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How Effective Is the San Francisco Unified School District in Educating Homeless Youth?

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How effective is the San Francisco Unified School District in educating homeless youth?

University of San Francisco

by

Gabriela Michel

May 2017

How effective is the San Francisco Unified School District in educating homeless youth?

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the

MASTER OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this analytical paper has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Executive Summary

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was passed in 1987 as the first landmark legislation to combat the national homelessness epidemic. Since its inception, the McKinney-Vento Act has been amended six different times. The McKinney-Vento Act has failed to address the causes of homelessness and provide adequate funding for public school districts across the country to meet the growing demands of the homeless youth population.

The San Francisco Unified School District is one of the public school districts that has been affected by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This paper presents the inadequate funding and implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in San Francisco. One of the problems includes identifying certain homeless youth populations such as unaccompanied youth and preschool age students within the San Francisco Unified School District's Families and Youth in Transition Program (FYIT). There is also no mandatory training for school administrators, staff, and teachers on the educational rights of homeless youth in the San Francisco Unified School District. Some homeless students feel there is a lack of emotional support from some of the school staff and administrators. SFUSD also does not have a McKinney-Vento Act Liaison that represents them.

The San Francisco Unified School District drafted a homeless educational policy in response to the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which amended the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The City and County of San Francisco also needs to work with the San Francisco Unified School District to find solutions that would benefit all of the homeless youth populations.

Preface: A True Story of a Homeless Youth¹

Becca² is the oldest child in a family of four. Becca first became homeless when her parents separated after a heated argument. Becca's mother then told her that they -- meaning that Becca, Becca's newborn baby sister, and her mother -- were never coming back to live with their father. The next morning when they left the house, Becca, her mother, and her newborn baby sister, experienced homelessness for the first time. Becca was just seven years old. At the time that she became homeless, Becca was attending Bessie Carmichael Elementary School.

Becca, her mother, and her sister moved to the East Bay to sleep in a women and children's shelter, as Becca's mother tried to find housing. Becca transferred to five different elementary schools throughout the school year.

Becca dealt with emotional distress and bullying. Teachers neglected Becca because of her inability to finish school work. One day, Becca was jumped by her classmates because her teacher bought her new shoes after learning about her homelessness. She had a bruise on her head from being jumped. Becca's father was able to pull her out of the public school that she was attending at that time in Oakland. He was able to enroll her at a public school in San Francisco. She was no longer homeless, for now.

Fourteen years later, Becca experienced homelessness a second time. Becca was a communications major in her senior year of college when her dad called her one night. He called to inform her that their landlord raised the rent on their rent-controlled apartment in the South of Market District of San Francisco. Her father and mother were unable to meet the new rent costs. The landlord gave the family a settlement and three months to leave their home that has been a part of their family for almost four decades. They were unable to find housing.

¹ Anonymous. Interview with author. March 11, 2017.

² This name is a pseudonym to keep the person anonymous.

Becca, her mother, and younger sister became homeless a second time. This was her father's first homeless experience. For about a year and a half, Becca and her family were unable to find housing in the Bay Area due to the high cost of living. Since April of 2016, they live in Fairfield. Becca works at a family business in Vacaville.

Introduction

There are federal educational policies that require school districts and states to provide stability to homeless youth and families as they try to transition to a more sustainable life. Some federal policies require states, such as California, to provide information on the homeless youth population. The California Department of Education receives federal funding through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to ensure the success of homeless students in all of the school districts across the state.³ The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act allocates federal funding to states, based on a formula that factors in the enrollment numbers of the homeless students within the school district.

Sometimes it is hard to determine if the school districts are accurately tracking the homeless youth population. Students who are homeless tend to move from one school district to another, as they try to find sustainable housing. National education policies such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, require an accurate count of the homeless youth population. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also requires an accurate count of the homeless youth population.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has a different homeless youth definition from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the City and County of San Francisco. This is problematic because some homeless youth may be counted more than once or not at all. Preschool aged children, unaccompanied youth, and youth who do not disclose

³ Shahera Hyatt, Brynn Walzer, and Patricia Julianelle, "California's Homeless Students: A Growing Population," *California Homeless Youth Project*, September 2014, 4, September 2014, accessed April 10, 2017, http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/CaliforniasHomelessStudents_AGrowingPopulation.pdf.

their living situation to officials, are at risk to experience chronic homelessness.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how policy makers in the San Francisco Unified School District address the homeless youth population. There will be an analysis of how effective the national, state, and local education policies are in addressing the homeless youth population. Part of this paper will discuss the problems that come with experiencing homelessness. The conclusion of this paper will make policy suggestions to better support the homeless youth population within the San Francisco Unified School District.

