



**Testimony of Barbara Duffield, Executive Director, SchoolHouse Connection,
Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Rules**

How Schools Can End Childhood Hunger and Improve Nutrition

September 15, 2021

Chairman McGovern, Ranking Member Cole, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role of schools in ending hunger and improving nutrition. My name is Barbara Duffield and I am the Executive Director of SchoolHouse Connection, a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education.

Public schools are positioned to see what no other entity sees: the child who hoards food before a three-day weekend; the child who falls asleep in class because she was keeping watch over her siblings all night long; the child who gets off at different bus stops each day — the child who is homeless.

Schools must be front and center in solutions to both hunger and homelessness. As universal institutions and community hubs, schools know the needs of children, youth, and families in their communities—including those who are largely out of sight.

Homelessness is a marker for so many other vulnerabilities, gaps in systems, and traumas that a child might experience -- it is so much more than a housing issue. Contributing factors include job loss and underemployment, evictions and lack of affordable housing, natural disasters, domestic violence, international violence, addiction, mental illness, low educational attainment, and generational poverty. For youth who experience homelessness on their own, abuse, neglect, abandonment, and family conflict are causal factors. Systemic racism is a profound driver of homelessness, as demonstrated by [racial disparities in the likelihood of families and youth becoming homeless](#), in the prolonged harmful consequences of homelessness, and in barriers to accessing education and services.

Homelessness is inextricably connected to hunger, and therefore hunger cannot be addressed in isolation from it. Families and youth stay hungry in order to stay housed; they eat less in order to pay rent. Once homeless, the logistics of finding food or accessing meals becomes much more challenging. Moving from place to place, lacking transportation and lacking cooking

facilities (or refrigerators, places to store food, or even can openers) are all real barriers. Shelters might not accommodate the foods, times, and ways in which infants, toddlers, and adolescents need to eat. Families and youth who stay with other people eat less, or not at all, in order not to get kicked out of where they are staying. One of our staff who experienced homelessness recalls exclusively eating one-dollar frozen meals because she was not allowed to use the kitchen to cook where she was temporarily staying, and she did not have space to store food. She did not have adequate nutrition as she tried to complete high school. Hunger also puts homeless children and youth in harm's way: children and youth who are without housing and food are [prey for human traffickers](#), who can offer them both. It should come as no surprise that high school students experiencing homelessness are nearly three times as likely to have not had breakfast each day, compared to their stably housed peers.¹

A significant impediment to solving the problem of child and youth homelessness is its invisibility: we cannot solve what we do not see. Homelessness is [equally prevalent in rural, suburban, and urban communities](#), but is largely hidden. Many communities lack shelters for families and youth, or the existing shelters are full or have reduced capacity. Families and youth often fear shelter – especially during COVID-19. For these reasons, families and youth move frequently between hidden, unstable, and sometimes unsafe situations — situations that make it hard to social distance, and impossible to stay “at home.” Of the [1.4 million children and youth identified by public schools as experiencing homelessness in the 2018-2019 school year](#), only 12% were staying in shelters when they were first identified as homeless; 76.7% were staying with others temporarily; 7% were in motels; and 4% were unsheltered. **In the areas represented by the Members on the Rules Committee alone, 61,796 children and youth experiencing homelessness were identified by schools in the 2019-20 school year (Appendix A).** In Appendix B, I've provided the numbers of students experiencing homelessness reported to the U.S. Department of Education by every school district in Rules Committee districts. These numbers do not include children too young for school, or those who were not identified as homeless, or those who were not enrolled in school. Still, you may find them eye-opening and disturbing.

When we understand *how* children and youth experience homelessness — that most of these students are not in shelters, but rather stay in hidden situations — and the reality of *how many* children and youth experience homelessness, it becomes even clearer that schools are not only the *best*, but often the *only* source of food and support. Proper nutrition, in turn, helps children focus on the education that is ultimately their lasting path to security and well-being. Indeed, [lack of a high school degree or GED is the single greatest risk factor for homelessness](#) as a young adult, making education a critical protective factor against homelessness. Yet homelessness creates barriers to school enrollment and attendance: high mobility, lack of paperwork, lack of transportation, and for youth who are on their own, the lack of a parent or guardian. And hunger makes success in school all the more difficult.

¹ Forthcoming analysis of 2019 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data, [Student Homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#).

Congress has recognized these barriers and has taken important steps to remove them. Under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, most recently reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act, every local educational agency (LEA) is required to designate a homeless liaison who ensures that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified, stabilized, provided transportation, and connected to services in the school and in the community. Under the Child Nutrition Act, children and youth who are homeless are categorically eligible for school meals; expedited processes allow school district homeless liaisons simply to notify child nutrition departments when a child is identified as homeless, in lieu of families completing applications. School, then, can be a refuge — a home for children and youth who have none of their own.

