	15
All students can enroll in school regardless of their immunization status	11	10
All students are provided with immunizations, if necessary, so that they may enroll in school without delay	7	9
Homeless children and youth are provided with the necessary immunizations (e.g., through a referral) so that they may enroll in school without delay	3	1
All students must be immunized before they can enroll in school, and homeless children and youth may be delayed from enrolling as a result	5	7
Special allowances have been made to enable homeless children and youth to enroll in school regardless of their immunization status	5	4

* N=51

Table reads: Nineteen state coordinators reported that school districts in their state that have McKinney grants have made special allowances to enable homeless children and youth to enroll in school without delay, but they must be immunized within a certain period of time; nine coordinators said this for nonsubgrantee districts.

Remaining Legal Barriers: Attendance Policies and Secondary School Credit Accrual for Homeless Youth

During the follow-up study, the problems of attendance and secondary school credit accrual emerged as issues for homeless youth. In general, state or district policies mandate a minimum number of days a student must attend school to stay enrolled, be promoted to the next grade, and earn a high school diploma. For homeless youth who are unable to find stable shelter, attendance policies pose a barrier to enrollment and completion of high school.

During site visit interviews, secondary school staff in some districts reported that attendance policies prevented homeless youth from remaining in school. One school district limits the number of unexcused absences and tardiness to 10 per semester. Once a student has exceeded the number of unexcused absences, the youth is denied credit for the course missed, expelled from school, or sent to an alternative school. If the youth is expelled, he or she does not receive any credit for the semester or school year. School staff from this district said that expulsion and credit denial are harsh penalties for homeless youth who need special consideration.

School staff from other districts also mentioned that it is difficult for homeless youth to earn credit in courses when they transfer during the middle of the school year. Because the school district of origin may have different requirements than the homeless youth's current district and because record transfers are often very slow, placing homeless youth in the appropriate courses is often "guess work." School counselors reported that teachers are not able to give homeless youth passing grades when they have not earned the required number of points and a record of their previous grades does not exist.

States and local school districts are looking for ways to address these issues for homeless youth. Some school districts, like Oakland Unified School District in California, are developing fast track programs through the adult education division. Others are relying on truant officers and school counselors to find solutions. In one school district, school officials report absent homeless youth to social services in hopes that the threat of losing social security benefits will spur their attendance. Experiencing success in removing other barriers for homeless children, local school districts are beginning to focus on those issues affecting the educational success of homeless youth.

Barriers to School Success for Homeless Children and Youth

Under the McKinney Act, states must to ensure that homeless students have access to educational services that enable them to meet the same challenging student performance standards to which all students are held. During the telephone survey, state coordinators were asked to indicate the current barriers to school success for homeless children and youth in their state. Additionally, state coordinators selected three areas of need that they would focus on if they had additional resources.

The barrier to success for homeless children and youth cited by the majority of state coordinators was frequent mobility from school to school. Other barriers cited by state coordinators, in order of frequency, included the lack of awareness and sensitivity among school administrators and teachers to the specific educational needs of homeless children and youth, and homeless children and youth's inability to complete school assignments due to the lack of an appropriate (e.g., quiet, has a desk) study area.

More than half of state coordinators said they would fund extra educational services (e.g., Title I, special education, tutoring) and provide for students' physical needs (e.g., food, clothing, health care, etc.) to reduce the barriers to success for homeless children and youth. In addition, about half of state coordinators indicated they would direct resources toward transportation, psychological services, and awareness raising and sensitivity training among school administrators, teachers, and students.

STATE-LEVEL SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES TO MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Under the McKinney Act, state coordinators are required to (1) gather data every three years on the problems homeless children and youth have gaining access to public preschool programs and to public elementary and secondary schools, the difficulties in identifying special needs, progress made by the SEA and LEAs in the state in addressing problems and difficulties, and the success of the program under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney Act in ensuring that homeless children and youth enroll in, attend, and succeed in school; (2) develop and carry out the state plan for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program; (3) facilitate coordination between and among agencies that provide services to homeless families; and (4) develop relationships and coordinate with relevant education, child development or preschool programs, and other providers of services to improve the provision of comprehensive services to homeless families. The strategies selected for completing these tasks vary across the states as individual coordinators establish different priorities and methods.

The purpose of this chapter is to present information obtained from the state coordinators regarding their role in awareness-raising activities, data collection efforts, access to educational programs, and coordination and collaboration with the social-service-provider community.

Awareness Raising and Sensitivity Training

Significant differences exist among and within states in the level of community awareness of issues related to the definition, condition, needs, and rights of homeless children and youth. Two of the most frequent methods used by state coordinators for raising awareness among school personnel are distributing materials and conducting staff development meetings. When asked what steps are taken to ensure that districts are aware of changes to federal legislation, most state coordinators reported either disseminating materials such as legislation and policy guidelines to administrative and school staff or conducting awareness-raising activities such as workshops, conferences, and meetings for administrative staff in both McKinney subgrantee and nonsubgrantee districts. State coordinators take these same steps to increase awareness of homelessness issues among community agencies, particularly for McKinney subgrantee districts.

Twenty-one state coordinators in the 1998 survey reported that developing their state consolidated plan had raised awareness among state program administrators about the efforts of the McKinney-funded program to serve the needs of homeless children and youth. However, nine state

coordinators during the same survey reported that some districts were not aware that they had a homeless population.

Coordination and Collaboration

Under the McKinney Act, each state must ensure that coordination occurs among the office of the coordinator and those school districts, agencies, and organizations that serve homeless children and youth. Accordingly, state coordinators indicated they coordinate and collaborate most with local education agencies, state government agencies, other offices within their state education agency, and homeless shelters. In the 1998 survey, nine state coordinators reported that coordinating or integrating the homeless program with other state programs was a problem because of limited time and program-specific agendas. Table 4 highlights these findings.

State coordinators also reported that, by far, the two collaborative activities with the most impact were participating in an interagency task force or committee on homelessness and building programmatic linkages among various programs, agencies, or organizations working in the service of homeless children and youth. Sharing data systems on homeless populations with other programs, agencies, or organizations was also a common strategy for improving services to homeless children and youth, identified by 10 state coordinators as an activity that most improved program administration and services to homeless students. A few state coordinators reported that the following activities had a positive impact on improving program administration: (1) working together with other programs, agencies, or organizations on monitoring the extent to which the needs of homeless children and youth are being addressed; (2) reviewing state policies and regulations that affect homeless populations; and (3) identifying barriers that impede access to school. By promoting coordination and collaboration locally, state coordinators have enabled school districts and social service providers to stretch their available resources.