A Literature Review on Homeless Students in America's Public School System

This literature review begins by looking at issues at homelessness and of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act at the national scale. It then looks at the effectiveness of the McKinney-Vento Act in California. It also features a study looking at the lived experience of homeless students within the New York Public School System and in the Bay Area.

America's Promise released a report called, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Homeless Students in America's Public Schools," that was written by Civic Enterprises with Hart Research Associates. The purpose of the report was to learn more about the 1.3 million public school students nationally that were homeless in 2012-2013 school year.⁴ Researchers found that 78% of the young people surveyed experienced homelessness more than once.⁵ Some homeless youth (61%) said that they were not connected with any outside organization for support.⁶

A majority of the homeless youth (67%) said that they were distressed about talking to people at their school about their living situation and other challenges.⁷ The report found that 62% of the homeless youth participants faced challenges when transferring schools and providing proof of residency to enroll in a new school.⁸ Homeless youth participants (56%) said that the lack of cooperation between their new and old schools was a major challenge as they were transferring schools.⁹ And many transfer multiple times.

Homeless youth participants (54%) said that concrete supports, such as housing, food, and transportation, and emotional support, were important.¹⁰ The homeless youth participants in the survey (50%) said that they either slept in a car, park, abandoned building, bus station, or in

⁴Erin S. Ingram et al., America's Promise, 4, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://gradnation.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/2016-10/HiddenInPlainSightExecSummaryFINAL.pdf>.

⁵Ibid., 6

⁶Ibid., 6

⁷Ibid., 6

⁸Ibid., 6

⁹Ibid., 6

¹⁰Ibid.,6

other public places.¹¹ The report also found that 42% of the homeless youth participants dropped out of school at least once.¹²

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires that schools have social workers on site to help support students who experience homelessness. Social workers are referred as liaisons in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The study also surveyed liaisons to better understand the policy implementations of the McKinney-Homeless Assistance Act in the public school system. Liaisons said that resources have not kept up with the rise of the student homelessness.¹³ Researchers found that 89% of liaisons said that they spend as little as half of their time or even less on their responsibilities as liaisons.¹⁴

The report also found that eight in ten liaisons (82%) said that their schools are doing a good job addressing the homeless youth population with their needs.¹⁵ About one-third of the liaisons that were surveyed said that their school district did not prioritize the homeless youth student population.¹⁶ Researchers also found that 89 percent of liaisons want schools and other organizations to improve on how they address the homeless youth population.¹⁷ About six in ten homeless students who participated in the study felt that their schools either did a fair job or poor job in providing support.¹⁸ Statistics and experiences in California reflect these national trends.

In September of 2014, a study was released by the California Homeless Project and the California Research Bureau that focused on the homeless youth population in California and the effectiveness of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in California public schools.¹⁹

¹¹Ibid.,6

¹²Ibid.,6

¹³Ibid.,7

¹⁴Ibid.,7

¹⁵Ibid.,7

¹⁶Ibid.,6

¹⁷Ibid.,7

¹⁸Ibid.,7

¹⁹ Shahera Hyatt, Brynn Walzer, and Patricia Julianelle, "California's Homeless Students: A Growing Population,"

The California Homeless Project and the California Research Bureau released a brief called “California’s Homeless Students: A Growing Population” to publish their findings on the homeless students in California.²⁰ Researchers found that about 270,000 students experienced homelessness in California.²¹ California’s homeless youth population represented about 21% of homeless students in the United States in 2013.²²

The California Department of Education relies on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act’s definition of homeless youth in order to identify students who are experiencing homelessness over the course of the school year.²³ The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires social workers or liaisons to identify homeless students and record this information on data management systems.²⁴ This information is reported once a year to the California Department of Education where it undergoes a certification process to get submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.²⁵

The research data on the homeless youth population were completed “by the California Homeless Youth Project at the California Research Bureau by using the office address of each LEA to categorize the LEAs into state Senate and Assembly districts.”²⁶ The data that were collected and later submitted to the U.S. Department of Education did not include the following homeless youth demographics: homeless youth children who were not in school, preschool-aged children, unaccompanied youth, and youth who had not notified school authorities about their

California Homeless Youth Project, September 2014, 1, September 2014, accessed April 10, 2017, http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/CaliforniasHomelessStudents_AGrowingPopulation.pdf.