In March 2020, when the pandemic took hold in the United States, children and youth experiencing homelessness lost that home, too; they lost the most stable places in their lives. Without in-person teachers, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, enrollment staff, coaches, and others to notice potential signs of homelessness, schools faced enormous challenges identifying families and youth experiencing homelessness. Last fall, together with the University of Michigan, we conducted a national survey that showed [a 28% decrease in the numbers of children and youth identified as homeless](#), compared to the previous fall — a drop of about 420,000 students. Looking at the numbers for the school districts that are represented on this committee, there is a drop of 4.5%, with only three months of virtual learning represented in the data. As the final 2020-2021 numbers come in, we are seeing much larger decreases. These numbers are cause for great concern, because there is no evidence that homelessness actually has decreased during the pandemic; and if children and youth experiencing homelessness are not identified by schools, they may not be enrolled, supported, or fed. Even otherwise effective pandemic-related anti-hunger programs, such as Pandemic EBT, have faced [challenges reaching highly mobile children](#), including children who are homeless or in foster care.

Despite the many upheavals of the pandemic, educators and community partners have worked diligently to devise creative means to stay connected to families and youth experiencing homelessness, to arrange food, and to meet needs holistically. At the center of these efforts are school district homeless liaisons and homeless education programs that keep a laser-like focus on the basic and educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and that spearhead school-community partnerships to ensure identification and support.

- **Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Colorado.** Prior to the pandemic, Adams 12 Five Star Schools significantly improved homeless student graduation rates, while decreasing mobility and drop-out rates — the results of a comprehensive, innovative, and integrated “Whole Child Initiatives” program (see Appendix C for details). The pandemic is presenting challenges on a level not seen before: more families and youth living in cars due to exposure to COVID, difficulties maintaining connections with youth and families, and more food insecurity. With nearly ten dedicated staff, the district is tackling these challenges with a multi-faceted approach that includes wrap-around coordinators in schools, host homes for unaccompanied youth, a mentoring program, and new housing partnerships. While all of these efforts reduce hunger for students, the district is working

to ensure that families have access to fresh food, particularly for those who culturally do not eat the processed, canned, or boxed food that is typical in local food pantries.

- **In Lawton, Oklahoma**, over 700 children and youth experiencing homelessness were identified by public schools, with less than 10% in shelter. In addition to regular breakfast and lunch, the district offers an option for virtual students to pick up 5 days of breakfast and lunch, by appointment, at any school cafeteria in the district. The district also provides meal bus routes to virtual students. Still, lack of transportation creates barriers to both of these options for students experiencing homelessness who cannot get to a school or a bus stop for food. These are barriers that the school district homeless liaison can address only once she learns about individual students or families experiencing them — such as when a mother who was not close to a bus route walked two miles to pick up food for her four children. The homeless liaison also arranges for school safety officers to deliver meals to the families experiencing homelessness that she identifies, and places mentors at secondary schools who keep snacks and drinks in their offices for youth.
- **In Frederick County, Maryland**, Frederick County Public Schools recognized that strong relationships are a key factor in keeping students connected to school, even when their housing situation changes frequently. This past summer, the McKinney-Vento program created a system for school staff to provide regular check-ins for all students identified as McKinney-Vento eligible to ensure they remained connected to school and had their needs met. Frederick County created a Food Distribution Food App that has helped schools, students and families: when an address is entered, all the food drops are listed, as well as any necessary paperwork. The district will be using the American Rescue Plan funds to hire a resource navigator who will have two directives: 1) to work within schools and communities to identify young people who are experiencing homelessness and 2) to connect students/families with community resources.
- **In Comanche Public Schools, Oklahoma**, approximately 18% of the student population is identified as homeless. The pandemic and the decrease in oil production increased the number of families in crisis: more children who are hungry and who don't have the school supplies and clothing they need. The McKinney-Vento grant helps students with food, counseling, necessities, fees, and other resources. The homeless liaison and social worker work with administrators, counselors and teachers at each school site, as well as with community partners, to make sure students experiencing homelessness receive the food resources they desperately need. The Regional Food Bank supplies the food in all school pantries. Over 60% of alternative school students are considered homeless; these and other students can "shop" for free in the food pantry and take food with them. The high school is working to become a Regional Food Bank or Oklahoma Food Pantry Site.
- **In Thompson School District, Colorado**, the pandemic has disrupted both the identification of students experiencing homelessness and food delivery, with fewer families getting connected to community food resources. The homeless liaison has begun putting food bags by the front door in some of the secondary schools, hoping that students will grab them on their way out. This year, she also has fielded many questions about food cost coverage for seconds at lunch, and has had many families reach out

asking for grocery cards, as families are hoping to be able to purchase their own food and increase the quality and variety of food they receive.

- In Massachusetts, the state education agency's McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth program proactively addressed the barriers faced by children and youth experiencing homelessness to accessing Pandemic EBT. During the Fall, it became apparent that many new P-EBT cards had not been activated, and students were not receiving their vital benefits. Many of these students were identified as homeless. The state provided [specific guidance to homeless liaisons on P-EBT outreach](#), and encouraged using school addresses for youth and families who had no stable address. In Massachusetts' 2nd Congressional district, three McKinney-Vento grantees — Worcester, Leominster, and Greenfield — are providing the steady support that homeless families and students need, from food pantries in high schools, to resource navigators, to partnerships with housing authorities. The effort to ensure students are eating has helped identify other needs: including housing, clothing and tutoring.

These are just a few examples of how, in a very real way, public schools *are* the homelessness response and prevention system for the most vulnerable children, youth, and families. I urge Members to contact McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons in their districts, and hear the on-the-ground perspectives of those who are closest to the challenges, and the incredible promise of our nation's children, youth, and families without homes.