Table 4. Coordination and collaboration for homeless children and youth, as reported by state coordinators*

Consider the agencies and organizations with which your office has spent the most time collaborating and coordinating on issues related to serving the educational needs of homeless children and youth. Among the following, please choose the four organizations or agencies with which your office spent the most time collaborating and coordinating.

Agencies and Organizations	Number of State Coordinators Reporting
Local education agencies	36
Homeless shelters	25
Other offices within your state education agency	25
Other state government agencies	24
State Coalition for the Homeless	19
Social service organizations	14
Schools	12
State or local housing agencies	12
Other local government agencies	7
Other homeless advocacy organizations	6
Institutions of higher education	4
Local businesses	1
Other	8

(Total exceeds 51 because respondents chose multiple answers.)

* N=51

Table reads: State coordinators most commonly reported that they coordinated and collaborated with local education agencies, homeless shelters, other offices within state education agencies, or other state government agencies.

Access to Educational Programs and Services

Although significant progress has been made in school access for homeless children and youth since the passage of the McKinney Act, a large proportion of homeless students still experience difficulty in gaining access to needed educational services, such as services for youth, gifted and talented programs,

and Head Start (Table 5). The survey revealed that the largest numbers of state coordinators rated the following programs as difficult for homeless children and youth in their state to access[4]:

- special education (33 state coordinators);
- Head Start or other publicly funded preschool programs (29 coordinators);
- gifted and talented programs (27 coordinators);
- Even Start or other family literacy programs (26 coordinators); and
- programs for students with limited English proficiency (25 coordinators).

Consistent with the findings of the 1995 study, access to Title I was not identified as a top barrier by state coordinators in 1998, with 29 coordinators saying that homeless children and youth have no difficulty accessing Title I in their state. However, with 19 coordinators still citing difficulty in this area, homeless students continue to face some barriers accessing Title I services. Although states may have policies and laws that declare that access should not be denied, this does not guarantee that homeless children and youth get into the educational programs for which they are eligible. For example, homeless children may not be able to access publicly funded preschool programs that have reached full capacity, or they may enter a school midway through the year after all slots for programs have been assigned. Similar to the findings of the 1995 study, functions that affect special education placements include the length of time to obtain interdistrict record transfers, difficulty in scheduling assessments, and the high mobility of homeless students.

[4] These data combine the "great difficulty" and "some difficulty" survey response categories.

Table 5. Access of homeless children and youth to education programs and services, as reported by state coordinators

Consider the current access of homeless children and youth to educational services in your state. Indicate the degree to which eligible homeless children and youth have difficulty accessing each of the following educational services.

	Number of State Coordinators Reporting				
Education Services	**Great Difficulty**	**Some Difficulty**	**No Difficulty**	**NA**	**Don't Know**
Services for youth	14	9	9	8	8
Head Start or other publicly funded preschool programs	10	19	16	0	5
Gifted and talented programs	10	17	8	2	12
Even Start or other family literacy programs	8	18	18	0	5
Special education	5	28	14	0	3
State compensatory education	3	10	21	10	6
Programs for students with limited English proficiency	2	23	18	1	6
Title I basic program	2	17	29	1	1
Migrant education	1	8	23	4	14
Free or reduced price school lunch	1	6	42	0	0
Other	2	1	1	6	1

* N=51

Table reads: Nine state coordinators reported that homeless students in their states have no difficulty accessing services for youth.

Data Collection

Under the McKinney Act, state coordinators are required to gather data on the problems homeless children and youth have gaining access to public preschool programs and to public elementary and secondary schools; the difficulties in identifying the special needs of children and youth; any progress made by the SEA and LEAs in the state in addressing such problems; and the success of the program in ensuring that homeless children and youth enroll in, attend, and succeed in school. In response to this provision, state coordinators were asked to indicate what kind of data were routinely

collected from school districts by the Office of the Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

Considering data collected from both McKinney subgrantee and nonsubgrantee districts, state coordinators said they most often collected data on school enrollment. State coordinators also routinely collected data on preschool-age children, difficulties or problems experienced by school districts in serving homeless students, and educational needs. Data on how homeless children and youth are performing in school (e.g., participation rates, retention rates, achievement) and on program effectiveness were the least routinely requested. Table 6 reports these findings in further detail.

However, when considering data from McKinney subgrantee districts only, a different pattern emerges. As shown in Table 6, state coordinators collect considerably more data from McKinney districts. For example, state coordinators collected data on enrollment, achievement, difficulties or problems experienced by school districts in serving homeless students, effectiveness of education programs and strategies, and educational needs. However, few state coordinators collect data on retention and participation rates from McKinney districts.

Table 6. Data collection on homeless children and youth, as reported by state coordinators*

What kind of data related to homeless children and youth does the Office of the Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth ask school districts in the state to provide periodically?

	SEA Currently Collects Data?			
Type of Data	Yes, from ALL districts	Yes, from McKinney subgrantee districts only	No	Other
Enrollment	21	25	3	0
Data on preschool age children	19	16	10	4
Educational needs	18	23	5	2
Difficulties or problems experienced by school districts in serving homeless students	18	22	6	2
Attendance rates	14	15	20	0
Participation rates in shelter or transitional schools	13	14	16	5
Participation rates in education programs (Title I, special education, etc.)	12	17	20	0
Effectiveness of education programs and strategies	8	33	7	0
Retention rates	7	12	27	1
Achievement	6	23	17	0
LEA's assessment of effectiveness of state or federally sponsored technical assistance	6	17	23	1
Participation in human service programs	3	15	29	1

* N=51

Table reads: Twenty-one state coordinators reported that they collect data on enrollment from all districts.

Activities of Other State-Level Agencies and Organizations

In most states, the Office of the Coordinator for Homeless Children and Youth collaborates a great deal with various state government departments, as well as with nongovernmental groups and organizations that operate at the state level. These various entities provide the coordinator with information on the needs and conditions of homeless children and youth in the state, help to establish the

state coordinator's agenda and activities, and facilitate the state coordinator's efforts in other ways. The primary ways in which organizations provide assistance to state coordinators are through (1) professional development for educators and other school personnel to increase their awareness of the needs and rights of homeless children and youth, and (2) coordination between schools and agencies serving homeless children and youth. However, other organizations play a role in conducting assessments of the needs of homeless children and youth and providing before-school, after-school, and summer education programs. Table 7 describes state services provided by non-McKinney sources. By collaborating with other agencies in these ways, state coordinators are able to carry out their McKinney Act mandate to develop relationships and coordinate with relevant education, child development, or preschool programs and with other providers of services to improve the provision of comprehensive services to homeless families.

Table 7. State services provided to homeless children and youth other than through McKinney subgrants to LEAs, as reported by state coordinators*

Consider the services that your office provided to homeless children and youth in your state, other than through McKinney grants to LEAs. Among the following, please indicate the five services that receive the most support (e.g., time, money, etc.).