²⁰ Ibid.,1

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.,3

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

homelessness.²⁷ This matters because it prevents the federal government from knowing if these students are or are not receiving the public education that is entitled to them.

The study also found that “there are many factors that may contribute to schools not identifying homeless youth, including insufficient training on data collection, lack of awareness of homelessness, and inadequate training on McKinney-Vento requirements.”²⁸ The stigma of homelessness prevents some students and families from disclosing their living situation to some of the school authorities.²⁹ Homeless youth that are older may not want to self-identify as homeless for the very same reason.³⁰

The data that are reported to the Department of Education might be duplicative, since it is possible for the liaisons to report a homeless student who moved from one school district to another during the same school year because of their homelessness.³¹ The homeless youth population in California is nearly doubled the national average for homeless youth students.³² Even as the population grew for the homeless students in the 2011- 2012 school year, California claimed about “21% of the homeless students nationwide, yet received only 11% of the available federal McKinney-Vento funds.”³³ These statewide trends are reflected in literature looking at specific school districts across the country.

“A Tale of Two Students: Homelessness in New York City Public Schools,” identifies the academic and behavioral challenges that impact homeless youth within the New York City public school system.³⁴ The outcome of the report offers alternatives to help homeless youth

²⁷ Ibid.,4

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 4

³² Ibid., 1

³³ Ibid.,4

³⁴Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, "A Tale of Two Students: Homelessness in New York City Public Schools," ICPH: Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, June 2014, 1, accessed December 1, 2016,

complete their education³⁵ The study compares the cost of failure for the homeless students to the probability of success for housed students and homeless students that attend the New York City public schools.³⁶

The report confirmed that there is link between students' performance in school and their living situation.³⁷ Researchers showed there were challenges in and out of class, where children who were homeless do not perform well in school, while their families moved from one form of temporary housing to another.³⁸ There were more frequent moves and changes in school enrollment, with more than one out of five homeless students (22%) transferring schools at least once in the academic year.³⁹ 18 percent of homeless students transferred two or more single times in a single academic year.⁴⁰

The study also found that homeless students are at risk to become the next left back generation: the next generation to experience recurring homelessness as they transition into adulthood.⁴¹ In the school year 2011-2012 alone, the City of New York paid millions of dollars to educate homeless students that had to repeat a grade because of their living situation.⁴² Homeless students in the New York City public school system also attend schools at lower rates. They missed school at least once a month on average.⁴³ Homeless students in the New York City public schools attend school at rates below the Department of Education's minimum requirement for grade promotion. This increases the probability of repeating a grade for the homeless

http://www.icphusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ICPH_policyreport_ATaleofTwoStudents.pdf.

³⁵Ibid.,1

³⁶Ibid.,1

³⁷Ibid.,1

³⁸Ibid.,1

³⁹Ibid.,1

⁴⁰Ibid.,2

⁴¹Ibid.,2

⁴²Ibid., 5

⁴³Ibid., 7

student.⁴⁴

Researchers in a study called, “Unheard and Unseen: How Housing Insecure African American Adolescents Experience the Education System,” found that the four African American homeless youth participants believe that education is an important catalyst that can change their economic opportunities.⁴⁵ Participants also mentioned that they did not tell their school officials about their living situation.⁴⁶ Participants in the study believe that school officials lack the empathy about their living situations.⁴⁷ Their main concern lay in the fact that there is a chance of relocation if they confide in school officials about their living situation.⁴⁸

Sadly, it is not uncommon for a homeless youth to not come forward about their homelessness. Some homeless youth experience neglect or judgment from their peers if they confide in others about their living situation: which is why homeless youth students prefer to keep their living situation to themselves.

⁴⁴Ibid., 2

⁴⁵ Ellis, Addie Lucille, and Kathy D. Geller. 2016. "Unheard and unseen: How housing insecure African American adolescents experience the education system." *Education and Urban Society* 48, no. 6: 583-610. *PsycINFO*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 28, 2017).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2

National Legislation on Homelessness and Education Initiatives

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

This section of the paper begins by looking at legislation addressing homeless youth in the 1980s in order to provide historical context to the reader. During this time, the homeless epidemic grew in response to the Republican administration closing the mental health institutions across the country. And a stance to the free market economy that left the poor more vulnerable to homelessness.