Recommendations

The scale of the current and future homelessness crisis — of rising evictions, of increasing natural disasters — means that we must build on the role of schools, and leverage their unique position in communities to meet the nutritional and other basic needs of children, youth, and families.

The federal government has not made this task easy. Siloed responses from different federal agencies create barriers that cause and perpetuate homelessness, and therefore cause and perpetuate hunger. A narrow understanding of homelessness as primarily if not exclusively a housing issue has also stymied holistic solutions. Schools see the tragic results first-hand. To remove these silos, and enhance school-based solutions that meet the comprehensive needs of families and youth, I offer the following recommendations.

- **Authorize and incentivize the use of public schools to deliver emergency rental assistance to prevent eviction.** If we can prevent homelessness, we can prevent hunger. But to do so, we have to take a hard look at delivery systems for our most vulnerable and mobile families and youth. The struggle to distribute emergency rental assistance (ERA) is a prime example of a potentially catastrophic failure of a critical delivery system. In many states and communities, ERA programs have been unable to process ERA applications and distribute assistance in a timely manner. The result is billions of dollars in unspent funds, while the ranks of families facing eviction and

experiencing homelessness grow. In trying to reach vulnerable families quickly and seamlessly, programs like ERA should leverage the nationwide, established system that is already in place and is well equipped to reach families in need: our public schools. Schools are uniquely situated to connect with the families they see every day; they have expertise in and ready resources for family-friendly communication and assistance. Yet inexplicably, schools are absent from the “Whole of Government” response to housing instability. While [some promising efforts exist](#), they are too few in number. And time is running out for millions of families: beginning on September 30, Treasury may recapture and reallocate excess ERA funds. Congress can help ensure renters and landlords in communities with poor-performing and low capacity ERA programs can still access emergency aid by redefining “eligible grantees” to include local educational agencies. Unfortunately, H.R. 5196, which passed out of the Financial Services committee yesterday, does not do this, and falls short in other respects. Even without legislation, Treasury could and should explicitly authorize local educational agencies to assist in the distribution of rental assistance, and incentivize ERA grantees to subgrant, contract, or otherwise create agreements with public schools to distribute rental assistance, leveraging the existing McKinney-Vento program and LEA homeless liaisons. Further, Treasury should encourage grantees to partner with schools to use Free Lunch eligibility as a categorical eligibility to meet the income requirements for ERA, and make families who are identified as homeless by schools (under the education definition of homelessness) categorically eligible for both motel stays and rental assistance. The “referral fatigue” experienced by families is real; to combat it, we must cut the bureaucracy and encourage direct assistance through trusted sources, such as public schools.

- **Fund the McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program at \$800 million (the level included in the American Rescue Plan Act).** We must make sure the infrastructure is in place to help expedite assistance through public schools for families and youth experiencing homelessness. As I mentioned previously, school district homeless liaisons are currently on the front lines of the homelessness crisis — they provide an existing infrastructure to proactively reach our most vulnerable families and youth and make sure that they have healthy food. But liaisons and the homeless education programs they administer in school districts are limited in their capacity to identify, stay in touch with, enroll, and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. In the most recent fiscal year, [only 23% of LEAs received direct subgrants through the EHCY program](#), due to insufficient national funding. Appendix B of my testimony shows which LEAs in your districts received subgrants in the 2019-2020 school year. Without adequate capacity, schools will continue to under-identify and under-enroll children and youth experiencing homelessness, which in turn limits the participation of these children in school meals programs. Fortunately, thanks to a bipartisan amendment by Senators Murkowski (R-AK) and Manchin (D-WV), the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) provided \$800 million for the identification, school enrollment, and support of children and youth experiencing homelessness — eight times the annual EHCY appropriations, allowing many more

school districts to participate in the program. The funds also may be used more flexibly than the EHCY program typically permits: ARP specifies that funds may be used for wraparound services to improve attendance. Congress should maintain at least this level of funding annually, as well as the flexible nature of the funds, to allow schools to expand their capacity for identifying and supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness.

- **Amend HUD’s Definition of Homelessness to align with that of the U.S. Department of Education.** The U.S. Department of Education, as well as federal programs such as Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund, the National School Lunch Program, and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, define homelessness to include the hidden situations of staying with others temporarily or in motels (regardless of method of payment). The definition of homelessness used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the most part only includes those on the streets or in shelters. As a result, the vast majority of the children and youth experiencing homelessness who are identified by public schools are not eligible for most HUD homeless assistance programs — even now, when staying with others in temporary, crowded situations places them at high risk for COVID-19 transmission and infection. So most children and youth experiencing homelessness don’t show up in HUD counts, and thus stay invisible, underserved, and underfunded. If we want to increase the ability of schools to help children and youth experiencing homelessness access shelter and housing, and thereby reduce their hunger, we must amend HUD’s definition of homelessness to align with schools and other child and youth serving agencies. Doing so would streamline referrals, leverage existing resources, and bring schools in as full partners.
- **Eliminate barriers to SNAP benefits for unaccompanied homeless youth.** At the other end of the age spectrum, youth who experience homelessness on their own, and who are minors - unaccompanied homeless youth — face unique barriers to accessing food assistance. Here, too, school district homeless liaisons are uniquely poised to help, but continue to report that unaccompanied youth face barriers to accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In particular, youth are asked for documents that they cannot produce and are inappropriately referred to child welfare agencies. The U.S. Department of Agriculture should revise and reissue [its 2013 guidance](#) to clarify the definitions of “homeless” and “parental control” and that there is no minimum age for SNAP benefits. Further, revised guidance should clarify that State agencies must not condition the processing of an application or the receipt of benefits on a child protection report for any applicant, including applicants under age 18. Child protection reporting should be based on specific facts indicating abuse or neglect as defined by state law, of which the State agency has specific knowledge, and should not be predicated on the mere fact that the applicant is an unaccompanied homeless youth.
- **Amend Head Start and other federal early care programs to align with the McKinney-Vento Act by requiring the designation of homeless liaisons and the**