State Services Provided to Homeless Children and Youth Other Than Through McKinney Grants to LEAs	Number of State Coordinators Reporting
Professional development for educators and other school personnel to increase their awareness of the needs and rights of homeless children and youth	39
Coordination between schools and agencies serving homeless children and youth	33
Before-school, after-school, and summer education programs	21
Assessments of the needs of homeless children and youth	20
Education for homeless parents regarding the rights and resources available to their children	16
Tutoring, remedial education, or other educational services	15
School supplies	13
Early childhood programs for homeless preschool-aged children	10
Assessments of the eligibility of homeless children and youth for educational programs and services	9
Transportation not otherwise provided	9
Referrals for medical, mental, and other health services	7
Tracking, obtaining, and transferring records necessary for school enrollment	7
Other	10

Total exceeds 51 because respondents chose multiple answers.

* N=51

Table reads: Thirty nine state coordinators reported their office provided professional development for educators and other school personnel to increase their awareness of the needs and rights of homeless children and youth.

DISTRICT-LEVEL SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES UNDER THE McKINNEY ACT

The McKinney Act authorizes state education agencies to award McKinney Act subgrants to local education agencies. The grants are intended to support districts' efforts to ensure that homeless children and youth have access to the same, free, and appropriate education as nonhomeless children and youth, and to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless children and youth. Subgrantees may use the funds for implementing professional development activities around specific problems in the education of homeless children and youth; tutoring; providing supplemental instruction or enriched educational services; providing before-school, after-school, and summer programs; mentoring; expediting evaluations for programs and services; providing referrals for medical, dental, mental, and other health services; educating and training parents of homeless children and youth; purchasing school supplies; and undertaking coordination activities.

Drawing on data from the survey of 51 state coordinators of homeless education and site visits to 14 school districts, we describe the McKinney Act subgrant award process and discuss how school districts organize project administration and services in their efforts to serve homeless children and youth.

Awarding McKinney Subgrants to Districts

School districts seeking McKinney funds apply to the state, which awards subgrants directly, based on the needs of the district's homeless population. Relatively small numbers of districts in each state apply for and receive McKinney dollars; program funds are limited; and most states prefer to concentrate their awards in a few districts rather than spreading them throughout the state. In most states, McKinney subgrants are awarded on a competitive basis. According to the survey of state coordinators, states awarded an average of eight new subgrants and five continuation subgrants in 1997-98, which is unchanged since the 1993-94 school year. Table 8 outlines the number of subgrants awarded in each state. In addition, state coordinators reported the following about subgrants made for the 1997-98 year:

- Nationwide, 602 subgrants were awarded in 1997-98. Of these, 357 were new subgrants and 245 were continuation subgrants (grants awarded in previous years that have not expired).

- The average overall amount of McKinney funds awarded to all subgrants within a state, including continuation subgrants, was $433,337. However, states ranged greatly in this

allocation, with Texas awarding a high of approximately $2.5 million and America Samoa awarding a low of $5,744. Similarly, the range in average subgrant allocation to each district was wide, with a high of $127,700 per subgrant in Texas and a low of $1,350 per subgrant in Utah.

- The largest number of subgrants were made to urban districts, with the remainder divided among suburban districts, small towns that are not part of a metropolitan area, and rural/farming districts.

Table 8. State allocation of McKinney program funds, 1997-98

State	State McKinney Grant (in Dollars)	Total Number of Districts	Number of New Subgrants	Number of Continuation Subgrants
Alabama*				
Alaska	$50,000	53	0	7
Arizona	383,000	300	0	8
Arkansas	242,859	311	3	13
California	2,200,000	1,000 +	27	0
Colorado	185,184	176	0	7
Connecticut*				
Delaware	60,000	19	0	3
District Of Columbia*				
Florida	1,094,822	67	2	14
Georgia	579,898	180	2	23
Hawaii	n/a	1	n/a	n/a
Idaho	56,565	110	8	0
Illinois	962,000	898	19	0
Indiana	309,500	298	10	0
Iowa	160,000	377	2	6
Kansas	180,000	304	6	0
Kentucky	378,000	176	0	11
Louisiana	550,000	66	0	10
Maine	80,000	187	2	0
Massachusetts	486,562	330	0	12
Michigan	900,000	600	19	18
Minnesota	243,000	391	10	0
Mississippi	413,000	154	36	0
Missouri	450,000	525	10	0
Montana	50,000	348	1	2
Nebraska	7,297	640	4	0
Nevada	50,000	17	6	1
New Hampshire	$74,000	5	1	3

Table 8. State allocation of McKinney program funds, 1997-98

State	State McKinney Grant (in Dollars)	Total Number of Districts	Number of New Subgrants	Number of Continuation Subgrants
New Jersey	408,877	594	7	0
New Mexico	160,840	89	9	0
New York	2,243,636	706	9	42
North Carolina	429,124	117	14	5
North Dakota	50,000	230	5	0
Ohio	961,000	611	0	11
Oklahoma	287,000	542	0	7
Oregon	194,000	199	16	1
Pennsylvania	1,098,866	500	13	0
Rhode Island*				
South Carolina	362,250	99	12	12
South Dakota	67,200	177	0	2
Tennessee	544,655	138	11	0
Texas	2,533,835	1050	5	15
Utah	49,955	40	25	12
Vermont	75,000	60	3	0
Virginia	286,000	134	14	n/a
Washington	316,490	296	0	10
West Virginia	183,299	55	24	0
Wisconsin	350,000	426	9	0
Wyoming	55,615	48	2	1
American Samoa	5,744	1	1	1
BIA	100,000	88	4	2
Puerto Rico	n/a	101	n/a	n/a
Virgin Islands	n/a	2	n/a	n/a

Source: U.S. Department of Education

* *States that did not participate in survey of state coordinators.*

When selecting applications for funding, state coordinators reported that they consider the quality of a proposed project, the number of homeless children and youth in the district, and the severity of unmet needs. Coordinators were least likely to take into consideration the concentration or proportion of homeless children and youth in the district.

Thirty-eight percent of state coordinators reported that there has been a change in how subgrantees spend McKinney funds locally since the 1994 reauthorization. They noted an increased emphasis on direct educational services for homeless children and youth and an increased focus on access to preschool, working with families, and collaborative efforts.

District Services and Activities Under the McKinney Act

Districts provide an array of services and activities in an effort to provide homeless children and youth with a free and appropriate education. On a basic level, they usually work to identify homeless students, place them in school, and provide them with transportation to school. To enhance the education of homeless students, districts sometimes offer before- and after-school programs, work to ensure that homeless students have access to other educational programs, and provide parent education. Districts also coordinate and collaborate with local social service providers. Finally, they work to increase knowledge about the education of homeless students by providing awareness-raising activities and sensitivity training.

