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## **The School Counselor and Students Experiencing Homelessness**

(Adopted, 2010; revised, 2018, 2024)

### **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

School counselors collaborate with school staff and community organizations to identify students who are experiencing homelessness and recognize that students’ housing experiences may greatly affect their mental, physical, academic, career and social/emotional development. As culturally responsive student advocates, school counselors understand how housing experiences may cause forms of oppression and collaborate with families, school staff and community partners to remove barriers to success.

### **The Rationale**

The McKinney-Vento Act defines children and youth experiencing homelessness as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This definition includes but is not limited to children who are:

- sharing housing due to economic hardship or loss of housing (i.e., doubled-up)
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or campgrounds
- living in emergency or transitional housing (i.e., shelters)
- sleeping in places not designed or ordinarily used for human habitation
- living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, etc.

Data from the National Center for Homeless Education report more than 1.2 million K–12 students who experienced homelessness in the United States were enrolled in public schools during the 2021–2022 school year (NCHE, 2023). This number includes students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, migratory students and unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness. Students experiencing homelessness may face increased educational barriers that can impede overall success in school (Haskett, et al. 2016). These challenges can include low academic performance, learning loss, delays and gaps, grade retention,

40 social/emotional concerns and increased risk of adverse childhood  
41 experiences (De Gregorio et al., 2022, Tobin, 2016).

42  
43 The McKinney-Vento Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student  
44 Succeeds Act, guarantees educational rights and supports for students  
45 experiencing homelessness and seeks to remove barriers to their  
46 educational success (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This includes  
47 transportation, immunization and physical examination requirements, fees,  
48 residency and birth certificate requirements, and lack of school records  
49 impeding homeless families' ability to enroll their children in schools.

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51 **The School Counselor's Role**  
52 School counselors are uniquely positioned to support students experiencing  
53 homelessness within academic, career and social/emotional domains  
54 (Waller & Rascoe, 2023). School counselors provide direct services in the  
55 areas of instruction, appraisal, advisement and counseling to support the  
56 success of students experiencing homelessness. Through indirect student  
57 services, school counselors collaborate with families, education and  
58 community partners to increase educational equity and access (ASCA,  
59 2019).

60  
61 To support and advocate for students experiencing homelessness, school  
62 counselors:

- 63 ● Adhere to federal and state laws/mandates, ethical guidelines and  
64 school district policies related to supporting students experiencing  
65 homelessness (ASCA, 2022)
- 66 ● Consult with and refer to school administrators, McKinney-Vento  
67 school district liaisons, state homeless education coordinators and  
68 community partners to promote the educational success of students  
69 experiencing homelessness (NCHE, 2023)
- 70 ● Support administrative decision-making regarding the determination of  
71 eligibility for services under McKinney-Vento in schools
- 72 ● Partake in professional development opportunities to increase  
73 awareness and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, Every  
74 Student Succeeds Act, school district policy and the rights of students  
75 experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2022)
- 76 ● Advocate and foster awareness for students experiencing  
77 homelessness by supporting parents/guardians and families in  
78 reducing barriers related to school enrollment, transportation,  
79 academic achievement, extracurricular activities/programs and  
80 appropriate educational placement (Camp et al., 2019)
- 81 ● Work within their professional scope of practice by managing potential  
82 conflicts due to multiple roles/relationships in supporting students  
83 experiencing homelessness

- 84 ● Acknowledge how biases, stigma and deficit-based approaches can  
85 negatively affect students experiencing homelessness, school staff and  
86 community partners (ASCA, 2022)
- 87 ● Understand the intersections of students’ cultural identities and the  
88 need for culturally responsive practices when working with students  
89 experiencing homelessness and their families (Waller & Rascoe, 2023)
- 90 ● Use data-informed tools and resources to identify academic needs and  
91 support remediation planning for students experiencing homelessness  
92 (ASCA, 2019)
- 93 ● Promote postsecondary readiness resources for students experiencing  
94 homelessness through various college- and career-focused activities,  
95 including postsecondary transition plans, financial aid and independent  
96 student status determination, AP/SAT/ACT preparation and fee  
97 waivers, career inventories and college/career advisement (NCHE,  
98 2023)
- 99 ● Collaborate with school- and community-based mental health  
100 professionals to assess students for common associated concerns such  
101 as adverse childhood experiences and refer students for additional  
102 support as appropriate (Waller & Rascoe, 2023)
- 103 ● Collaborate with community partners to link students and their families  
104 to prevention and intervention resources within the community
- 105 ● Promote collaborative partnerships with school counseling preparation  
106 programs to support the inclusion/integration of research and  
107 literature regarding students experiencing homelessness in order to  
108 enhance the training and preparation of future school counselors  
109 (Camp et al., 2019).

## 111 **Summary**

112 School counselors promote awareness and understanding of the issues  
113 students face when experiencing homelessness. School counselors  
114 recognize and identify strengths and distinct challenges faced by students  
115 experiencing homelessness and help mitigate their impact on students’  
116 academic, career and social/emotional development. School counselors  
117 collaborate with students, parents/guardians, school and community  
118 partners to increase educational equity, access and achievement for  
119 students experiencing homelessness.

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