provision of transportation. Schools, of course, are not the only child-focused system in our communities. While the topic today is the role of schools in ending hunger, many young children, not yet school age, have dire unmet nutritional needs as a result of their homelessness. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that [1.3 million children under the age of six experienced homelessness in 2018-2019](#), but that only 10% were enrolled in a federally-funded early childhood program. If these children are not participating in quality early care programs, they are not likely to be connected to reliable, adequate sources of food. Despite improvements to the Head Start Act and the McKinney-Vento Act, young children who are homeless continue to be under-identified and under-enrolled, with lack of transportation continually cited as a top barrier. Head Start and other federally funded early childhood programs should be amended to align even more completely with the EHCY program by requiring designated homelessness liaisons and providing for transportation for homeless and foster children. By ensuring that there is a point person for homelessness identification and enrollment — a counterpart to the K-12 homeless liaison — and by ensuring the means to attend regularly, these two changes would increase participation and connection to a multitude of necessary services, including nutrition, for our nation’s youngest children without homes.

- **Ensure that families experiencing homelessness can access and maintain child care.** To help families experiencing homelessness gain and sustain employment sufficient to maintain both access to food and housing, they need child care. While the Child Care and Development Fund does contain provisions for the identification and enrollment of children experiencing homelessness, the cost of child care, lack of transportation, and poor outreach by child care providers still puts child care out of reach for families experiencing homelessness. Families experiencing homelessness who have the maximum subsidy still must pay out of pocket anywhere from \$40 - \$350/week. We applaud and support efforts to expand access to child care, including through the Build Back Better Act. However, the most vulnerable and low income families, including families experiencing homelessness, must first have stable and lasting access to child care before increasing supports should be directed to upper income families. Additionally, low income families should have access to the quality and choice that meet their needs. As provided for in the Child Care for Working Families Act, children who are found to be experiencing homelessness or are in foster care at the time of enrollment should remain eligible for child care until the child reaches the age of compulsory school attendance.
- **Fund mobility and other services to accompany housing vouchers for families, and transitional housing for unaccompanied youth and young adults who need it.** Households with children are more likely than households without children to have difficulty paying rent or mortgage, and are [at highest risk for eviction](#). Yet families with children are [a decreasing share](#) of federal housing assistance beneficiaries. Recent legislation, including the American Rescue Plan Act and the Building Back Better Act, contain significant investments in Housing Choice Vouchers as the purported solution to

family homelessness. Yet many school district liaisons report that there are no landlords willing to accept vouchers, or that lack of case management and other services set families up for failure, further reducing the pool of participating landlords, or trap them in impoverished neighborhoods without access to nutritious food. Rental assistance to families should include the option to access a full panoply of wrap-around mobility services that will help them move to higher opportunity neighborhoods with high-performing schools, as well as access to quality childcare, medical care, fresh food, and other necessities. These wrap-around mobility services, as contemplated by [the bipartisan Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act](#), include recruiting more landlords to accept these vouchers, as well as pre- or post-move counseling, housing search assistance, assistance with security deposits, school enrollment assistance, and the provision of information to families about community-based supports. Many youth and young adults who experience homelessness on their own have deep and complex needs; therefore, an adequate service array must include longer-term and service-rich options — i.e. transitional housing — to help these youth sustainably overcome homelessness, and prevent future generations from experiencing it. [Transitional programs for youth and young adults are effective](#) and are an essential and core element of efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. Yet this youth-focused housing is in short supply—or even absent—in many communities, and has been defunded by HUD. Congress should increase investments in the Transitional Living and Maternity Programs and other Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programming, while HUD should incentivize Transitional Housing for youth, young adults, and young families in its Notice of Funding Opportunities, in accordance with local needs and priorities.

In closing, I am sure that the goal of the Ending Hunger in America initiative is not to have well-fed homeless children and youth; and indeed, as long as child and youth homelessness is rampant, so too will be childhood hunger.