Data collected from site visits indicate that districts with and without McKinney funds are finding ways to address at least some of the needs of homeless children and youth. However, LEAs with McKinney subgrants are better able than other districts to provide a broader range of educational and recreational services to homeless children and youth. All McKinney subgrantees we visited have identified a district-level staff person who is responsible for enrolling homeless students, establishing procedures for identification and placement of homeless children and youth, developing project guidelines, collaborating with local social service providers, evaluating the program, documenting services and activities, and disseminating information. Furthermore, McKinney districts are more likely than their non-McKinney counterparts to (1) ensure that shelter-based homeless children and youth are identified, enrolled in school, and attending school; (2) provide professional development to district and school staff in order to increase the awareness of the rights and needs of homeless children and youth; (3) sponsor professional development activities that identify procedures to follow and services that are available; (4) sponsor after-school activities and programs for parents; and (5) collect data on the number of homeless children in the district and the types of services available.

In contrast, LEAs that do not receive McKinney dollars must rely on funds from Title I and community organizations to support their efforts. In most of these districts, a central staff person to address the needs of homeless students does not exist. Instead, they rely on school staff (e.g., guidance counselors, nurses, social workers) to identify homeless students and provide individualized services on an as-needed basis. In addition, non-McKinney districts provide little professional development related to homelessness; enjoy few district-level collaborations among shelters and other service providers; and sponsor few after-school activities. Because services to homeless children and youth are not coordinated at the district level, state coordinators have to provide more leadership and information to nonsubgrantee districts so that they do not deny services to homeless children and youth. Most of the sites we visited did not have a district-wide definition of homeless.

District Staffing of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program

According to the survey of state coordinators, 3,874 districts nationwide -- both with and without subgrants -- have designated a liaison for homelessness issues. Although this is a decrease from the number of districts reported in 1994, it is encouraging to note that an additional 4,938 districts have designated a contact person for homelessness issues. Therefore, in total, 8,812 districts nationwide -- or 66 percent -- have designated either a liaison or a contact person for homelessness issues.

Subgrant project staffing varies among the seven local sites we visited. In some sites -- usually those serving a small number of homeless children and youth -- one staff person performs the administrative and operational tasks required under the McKinney grant. In others, project administration is apportioned among several people. For example, in Salem-Keizer, Oregon, the Homeless Children and Families Program consists of the program coordinator, a youth outreach advocate, a children's advocate, a family advocate, and an administrative assistant who is responsible for collecting and compiling data. Subgrants with several staff members must find creative ways to stretch their subgrant funds to cover positions. In every subgrant project in the site-visit sample, regardless of staff size or configuration, the liaison for homelessness education is the staff person who is responsible for the majority of project operations and administration.

In a few smaller districts, liaisons divide their time between homelessness issues and other district responsibilities. However, other liaisons in the districts we visited worked full-time in that role. Whether working full-time or part-time on homelessness issues, all district liaisons in each site visited are responsible for enrolling homeless children and youth in school. Other responsibilities listed by liaisons, which varied greatly depending upon the size of the program, included coordinating with local social service providers, developing project guidelines and procedures, filing reports with the state, evaluating the program, arranging transportation for homeless students, disseminating information about homelessness to schools and the community, supervising staff and volunteers, coordinating program and special events, providing technical assistance to other districts, providing statewide leadership and advocacy, and working with parents of homeless children.

Identification and School Placement

Most McKinney subgrantees devote time and resources to the task of identifying and placing homeless children and youth in school. In Little Rock, Arkansas, the district has encouraged schools to implement a support team strategy for homeless students. When a homeless child registers for school (which can occur at the school or at the district office), the school-based registrar contacts the student's teacher, the principal, a counselor, and the school nurse. The group operates as a team to coordinate services for the student. When necessary, the team convenes to discuss the issues of homeless students.

Several school districts have taken creative steps to handle the large task of finding homeless students and registering them for school. For example:

> **Cleveland Public Schools (Ohio)** developed a phone-in voicemail system that allows shelter providers to enroll children in school over the phone. The providers call the 24-hour Helpline and respond to prompts that provide the necessary enrollment information to the school district. If there is information missing, the district will call other districts to request student records. According to shelter providers, district enrollment staff, and the liaison, this system has dramatically reduced the amount of time it takes to enroll a homeless student in school. Generally, students can attend school the day after a call is placed to the Helpline.

Shelter providers play a crucial role in the identification and school placement of homeless students. At many shelters, providers direct all incoming families with school-age children to the liaison's office for assistance with school-related matters. Liaisons noted the importance of shelter providers emphasizing school attendance; in several places liaisons depend upon the collaboration of shelter staff to see that homeless students enroll in school. In fact, in many shelters students must be enrolled in school within a brief number of days after arrival -- if their parents do not see to this, the family is not allowed to stay in the shelter.

In two of the McKinney districts we visited, school enrollment is influenced by desegregation orders. In both districts, the desegregation order may prohibit homeless students from attending their school of origin[5] in an effort to maintain the proper ethnic composition. As a result of the desegregation orders, if space is not available in the school of origin or a nearby school, students are sent to another school within the district.

In contrast to McKinney districts, the identification of homeless children and youth in non-McKinney districts is generally not a systematic or formalized process, and most of the districts we visited rely on homeless families to identify themselves during enrollment or other in-take procedures.

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[5] To promote school success and continuity of learning environments, homeless students may stay enrolled in the school they were attending prior to becoming homeless.

Districts also use school social workers, counselors, teachers, and nurses to identify homeless students who come to their attention because of behavioral, health, academic, or other problems. For example, one district issues an annual survey to school nurses that asks them to count the number of homeless students attending their particular school. A few districts we visited rely on shelters or other service providers to identify homeless students and ensure they receive appropriate school services. The following example demonstrates the crucial role local service providers can play in homeless students' academic well-being:

> **Building Blocks (Missouri)** is an initiative of the Community in Partnership Family Center in Pattonville. Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the program helps homeless children and youth access educational services and resources. A team of intervention specialists, advocates, and a school coordinator works to screen homeless students for special education services, facilitate the referral process for special education, advocate for students during individual education plan meetings, access resources such as eyeglasses and school supplies, work with parents to play an active role in their child's education, and address issues related to transportation, immunization, and guardianship.

The identification and school placement of homeless students in non-McKinney districts is complicated by the relatively small size of their homeless populations as compared to McKinney districts and the high mobility rates that characterize homeless populations. As one district administrator described the situation, "By the time we make the arrangements to help, the family is gone."

