

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION **McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Programs**

Overview

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act addresses educational challenges created by homelessness and guarantees homeless students the right to enroll, attend, and succeed in school. The law places the responsibility for guaranteeing the rights of homeless students on states and school districts.

While students experience instability in their home lives due to homelessness, school is often a place of safety and security. Research has shown that no common set of characteristics describes the typical homeless student, but all students do need a sense of belonging, a consistent and caring environment, and the security of an organized and predictable classroom and school schedule to succeed. School also provides basics that the students may not have at home, like breakfast and lunch. As schools continue to increase their focus on producing college- and career-ready graduates, education also becomes an increasingly clear path out of homelessness for students.

National Data

Rates of homelessness in the United States among children and youth are higher today than at any point since data has been collected on homelessness. Each year, public schools across the nation report the number of students identified as homeless to the U.S. Department of Education. Over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, schools identified 1,301,239 children and youth as homeless (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2016).

Schools use the definition of *homeless* provided in section 11434a of the McKinney-Vento Act. It states that any person who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence is homeless. While the law mandates the criteria of fixed, regular, and adequate to assess housing, it also provides several examples of homelessness. Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason is the most common form of homelessness experienced by school-age children in the United States, with 76% of all homeless children living in doubled-up conditions (NCHE, 2015).

Staying in emergency, family, domestic violence, and transitional living shelters is the next most common type of homelessness experienced by students. When faced with homelessness, some families are able to stay in hotels or motels; living in a hotel or motel due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations is the third most common type of homelessness reported by public schools. Many children and youth also live in unsheltered situations, which can include campgrounds or public places not meant for housing, such as parks, bus or train stations, and condemned or abandoned buildings. Unsheltered homeless children and youth accounted for more than 42,003 students identified by schools during the 2013-2014 school year (NCHE, 2015).

Families and Youth in Doubled Up and Motel Living Situations

It is important to note, children and youth in doubled-up situations are considered homeless under the education definition only if they are sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. People who are sharing housing in permanent, adequate, and voluntary arrangements do not meet the education definition of homelessness. Children and youth in doubled-up and motel situations are extremely vulnerable, living in precarious, unstable, and sometimes unsafe conditions. They may suffer the life-long impacts of toxic stress if their living situations are not stabilized.

Many homeless families and unaccompanied youth have no choice but to stay in motels or temporarily with other people. Parents with children fear that if the family sleeps on the street, they will lose custody of their children, so they seek any living situation that might keep their families intact. Youth who are homeless on their own – unaccompanied youth – often try to stay “under the radar,” so they are invisible to child welfare and other authorities. Many homeless families with children and unaccompanied youth are forced into motels or other temporary situations because there is no family or youth shelter available

in the community, shelters are full, some shelters have policies that separate the family, or shelters prohibit unaccompanied minors.

Colorado Data

Overall, the number of students experiencing homelessness has increased significantly. During the 2014-15 school year, **24,685** students experiencing homelessness were identified and served in Colorado public schools, grades PK-12. Based on end of year data collection counts submitted by Colorado public school districts, **since the 2003-04 school year, the number of public school students experiencing homelessness in Colorado has more than tripled.** See chart below for a year by year comparison.

In addition to providing a definition of *homeless*, the McKinney-Vento Act defines *unaccompanied youth* as youth who are "not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian" [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6)]. Unaccompanied youth make up a much larger segment of the homeless population than many people realize. **The number of unaccompanied homeless youth identified and served in Colorado public schools increased 55% in a four year timeframe, from 1,325 in the 2009-10 school year to 2,052 in the 2014-15 school year.** More young people than ever have been left to fend for themselves during these uncertain economic times. This is troubling because these youth are perhaps the most vulnerable, as they are dealing with the crises of homelessness without a safe, supportive parent or guardian.

Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness in Colorado By School Year	
2014-2015	24,685
2013-2014	24,062 (Colorado Floods School Year)
2012-2013	23,293
2011-2012	23,680
2010-2011	21,487
2009-2010	18,408
2008-2009	15,834
2007-08	12,302
2006-07	11,954
2005-06	12,689 (Hurricane Katrina/Rita School Year)
2004-05	9,309
2003-04	7,319

Number of Students Experiencing Homelessness by Primary Nighttime Residence for the 2014-2015 School Year			
Sheltered	Doubled Up Due to Economic Crises	Unsheltered	Hotels/Motels
3,143 (12.7%)	18,283 (74.1%)	883 (3.6%)	2,376 (9.6%)

For more information on the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness, visit Colorado's McKinney-Vento webpage at: www.cde.state.co.us/DropoutPrevention/homeless_index.htm.

A full list of statewide McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaisons can be found at: www.cde.state.co.us/DropoutPrevention/homeless_liaisons.htm.