To those who would say that schools have their hands full right now, especially as they attempt to re-open, re-engage students, and close learning gaps created by the pandemic, I would say that there is no equity in education, there is no academic recovery, without responding to hunger and homelessness. It is experienced disproportionately by those who face numerous other health and education barriers: [students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners disproportionately experience homelessness](#). Homelessness also has profound educational consequences: the pre-pandemic (2018-2019) [national average graduation rate for homeless students was 67.8%](#). This is 12% below other low-income students (80%) and nearly 18% below all students (85.5%). [Students experiencing homelessness also scored lower than economically disadvantaged students](#) on statewide assessments by approximately eight to nine percentage points. Schools certainly can't solve these problems alone, but their insights, experiences, knowledge, and resources should be leveraged, and should also inform and shape agencies' policies — as should the lived experiences of our students themselves, who know better than any of us the potential of school and school-based services to change the trajectory of their lives.

“My high school had developed to be my home outside of the home, and this was the only place I could still control. After my mother passed and I was then left to face homelessness on my own, my school was the only place I had left... I spent 12 hours awake at school, doing school work, or thinking about my school consistently for months after. The only thing left important to me in this world was education, and I still had my home at school.”

—Ash P., SchoolHouse Connection Scholar and current college student



**Total Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness Identified by
School Districts in the Congressional Districts of the House Committee on Rules
School Years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020**

Member of Congress	Total PreK-12 Homeless Students Identified 2018-19 School Year	Total PreK-12 Homeless Students Identified 2019-20 School Year
Jim McGovern (MA-2)	4,469	4,002
Norma Torres (CA-35)	17,436	17,343
Ed Perlmutter (CO-7)	8,529	7,393
Jamie Raskin (MD-8)	2,465	2,342
Mary Gay Scanlon (PA-5)	1,544	1,227
Joseph Morelle (NY-25)	3,355	2,794
Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)	2,050	1,806
Debora Ross (NC-2)	5,688	5,701
Joe Neguse (CO-2)	5,875	6,992
Tom Cole (OK-4)	6,248	5,910
Michael Burgess (TX-26)	3,498	3,226
Guy Reschenthaler (PA-14)	2,052	1,706
Michelle Fischbach (MN-7)	1,501	1,354
TOTAL	64,710	61,796

Source: U.S. Department of Education: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/edfacts/data-files/school-status-data.html>

Numbers of identified homeless students for each local educational agency in each congressional district represented on the House Committee on Rules are provided in Appendix B.

Appendix C

More Detailed Descriptions of Local School District Efforts to Identify and Support the Holistic Needs of Children, Youth, and Families Experiencing Homelessness

Homelessness in Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Colorado 2010-2021

School Year	Number of Homeless Students	Percentage of Student Population	Number of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth	Graduation Rate for Homeless Students	Drop-Out Rate for Homeless Students	Mobility Rate* for Homeless Students
2010-11	694	2%	33	58%	10.7%	60%
2019-20	1335	4%	182	67%	6.9%	21.3%

**the unduplicated count of K-12 students who moved into or out of the school district during the school year divided by the total number of students that were part of the school district at any time during the school year*

Challenges Facing Students Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

Students and families in Adams 12 Five Star Schools continue to struggle with the persistent challenges of poverty, unstable housing, and food insecurity on a scale never before seen. Youth experiencing homelessness face many barriers to gaining a quality education. The majority of students and families identified as homeless in the Five Star District are housed with friends or extended family in residences outside of Adams 12 boundaries, and families facing homelessness who do not have the ability to “double up” have to choose from the only available shelter options in Denver, Boulder, or Jefferson County. In either of these situations, students have to commute to school either on often inaccessible public transportation or rely on personal vehicles that are often in poor shape and therefore unreliable. These situations are exacerbated when students and families move among two or three “doubled up” situations or shelters while trying to navigate their housing options. Often if families feel that transportation is too cumbersome, they then transfer their student to a different school or district, thereby interrupting social connections and academic progress as the student attempts to familiarize themselves with yet another new routine, schedule, teacher, etc. Students who do actually make it to school on a regular basis still face many barriers in their education. These include stigmatization and stereotyping of what homeless students are capable of achieving as well as a lack of understanding by school staff of the chronic trauma that affects a student experiencing homelessness. Behaviors that may present as defiant, apathetic, or disrespectful often draw negative responses from adults as well as exclusionary discipline practices, alienating students who conversely need the strongest connections with adults at school and the most time in the classroom.

Additional Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Students Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

- Increased number of students living in cars because they were exposed to COVID-19 or were doubled up with people who had or had been exposed to COVID-19

- Significant impact on the ability to maintain strong and consistent connections with youth experiencing homeless, particularly Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
- Significant impact on attendance and grades due to lack of access to the necessary technology to attend classes, parents and guardians who struggled with knowing how to support their students in engaging remotely, families who were forced to prioritize survival over school, and overall student frustration with additional barriers created by the pandemic
- Increased transience and school mobility due to the loss of employment and housing
- Growing food insecurity and health concerns as families are left to make difficult choices about how and where their limited funds are used

Current Strategies in Adams 12 to Support Students Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