Transportation to School

As discussed earlier, state coordinators reported that transportation is the biggest barrier to school access for homeless children and youth. Most districts cannot cover the high costs of transporting students with their relatively small McKinney subgrants. Therefore, districts are forced to seek funding from other sources or offer limited transportation services. One district we visited provided transportation for homeless students only until the McKinney budget ran out, often in early spring. As a result, homeless students had to change schools to enroll in one where either an operating bus route already existed or one they could walk to. In contrast:

> In **St. Louis Public Schools (Missouri)**, the district covers the cost of transportation for homeless students, either through the McKinney grant or through general district transportation funds. The district transports an average of 956 homeless students each year. Middle and high school students receive bus passes for public transportation from the district, while elementary students are transported either in taxicabs or on school buses. The district requires that parents or guardians be advised about school options, that transportation agreements be reviewed every 20 days, and that social workers and shelter staff monitor students' attendance. In 1997-98, $50,000 from the district's $180,000 McKinney grant covered transportation costs, while the school district covered more than $300,000.

Liaisons in more than one district expressed frustration with neighboring districts that occasionally refuse to pay for students to be transported across district lines. They note that it is not clear who is required to foot the bill -- the district in which the student resides or that in which the student attends school. State coordinators generally have limited daily interaction with districts; as a result, district liaisons or contacts often resolve these issues themselves. Furthermore, in these situations, if non-McKinney districts surround the McKinney district, coordinators note that the McKinney district most often ends up paying for the student's transportation.

Respondents in only one nonsubgrantee district discussed the McKinney Act provision that requires districts to continue the child's or youth's education in the school of origin. In rare cases where transportation accommodations to homeless students' school of origin are requested, this nonsubgrantee district usually arranges with a neighboring McKinney district -- one that hosts one of the few homeless shelters in the area -- to provide transportation to the student's school of origin. During transition periods, the district will temporarily cover the costs of cabs or buses. The liaison explained that the district "does not feel economic pressures [to provide] transportation. It is not an economic issue, generally. Somehow it works out financially on a case-by-case basis. This is because homeless students who must be transported back [into our district] have luckily fallen into neighboring districts that can pick up the costs with their McKinney funds." However, other respondents in this district suggested that transportation could be a barrier if a homeless student moved to another non-McKinney district. With neither district receiving special funding, they queried, "Who would ultimately be responsible?"

Despite the great problems noted in the area of transportation, districts are making progress: in the previous evaluation, no district in the sample had successfully responded to the McKinney Act in returning homeless students to their school of origin across district lines. In the group of districts visited for this study, several had made substantial progress in this regard. For example, some school districts ensured that homeless students connected with existing school or public bus routes, while others went to great lengths to transport students to their school of origin, such as hiring taxicabs to transport younger students who could not ride public buses alone or students who did not live near existing school bus routes.

According to state coordinators, LEA dollars are the primary means of funding transportation to school for homeless students in both subgrantee and nonsubgrantee districts. Coordinators reported that transportation was a barrier to school success, and almost one-quarter said that they would make directing resources to transport students to their schools of origin a top priority.

Before- and After-School Activities

Several of the subgrantee districts we visited offer homeless children a supplemental instructional program that consists of before- or after-school tutoring sessions. Offered in schools and shelters as well as libraries and other community areas, these sessions provide homeless children one-to-one homework or other instructional assistance from a school teacher or volunteer tutor from the community. The following are some examples of the types of instructional services provided in McKinney districts:

> **Cleveland Public Schools (Ohio)** offers a tutoring program for homeless students at 14 sites around the district. The programs, which meet twice a week for two hours, are staffed by school district teachers who are paid school district wages for their work. When students enter the program they take a computerized assessment. Several weeks later they are given the assessment again to measure their progress. Copies of student assessment results are given to parents and teachers as well as kept at project sites. During the 1997-98 school year, the tutoring program served 495 homeless children and youth.
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> **Little Rock Public Schools (Arkansas)** provide after-school tutoring help for 20-50 homeless students at a school and a local college twice a week. A full-time education professor who volunteers her time to run the program and to recruit and train college students as tutors coordinates the program at Philander Smith College. The college donates space for the program. Students in grades K-6 are transported from a local shelter to participate in the program, during which they meet by grade level to work with the college tutors.
>
> **Salem-Keizer School District (Oregon)** provides services to homeless students at the Oregon Capitol Inn, where about 100 homeless students stay every night. In an effort to reach homeless students who live in the hotel, the school district rents two rooms at the hotel to serve as a community center. The center has a computer lab and a lending library and is staffed during the week. Staff members offer a variety of services and host different clubs for children and youth. The district program works with the hotel's owner to ensure that all students attend school. Before the district opened the community center at the hotel, school attendance was 63 percent among students staying at the hotel. Once the center was opened and the partnership began, school attendance rose to its current 98 percent.

At the sites visited, before- and after-school programs were much more likely to serve homeless children in shelters than those living doubled-up or in other situations. In addition, only a few sites we visited reported holding after-school tutoring sessions specifically focused on homeless youth. The following is one such site:

> **Lincoln Public Schools (Nebraska)** funds a tutor's salary, supplies, and software for a tutoring program at the Freeway Youth Shelter. Tutoring sessions last for two hours and are held five times a week. Youth are assessed upon entering the program to determine what educational, social and life skills, or career exploration services are needed. The education tutor, in conjunction with a shelter staff member, is responsible for providing the needed services and for

maintaining communication with each youth's teachers and counselors. During the course of the 1997-98 school year, 231 youth participated in the program. Youth stay at the Freeway Youth Shelter for an average of ten days. During that time, youth participate in an average of seven tutoring sessions.

Despite the absence of McKinney funding at the district level, some nonsubgrantee districts also sponsor before- and after-school programs for homeless children and youth. After-school programs take place in schools, residential shelters, and community centers and feature homework assistance, one-to-one tutoring, or other kinds of instructional assistance. The following is an example of instructional services provided in nonsubgrantee districts:

IPS 14, Indianapolis (Indiana) Originally a program exclusively for homeless students, the school's after-school club program enables all students -- not just those who are homeless -- to participate in clubs for four afternoons each week. The program, funded by several community partners and a grant to the school to cover students' transportation costs, rotates students through three nine-week cycles. The cycles focus on building teamwork, preparing students for the state assessment, and preventing summer drop-off in academic skills.

However, in other nonsubgrantee districts that offer before- and after-school programs, the programs reach a limited number of homeless students because of transportation issues. In general, shelter-based students are more likely to have access to such services.

Improving the Access of Homeless Children and Youth to Educational Programs and Services

State coordinators reported that, more than other federal programs, homeless children and youth have some or great difficulty accessing gifted and talented programs, special education services, and Head Start or other publicly funded preschool programs. The subgrants in our study use a variety of strategies to ensure that homeless children and youth have access to educational programs and services. In Salem-Keizer, some homeless children and youth have a district case manager who helps those children and their families access needed services and educational programs. Because staff members know these families well, they are more apt to learn about the children's needs and help the family meet those needs. While this approach greatly improves the access of some homeless children and youth to educational programs and services, the high cost of such intensive services makes it prohibitive for every homeless student to have a district case manager. Another example is:

Fargo Public Schools (North Dakota) uses some McKinney funds to pay the salary of a "tracker." This tracker has very close contact with homeless families and provides materials such as school supplies, eyeglasses, and bus passes when necessary. She also assists in registering students for school (often contacting principals to determine which school is the most appropriate for the student) and has organized an after-school tutoring program at a local shelter.

The tracker serves as the point person for principals, teachers, and counselors who want to communicate students' needs. She often attends meetings with school staff.

Several McKinney districts in the study hire social workers to help improve homeless students' access to educational programs and services. The district coordinator in St. Louis noted that, "services to homeless children and youth work hand-in-glove with social work services." In Cleveland, the program for homeless students funds a part-time social worker and a part-time psychologist. The social worker ensures that families are getting all they can from social service agencies while the psychologist tests those students who may need special education placement. By employing its own psychologist to test children, the district ensures that homeless children who require special education are placed in programs within 14 days of being identified, a process that usually takes months.

When asked, some district administrators in the sites we visited argued that homeless students have the same access to educational services and programs as any nonhomeless student. Most of the McKinney districts did not think that homeless students lacked access to Title I. In Title I schoolwide schools, which have proliferated since ESEA was reauthorized in 1994, homeless students automatically have access to equal services as nonhomeless students, depending on their academic needs. However, some administrators noted that treating homeless children and youth as all students are treated is not always acting in their best interest. For example, programs with limited enrollment slots that tend to fill up at the beginning of the year are usually unable to serve homeless children who often arrive later in the year.

Approximately one-half of state coordinators reported that homeless students in nonsubgrantee districts had equal access to educational services as their counterparts in subgrantee districts, although a significant number of coordinators admitted that they did not know if such access was granted equally to students. Because most respondents in the nonsubgrantee districts were unaware of the provisions of the McKinney Act, few make concerted efforts to ensure that homeless students have access to Title I, Head Start, and special education services, as called for in the 1994 reauthorization. However, it should be noted that in a couple of nonsubgrantee districts, Title I services are reserved specifically for early childhood students, and in others, the schoolwide option makes all students automatically eligible for such services.

In general, respondents in nonsubgrantee districts suggested that homeless students are eligible for any services available to the at-risk student population. According to a principal, "We use money to help children whom we perceive as needing assistance. We don't care if they're homeless or not." Although respondents are reluctant to target homeless students for fear of labeling or stigmatizing them, encompassing homeless students in the general at-risk pool does not necessarily serve their best interests. For example, early childhood programs often fill up at the beginning of the school year, and the referral

process for special education can be lengthy. One district administrator noted that in cases where homeless students require special education services, there is little communication with the student's previous school, and assessment of academic needs often has to be repeated, thus making the process longer than it needs to be.

Parent Involvement

Most of the subgrantee districts in our study do not offer many services to the parents or guardians of homeless students. Some host monthly meetings with parents, while others send materials for parents to schools, or offer occasional workshops. However, several districts emphasize involving parents.

> **Salem-Keizer Public Schools (Oregon)** has two staff members who provide services to parents. The youth outreach advocate provides case management for some families, and the family advocate offers training, activities, and case management. Services offered to parents include: life skills training, computer training, assistance with job searches, GED classes, and monthly transportation to grocery and other stores. In the past, the district has provided hair cuts, flu shots, and bags of fruit to parents. The district also grants scholarships to parents who wish to take classes at the local community college. According to the district coordinator, activities for parents are planned based on their needs, and aim to increase their involvement in the program.
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> In **Cleveland Public Schools (Ohio)**, the district provides a "Mommy and Me" program for parents and their children below age 6. In the program, parents and their children meet individually with a district teacher who works with them to complete a "Family Facts Book," which includes a picture of the participating child and basic facts about the children in the family (health records, schools attended, social security numbers, and phone numbers of family members, social service agencies, and emergency contacts). Participants are given a learning doll, made by volunteers, which parents use to teach their children about colors, shapes, and manipulating zippers and buttons.

Most nonsubgrantee districts that we visited did not offer services specifically to the parents of homeless students. One exception is:

> **Oakland Unified School District (California)** Staff from the Office of Homeless Education sponsor semi-annual workshops for parents in local homeless shelters. The workshops, called "Conscious Parenting," are designed to empower parents, help them navigate the school system, and identify ways that parents can encourage their children to succeed in school.

Awareness Raising and Sensitivity Training

Among the seven McKinney subgrant projects we visited, most noted the importance of raising awareness among school staff. One coordinator for whom this has been a priority said, "The awareness level really improved. Because of information they have, people are much less likely to turn kids away." Sites often send information to schools about how to recognize and meet the needs of homeless children and youth. Some sites go beyond disseminating materials to provide professional development and training. The coordinator in Salem-Keizer teaches lessons on homelessness at local elementary schools. In Little Rock, the liaison provides training to school secretaries and school-based registrars. Because these staff members are often the first that a homeless family will see, the district wants them to be sensitive to the needs of homeless families and informed about district services available to them. Another example is Cleveland Public Schools:

> **Cleveland Public Schools' (Ohio)** subgrant program worked with the Cleveland Playhouse to produce a musical about the experiences of two teenagers who become homeless. The musical, called *Shelter*, enjoyed so much success as an educational tool that the subgrant program and the Playhouse converted the musical into a 30-minute video, for which the subgrant program wrote an accompanying curricular unit. The video has been used as a professional development tool with teachers both in their schools and at the Cleveland Playhouse.

Despite their best efforts, liaisons are often unable to reach the number of school staff they would like to. According to one district administrator:

> The bigger the school is, the more difficult it is to get the staff in that building, from administrators on down, to be responsive to the needs of all kids. That is really a challenge...They're overwhelmed with so many different issues that a kid who's homeless doesn't always rise to the priority he or she should. We only have one person following up in 50 schools -- it forces you to deal with people in large groups. We try to put in place procedures and guidelines to guide people's behavior, but it doesn't always happen.