<u>Staffing - 9.75 FTE (6.75 funded by Medicaid, 1.0 funded by Title IA Set-aside, 2.0 funded by grants)</u>	
<u>Connections to Community Resources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Housing ● Medical and dental care ● Legal services ● Undocumented immigrant resources ● SNAP/EBT (food stamps) ● Basic resources ● School-based resource rooms 	<u>Direct Provision of Basic Resources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food ● Clothing ● Shoes ● Hygiene items ● Laundry services ● Direct enrollment in Medicaid/CHP+ ● Student Health Assistance Fund (SHAF)
<u>Transportation Assistance</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gas vouchers ● RTD coupons/passes ● Private cars (rare) ● Re-routed yellow buses (rare) 	<u>Attendance Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnership with Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) to provide two AmeriCorps members ● Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) at each high school
<u>Academic and Social-Emotional Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1:1 tutoring with in-district teachers ● Credit recovery ● Summer school ● Technology ● Internet services ● School supplies ● Informal paired mentoring with trusted adults ● Purchase of graduation caps and gowns ● Frequent training for district and school staff 	<u>Wrap Services</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formal wrap service teams at McElwain Elementary and Coronado Elementary ● Close collaboration between SFOP and school administrators, mental health professionals, and SELS ● Close collaboration between SEI offices - Whole Child Initiatives, Federal Programs, Health Services/504, Intervention Services, PEAK/CCLC
<u>Post-Secondary Support</u>	<u>Recreational Opportunities</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Athletic fees

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Close collaboration between UHY Youth Advocate, Director of Counseling, Director of CTE, and the SWAP program ● Transportation to college and career fairs ● Assistance with completing ICAP Graduation Plan and FAFSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocacy with local businesses to offer reduced rates ● Passes to local rec centers
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New Adams 12 Initiatives For 2021-22 to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

- Host Home model for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth
- Partnership with Maiker Housing Partners (Adams County Housing Authority) to provide a more direct route to housing and rental assistance for Adams 12 families
- Partnership with Almost Home to support families with respite housing
- Expansion of 1:1 tutoring program
- Development and implementation of a formal mentorship program
- Expansion of Single Points of Contact to the middle schools
- Collaboration with new Wraparound Facilitators at Horizon HS, Legacy HS, Mountain Range HS, and Northglenn HS
- Addition of two new AmeriCorps members from Colorado Youth for a Change
- Addition of a Family Outreach Liaison for the Student and Family Outreach Program
- Expanded partnership with Kids in Need of Dentistry (KIND)

Successes

- Adams 12 is consistently recognized by the Colorado Department of Education as one of the most innovative and impactful homeless education programs in the state.
- 2019-20 saw the highest graduation rate for homeless students in Adams 12 history as well as the most quickly closing graduation gap of any subpopulation of students.
- Mobility rates and dropout rates for homeless students in Adams 12 have dropped significantly over the past decade.
- Training about McKinney-Vento law as well as the unique needs of homeless students is now a part of mandatory beginning-of-year training for all district and school staff.
- Support for students identified as McKinney-Vento is an unfunded mandate. Despite this barrier, the Adams 12 Office of Whole Child Initiatives has spent countless hours applying for various funding sources, bringing approximately \$1,500,000 in grant funds into Adams 12 over the past six years alone to support students who are experiencing homelessness as well as students who are involved in the child welfare system.

Continuing Challenges

- Locating ongoing funding to keep resource rooms stocked, particularly with non-food items such as hygiene products, household goods, and clothing
- Ensuring that families have access to fresh food, particularly for those who culturally do not eat a lot of the processed, canned, or boxed food that is typical to local food pantries

- Navigating the red tape linked to accessing federal emergency rental and mortgage assistance from local agencies
- Acquiring funds for respite housing (three-four week hotel stay while families who are in situational homelessness save for first, last, and deposit)
- Community pushback against safe parking initiatives
- Misunderstanding and misconceptions about youth homelessness and the adverse effects of being “doubled up”
- Despite our success in acquiring grant dollars, funding remains tight. In addition, the time and effort that goes into not only writing applications but then also managing the awarded funds is significant.

Our Primary Partnerships

A Precious Child	Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF)	Growing Home
Adams County Health Alliance	Community Reach Center	Joyful Journeys
Almost Home	Covering Kids and Families	Kids First Healthcare
Broomfield Communities That Care	Crossroads Church	Maiker Housing Partners
Broomfield FISH	Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County	Mile High United Way
Center for Health Progress	Five Star Education Foundation	Rocky Mountain Partnership
Cold Weather Care	Food For Hope	Tri-County Health Department

Ardmore City Schools, Oklahoma

Ardmore City Schools, at this date, has identified approximately 35% more McKinney-Vento students who have enrolled for this school year. We are still enrolling students and doing outreach to let families know they can enroll their children even if they can't provide "proof of residency". Many of our families have lost housing, jobs and income due to the pandemic. Additionally, when screening at intake for McKinney-Vento, we are finding that 84% of our students have experienced trauma related to COVID-19 and events related to the pandemic, many with multiple traumatic events including death of a loved one.

The identifiable effects we are seeing so far are (each of these scored over 50% of respondents):

- Increase in anxiety, social anxiety, depression
- Mental health support needs for domestic violence, parent incarceration, neglect and abuse in the home
- Behavior issues with in-person instruction and school refusal behavior
- Attention seeking through outbursts
- Apathy

The requests from McKinney-Vento families for support and resources include (each of these scored over 50% of respondents):

- Counseling referrals
- Basic Needs: food, hygiene, clothes, health awareness
- Education Needs: school supplies, school clothing, payment or waiver of fees, EL service referrals, transportation to/from school of origin
- COVID testing and vaccination services
- Medical referrals - health, dental, vision
- Graduation planning - career/tech school and college planning guidance
- Assistance accessing social services such as SNAP, Soonercare, etc.