The vast majority of state coordinators reported that they conduct awareness-raising activities for staff from nonsubgrantee districts and, to a lesser extent, for school staff and community representatives from these districts. However, most of the nonsubgrantee districts we visited do not conduct such sessions for either school staff or parents, despite the fact that a few respondents mentioned that a lack of sensitivity among school staff was a challenge that homeless students faced at school. In one nonsubgrantee district, social service providers reported that principals periodically turn away homeless students trying to enroll in the school because they lack proof of residence. Respondents also suggested that while some teachers are extremely supportive and responsive to the needs of homeless students, others are not sensitive at all and "make life difficult" for homeless students. In another district, awareness of homeless students in general is minimal. According to a district administrator, "We are told to get them in school. People don't really want to acknowledge that they [homeless students] exist."

The relative infrequency of awareness raising and sensitivity training in nonsubgrantee districts can be attributed in part to the relatively small homeless student populations and a lack of resources. Nevertheless, a small number of nonsubgrantee districts did overcome resource challenges and manage to sponsor awareness-raising activities, if only to a limited extent. For example, one nonsubgrantee district conducts in-services with school registrars to discuss intake procedures, which are outlined in the district's policy on homeless students, while shelter providers in another district hold sessions with parents to inform them of their rights. In general, however, lack of awareness is a problem, and few practitioners and parents are aware of the rights of homeless students. This lack of awareness leads to a failure to enforce the McKinney Act provisions.

Coordination and Collaboration Among Local Social Service Providers

Most subgrantee districts we visited have done a good job of setting up lines of communication among school officials and shelter providers for the identification and school placement of homeless children. Some districts, however, have gone beyond this basic approach to the tasks of coordinating services and collaborating with agencies serving homeless children and youth. The following are some examples of subgrantee districts that have coordinated with other service providers and agencies to access additional resources and broaden the cluster of services available to homeless children and youth:

> In **St. Louis Public Schools (Missouri)**, the district coordinator participates in the Homeless Network, an umbrella group for all of the service providers to the homeless in the area. The network conducts monthly focus groups and provides educational opportunities for homeless adults and children. Service providers note that the network helps reduce animosities, fosters better working relationships among agencies, fosters greater openness among staff, and ensures that families' needs are better met, especially when they have multiple overlapping problems (e.g., substance abuse and domestic abuse). The district coordinator, who initiates meetings and provides in-service training for the network said, "there is a continuum of care built into the Network."
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> **Tucson Public Schools (Arizona)** supports nine Family Resource Wellness Centers that are located at or close to Title I schools. Though the district provides some McKinney funds as well as the buildings and electricity for the centers, they are largely supported by external funds. Local agencies collaborate with the district to offer a variety of services at the Wellness centers. One center that partners with a public health organization offers medical services; another uses McKinney funds to offer academic support and a job training program. The Wellness Centers have been in existence for six years.

Unlike McKinney districts, respondents from nonsubgrantee districts reported that school officials communicate with local service providers on an as-needed basis, and that, in most cases, social workers, teachers, and principals are the primary links to homeless students and their families. Further,

in most of the districts we visited, local service providers participate in some sort of facilitating structure -- be it a network, coalition, or other vehicle for collaboration. The existence of such structures suggests that even in the absence of McKinney dollars, local communities are rising to the challenge of ensuring that the educational, health, and economic needs of homeless families are addressed.

Data Collection, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Collection of data varied widely across the sites we visited. At a minimum, each subgrant is required to provide an "unduplicated count" of homeless students to its state department of education. Some subgrants go beyond this basic information to collect data on the ethnicity of participants, the percent of identified students or families served, participation in services or activities by parents as well as students, student attendance, and student academic achievement. Often the kind and amount of data collected depend on the district's capacity to maintain data of any sort; it is difficult for districts that do not have an easily accessed student database to collect and maintain data on homeless students. In other districts, a sophisticated district-wide electronic system can be tailored to allow students' records to indicate their homelessness status, which leads to the ability to disaggregate all district data by homelessness status. For example, in the Little Rock school district, the liaison receives a list each month from the student assignment office of all homeless students that indicates their ethnic group, grade, school, gender, and living arrangement (e.g., shelter, doubled-up, etc.) However, in several other districts we visited, systems for keeping track of homeless students were manual and not tied into a districtwide data system.

Most of the subgrants we visited were unaware of the McKinney Act requirements to track the academic achievement of homeless students. One liaison noted that collecting such data is complicated because neighboring districts do not use the same assessments. Another noted that while the program has the capability to review homeless students' academic achievement, they do so on an individual basis when school staff indicate the need. In Little Rock, the coordinator receives a list of homeless students and their grades on a quarterly basis.

Most subgrantees keep information on participation in the activities and services they offer. In Salem-Keizer, these data are kept on services provided to parents and students and disaggregated by age group and ethnicity. This enables the program in Salem-Keizer to review at the end of each year exactly how many people from each age group participated in each activity or service they provided.

District liaisons disagreed about the difficulty of collecting and reporting information on academic performance, enrollment levels, attendance rates, participation in federally funded education programs, and attendance in transitional schools, which are often located in shelters. While some noted

that they have access to this information already, they felt it would be a difficult and time-consuming task to compile and report it. Districts differed in the kind of information to which they have access -- in one district, the liaison provided us with counts of homeless students participating in a variety of federally funded education programs, in another the liaison did not have easy access to this information. One liaison explained, "Part of the problem is that we have no base to draw from...Given the mobility, all we know is the percent enrolled in school."

Subgrants differed in the manner and frequency in which they are monitored by the state. Some districts submit monitoring reports to the state that include information about the number of homeless children and youth and the programs and services the district provides to them. Other districts receive monitoring visits from the state; one district noted that this occurs twice yearly while another reported a visit every other year. A few subgrants said that they were not monitored by the state.

Liaisons reported great difficulty in evaluating their programs. According to the supervisor of one program: "One of the biggest challenges to us is being able to evaluate the effectiveness of what we're doing." Only two of the subgrants we visited evaluate their programs. One uses evaluation forms required by the state to assess needs and evaluate program activities. According to the liaison in Salem-Keizer, "Every year the program randomly surveys parents, volunteers, agency personnel, and school teachers on our effectiveness. We use that information in our grant. For example, we learned concretely that people needed more transportation, so we gave shelters more latitude with transportation vouchers. Longer case management services are a direct result of surveys."

Unlike McKinney districts, the nonsubgrantee districts we visited did not participate in data collection, monitoring, or evaluation. The one exception to this is Oakland, California, which collected teacher evaluations on homeless students who participated in the after-school tutoring program.

Federal Support for District Programs for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

The emphasis on coordination and collaboration in the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has had an impact on education programs for homeless children and youth. Before the reauthorization, the McKinney Act was the only legislation that specifically mentioned the needs of homeless students. That changed with the reauthorized Title I, which requires local education agencies to specify in their application for Title I funds how their Title I program will address the needs of homeless students. Liaisons spoke highly of this. According to one:

> We came late to knowing that we could use Title I dollars for homeless kids. We went to the state director of homeless education and asked for more money. She said, "No, but ask the Title I director." We had a meeting with the Title I director and the state director of homeless education who reminded him of that obligation. She pointed out Title I legislation that authorized that...He did set aside some money...It's been a God-send. We've been operating for all these years and didn't know that we could access those funds to enhance what we've been doing. That has helped make our lives easier.

Other federal programs in the subgrantee districts we visited also support programs for homeless students. Because of a school district's consolidated plan, federal funds from Goals 2000 and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program were used to provide after-school programming and other education services. However, subgrantees said they received more funds from Title I than from any other federal program source.

In most of the nonsubgrantee districts we visited, respondents did not report receiving funding from outside sources to serve homeless students. However, in two districts -- both former McKinney subgrantees in which the homeless problem was recognized -- outside sources of funding were available. For example, Oakland Unified School District, which was a McKinney subgrantee between 1994 and 1996, tapped into Title I funding, McKinney dollars awarded to the county office of education, and in-kind support from a local philanthropic organization to sponsor its after-school program. Similarly, IPS 14 in Indianapolis leveraged financial support from several community groups to operate its after-school program. In smaller or more rural districts where homelessness is not commonly recognized as a problem, the likelihood of leveraging non-McKinney dollars or other sources of support diminishes. One nonsubgrantee district is required by state law to reserve funds to serve homeless students:

> **Reynolds School District (Oregon)** is subject to a state law that requires every district to set aside part of their Title I, Part A funds to serve homeless students. This money, referred to as the Title IA set-aside, has increased awareness around the state about the educational needs of homeless students. Districts can generate their own set-aside amount based on the estimated cost of serving their homeless population, or they may use a state funding formula. Each district is required to estimate the number of homeless students it serves and come up with a program to meet their needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

States and local school districts are continuing to work on breaking down barriers that impede school access, attendance, and success for homeless children and youth. Since the McKinney Act was enacted in 1987, most states and local school districts have reviewed and revised their laws, regulations, and policies to remove enrollment barriers caused by immunization and guardianship requirements, and more and more homeless students have gained access to school as a result. States and school districts are still struggling, however, to find ways to address transportation needs. They struggle largely because local school districts have limited resources. Other policies that act as barriers, such as school attendance and secondary credit accrual, have recently been identified.

To address the educational needs of homeless children and youth, state and local school districts have provided a range of services and activities. In many states, the district personnel view the state coordinators as the primary source of information and authority on issues related to the education of homeless children and youth. Since the McKinney Act was passed, for example, state coordinators have provided staff development for school personnel to overcome the barriers to serving homeless children and youth. In addition, state coordinators help coordinate the activities of schools and agencies serving homeless children and youth, identify available services and resources, and communicate this information to those who need it. By promoting coordination and collaboration locally, states have enabled school districts and social service providers to stretch their available resources and thus to better serve homeless children and youth.

As states and districts work to meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth, some issues are particularly salient. In the following section, we discuss these issues in light of their implications for future policy decisions. First, we summarize the recommendations made by state coordinators in the national survey regarding ways to improve state and federal efforts to meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth. Second, we discuss policy implications based on our own interpretation of the data collected for this study.

Recommendations of State Coordinators

- Most state coordinators want clarification of the McKinney Act and federal laws as they pertain to subgrant and nonsubgrantee districts. In particular, they would like specifics about guardianship, immunizations, transportation, and prekindergarten services.

- Most state coordinators want the coordinators of all federal programs, especially Title I, to receive clear and concise directives about federal coordinators' roles in educating homeless students. State coordinators believe that in order to improve access and services, other federal programs must reserve funds.

- Several state coordinators believe the McKinney Act should have an established grace period that allows homeless children without the proper documentation to enroll in school without delay.

- Several state coordinators would welcome technical assistance on gathering data.

- Some state coordinators suggest a longer award cycle for McKinney subgrants. A longer award cycle would allow districts to make continuous strides toward ensuring the enrollment and success of homeless children and youth.

- Some state coordinators want the McKinney Act to require that states with homeless populations above some minimum number have a full-time state coordinator for homelessness issues. Part-time state coordinators, particularly those in states with large homeless populations, are often unable to fully meet all the demands of their position as defined by the act.

- Some state coordinators suggest that the U.S. Department of Education develop a national campaign to increase awareness about the rights of homeless children and youth. One target of the campaign should be to improve homeless children and youth's access to education in rural areas where the rate of identification is low.

- A few state coordinators want access to networks and professional development at the SEA level.

- Three state coordinators would welcome a tracking system similar to the one that is used for migrant students.

- One state coordinator believes all states should get a local needs assessments to determine funding level for homeless children and youth.

- One state coordinator suggests an increased research agenda on education issues related to homeless students to document information dissemination, data collection, identification, services, needs, and effective practices.

Policy Implications

Many homeless students still experience difficulty in gaining access to federal and state education programs, in part due to a lack of information on the district and school levels. In particular, homeless students face the most obstacles to participation in gifted and talented, Head Start, special education, and bilingual/ESL programs. State coordinators could do more to ensure that information about the rights of homeless students is communicated clearly to local school districts and schools. In addition, federal program guidelines could give further direction to local Head Start programs about how to accommodate homeless students when programs face waiting lists and limited space.

While districts have made progress in transporting homeless students to their schools of origin, many students are not transported to their original schools because of high transportation costs and questions about responsibility. The transportation of homeless students, particularly young children, is an ongoing challenge. State coordinators could help ensure that districts understand their roles and responsibilities in meeting the McKinney Act's school-of-origin provision, which has implications for students' academic success, including enabling students to maintain credits earned and to avoid attendance problems. However, without additional resources, it would be impossible for districts to comply in all situations.

Few states and districts disaggregate student achievement data by homelessness; family mobility both complicates and necessitates the collection of such data. Because methods for identifying homeless students are difficult and yield imperfect results, many districts do not attempt to label or tag homeless students in their database systems and are not required to do so under the McKinney Act. Therefore, few districts are able to measure the academic performance of homeless students or track their progress over time. However, given that family mobility is a the greatest barrier to school success for homeless students, states and districts need to collect and analyze achievement data for this transient population to ensure that homeless students are making academic gains and to provide some record of their achievement as they move from school to school.

A district liaison for homeless issues can be an invaluable agent for ensuring school access for homeless students and for coordinating efforts with and among social service agencies and organization serving this population. By negotiating the network of local agencies and social service providers, liaisons have helped ensure that local services are not duplicated and that district staff members have a system for enrolling homeless students in school.

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