Key things needed in our community:

- Affordable housing
- Shelter space for families (including "family style" space for children of both genders)
- Transitional housing for unaccompanied youth with ability to check in without parental consent
- Job training for parents trying to return to work or get above the minimum wage/multiple job threshold

Our most pressing need in our district pertaining to all students is mental health care and affordable housing. We applied for and recently received Superintendent Hofmeister's School Counselor Corps grant through OSDE. Our program is just now being implemented and we hope to see a positive outcome. For our homeless students and families, through ESSER III funding, we hope to implement a wrap-around program to provide support for the entire family with a "care coordinator" who will facilitate access to social services. As for affordable housing, it is a well-known need in this area and as a school district, we are dependent upon the community meeting that need.

To address the role of schools in Oklahoma "ending hunger," Ardmore is truly blessed and lucky to have a grant through a private, non-profit, local organization that provides support for our district's supplemental food program. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma is the recipient of that grant support which provides us with the food resources required to allow our students in need to take additional food home for the weekends and holidays. So much goes into the coordination and provision of this service, which typically goes unnoticed, that it tends to be underappreciated. With the increase in SNAP benefits for our families, we are still experiencing a high demand for the program. On a side note, our district is 100% free/reduced but the need is still apparent.

If I could share one thing with any of the legislators it would be this: don't just visit with your constituents who contribute to your reelection campaign. Put boots on the ground and visit your local school district. Talk with your district's McKinney-Vento liaisons; witness, first-hand, what those of us who are trying to keep the strings from unraveling in our students' lives are doing on a daily basis. Ask the tough questions which have nothing to do with lobbyists and corporate interests but the health, both physical and mental, of those families and children you represent.

Poudre School District, Larimer County, Colorado

First of all, thank-you for making time to listen to stories and gather information on the issue of schools addressing hunger, and the intersection between homelessness, hunger, and the role that schools play in meeting the basic needs of our students.

Here in Poudre School District in Larimer County we see the hardship that poverty and homelessness causes our students on a daily basis, and the issue of food security and hunger are at the top of that list. When a family is living on the brink, or in the midst of, experiencing homelessness, every choice they make has consequences. Do you fill the fridge or pay the rent? Go without utilities or go to the grocery store? Repair the car that you rely on to make it to your minimum wage job, or use that same money to provide whatever food you can to get your children through the month and to the next paycheck, the next round of Snap benefits, or to the next day the foodbank pantry is open to the public. These are real quandaries that our families face on a daily basis, and often it's the kids that suffer.

Our schools play an integral role in keeping those children fed and healthy. Free and reduced lunch programs provide a healthy breakfast and lunch to students who otherwise won't eat, are forced to skip meals to stretch family budgets, and who often don't receive healthy meals at home even if they do have something to eat. It only takes one visit to a food bank pantry to realize the challenge families facing food insecurity encounter there. Food banks do an incredible job providing resources to the underprivileged, but they are limited by the donations they receive. Club crackers, day old pastries, Oreos and ramen noodles far outweigh available fresh vegetables, fruit, meat and dairy that makes for a healthy meal. And for our families experiencing homelessness, those often aren't an option even when they are available. Families living out of cars, in shelters, and in hotels and motels don't have places to store or prepare food, and their diets reflect that. Again, our schools are too often the only place where our homeless students get the nutrition they need to survive and to thrive.

There is also no question that our commitment to address food insecurity and hunger is inextricably tied to student success. Full bellies make for better students. And it goes beyond that. Not only does hunger itself cause students to suffer at school, the accompanying trauma and anxiety that comes with worrying about where their next meal will be coming from can overwhelm students of any age and create insurmountable barriers to education.

Here in Poudre School District, where we identified 1,313 K-12 students as experiencing homelessness during the 2020-2021 school year under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, we go to great lengths to combat student hunger in our schools. All McKinney-Vento identified students automatically receive free and reduced lunch status, and therefore healthy breakfasts and lunches in our schools, and we aggressively help families who are at risk of homelessness apply for free and reduced status as well. We also partner with the McKBackpack Program here in Fort Collins, a non-profit organization that distributes thousands

of pre-packaged family food bags to our schools weekly for children to take home to their families and help them keep kids fed through the weekend. And finally, our network of McKinney Advocates, McKinney Contacts, and Family Liaisons work tirelessly to connect families to community resources that address food insecurity, help families register for SNAP benefits, access district resources to provide grocery cards and other emergency aid to families who need it, and to identify students that have fallen through the cracks and aren't getting the food they need.

The Pandemic has only magnified these challenges. Shifts to remote and hybrid learning have been a challenge for all, but for our students that rely on schools as a primary source of food for their kids, it meant being faced with daily hunger and new stresses on budgets that were already broken. PSD acted swiftly, aided by federal COVID relief programs (thank-you!), opening school kitchens across our community to provide bagged breakfasts and lunches to any student and family that needed it, and mobilizing our transportation department to deliver bagged breakfasts and lunches to high needs neighborhoods where kids didn't have transportation to get to distribution centers. We also worked closely with McBackpack and the Larimer County Food Bank to provide additional food to fill empty pantries, and to help coordinate lunch distributions throughout the summer months when school was not in session.

It was, and has been, an incredible effort that so many in our district worked tirelessly to pull off. And it was an effort that made it glaringly clear how many students in our district would go without food if we weren't here to serve them, and how so many of these families fly under the radar during normal times, unseen in their struggle to put food on the table for their families.

Schools provide so much more than education to our students. We also provide community, support, connection, transportation, childcare, and yes – food, to the thousands of kids who walk our halls every day. As lawmakers it's important for you to know that, and for that reality to always shape the decisions you make, the laws you pass, and the assistance you provide.

Clinton Public Schools, Oklahoma

Children and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness face many challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated those conditions. The combination of precarious living conditions, high mobility, and poverty create considerable educational, health, and emotional problems and barriers for such children and unaccompanied youth. In order to meet the needs of all homeless and unaccompanied youth, Clinton Public Schools has implemented a number of services to eliminate barriers and provide supports to our students.

Clinton Public Schools annually conducts a needs assessment as required under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act. The local education agency's homeless liaison works with the school-based social workers, assistant superintendent, superintendent, site counselors, and site administrators to conduct the assessment and review the findings. During the annual budgeting process, the superintendent used the data to determine sufficient set-aside funds to meet the needs of all identified homeless students as well as to provide for further identification of students who qualify for services under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act.

Clinton Public Schools successfully pursued Title 1, Part A McKinney-Vento subgrant funds and uses those funds to provide services to all identified homeless students. Provided services are coordinated by a team of local education agency staff who work together to meet the needs of all identified homeless students. The Care Team consists of school-based social workers, school counselors, teachers, school administrators, the local homeless liaison, and district-level administration. The team provides transportation to services, appointments, school, court hearings, and other necessary travel for homeless students. The team also provides appropriate clothing, including specialized clothing for homeless students to participate in educational programs, such as career-tech, uniforms or other appropriate attire for homeless students who participate in internships and work-study programs, and seasonally appropriate attire, such as jackets, coats, hats, and gloves, so that students can fully participate in all educational programs offered by the LEA and its partner organizations.

The Care Team partners with outside organizations, such as the Multi-County Youth and Family Services, the Oklahoma Regional Food Bank, local shelters, Red Rock Behavioral Health Services, Vocational Rehab, the Western Technology Center (Career Tech), and local physicians, optometrists, and dentists to ensure necessary wrap-around supports are provided appropriately and as needed. Clinton Public Schools also provides breakfast and lunch during school breaks and summers. All of the coordinated supports ensure that barriers to attendance, enrollment, and academic success are mitigated or removed. As a result of the district's emphasis on serving all students and ensuring each child has the necessary support to participate fully in the entirety of the district's curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular offerings, the district has added two school-based social workers and three behavior specialists to the staff, developed site-based care teams, and applied for and secured additional funding specifically for the purpose of providing essential wrap-around support for homeless students.

Frederick County Public Schools, Maryland

The biggest challenging trend is identifying students who are experiencing housing instability. FCPS will be using ARP Fund 1 to hire a resource navigator who will have two directives: 1) to work within schools and communities to identify young people who are MV eligible and 2) to connect students/families with community resources and provide FCPS supports.

Regarding meeting the nutritional needs of families:

- * FCPS provides breakfast and lunch to all FCPS students free of charge. Supper and snacks also provided at certain sites.
- * Schools coordinate with the MD Food Bank to provide food drops on school premise.
- * Schools coordinate with community organizations to provide food drops, vaccines and fun at local school events.
- * FCPS provided systemwide summer school for the first time this past summer. All participating students received free lunch.
- * [Frederick County created the Food Distribution Food App](#): Super helpful for schools, students and families-when address is entered, all food drops are listed and what, if any, paperwork is needed.
- * Collaboration with Blessings in a Backpack to provide students with meals over the weekend-Students who are MV are automatics for BIAB.

Whole child supports to students:

- * Elevate Academy: Systemwide 5 week summer school for all students, all students who are MV were invited and encouraged to attend
- * Elevate Bridge: Provided approximately 4 check-ins to students who are MV over the summer. Staff communicated via phone, Google Meets and in person. Please see attached Guidance for more information.
- * New Horizons Summer Academy: Provides opportunity to earn 1 credit, job life skills and earn a \$600 stipend for high school students from 6 of 10 FCPS high schools. Funded by MV Grant
- * FAFSA Mentor Program: All seniors who are experiencing housing transition will have a FAFSA mentor who will be trained in completing the FAFSA, Classes/Programs offered at Frederick Community College and Frederick County Workforce Services with the goal of ensuring students complete the FAFSA, have a plan for post graduation and receive a soft hand-off to the that organization/institution from FCPS. This program is supported by both MV Grant and, hopefully, ARP Fund 2.
- * Shelter Therapy Program: Provides therapeutic supports by FCPS therapist and case management by FCPS case workers to students who are residing at Emergency Family Shelter. The goal is to connect students to therapeutic supports while in shelter as well as after shelter, connect students to three caring adults at school and provide case management to families. Funded by MV Grant.