In the early 1980s, homelessness presented itself as a local problem that needed a federal response.⁴⁹ To the Reagan Administration, homelessness was seen as a problem that did not need federal interference.⁵⁰ The first federal task force on homelessness was created in 1983.⁵¹ The purpose of this task force was to provide information to local governments on how to obtain federal property for the homeless population.⁵² This federal task force on homelessness did not provide program or policy actions on homelessness.⁵³

Advocates across the country wanted the federal government to acknowledge that homelessness was a nation-wide problem that required a federal response.⁵⁴ In 1986, the Homeless Person's Survival Act was introduced in Congress.⁵⁵ Only parts of this legislation were enacted into law.⁵⁶ Some of the parts that were enacted include: the Homeless Clarification Act of 1986 and the Homeless Housing Act.⁵⁷ The Homeless Clarification Act of 1986 removed permanent address requirements and other requirements to federal programs such as

⁴⁹ "McKinney-Vento Act," National Coalition for the Homeless, June 2006, 1, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/McKinney.pdf>.

⁵⁰Ibid.,1

⁵¹Ibid.,1

⁵²Ibid.,1

⁵³Ibid.,1

⁵⁴Ibid.,1

⁵⁵Ibid.,1

⁵⁶Ibid.,1

⁵⁷Ibid.,1

Supplemental Security Income, Aid to Families with Dependent children, Veterans Benefits, Food Stamps, and Medicaid.⁵⁸ The Homeless Housing Act created the Emergency Shelter Grant program and a transitional housing program which are both administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).⁵⁹

The Urgent Relief for Homeless Act was introduced in late 1986.⁶⁰ This legislation contained Title 1 of the Homeless Persons' Survival Act which provided emergency relief provisions for shelter, food, healthcare, and transitional housing.⁶¹ This legislation passed both houses in 1987.⁶² The act was then renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987.⁶³ In 2000, President Bill Clinton renamed it the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act after the deceased Representative Bruce Vento.⁶⁴

In the 1994 amendment of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Congress amended the Education of Homeless Children and Youth program.⁶⁵ Some the amendments in the Education of Homeless Children and Youth program included: the rights of homeless preschoolers to a free and convenient public school education, the right for parents of homeless children and youth to choose their children's school placement, and a requirement that educational authorities coordinate housing for homeless youth.⁶⁶

Schools use the Mc-Kinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's definition of homeless youth in order to identify the homeless students. Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the definition of homeless youth is defined as children and youths who do not

⁵⁸Ibid.,1

⁵⁹Ibid.,1

⁶⁰Ibid.,1

⁶¹Ibid.,1

⁶²Ibid.,1

⁶³Ibid.,1

⁶⁴Ibid.,2

⁶⁵Ibid.,3

⁶⁶Ibid.,3

have access to adequate housing, and:

children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C)); children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle...[Section 725, 2B, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act] ⁶⁷

The 2002 reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, under the No Child Left Behind Act, required that local educational agencies (LEAs) or school districts continue the education of homeless youths.⁶⁸ The law requires that state coordinators and local educational agencies have to inform school personnel, providers, and advocates that work with homeless families about their rights and the services that are available to them.⁶⁹ Liaisons have the responsibility to conduct and report a count of students and families, who are homeless, annually to the U.S. Department of Education. Through the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program, The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act authorizes federal funding for school districts to use for the youth and their families who are homeless, to provide school supplies and public transportation money. ⁷⁰

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Education, "Part C - Homeless Education," Home, December 19, 2005, accessed February 25, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg116.html>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Homeless Education," Homeless Education - Specialized Programs (CA Dept. of Education), accessed March 09, 2017, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act: Title 1—Improving The Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is a part of Lyndon Johnson’s effort on the “War of Poverty.”⁷¹ This legislation requires that each child is given fair and equal opportunities to receive an education.⁷² Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ensures “that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.”⁷³ The purpose of Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is to make sure that there are quality academic assessments, accountability, teacher training, and materials are met with State academic standards.⁷⁴ Title 1 is specifically geared towards supporting students in poverty.

Title 1 is supposed to close the achievement gap between high and low performing children.⁷⁵ Title 1 is supposed to meet “the educational needs of low-achieving children” which include migratory, neglected, and delinquent children, such as homeless youths.⁷⁶ Title 1 holds all schools, local agencies, and states accountable for improving academic achievement for all students.⁷⁷ Part of Title 1 also requires that local educational agencies coordinate services with for youth, children, and families that need them, some of whom maybe homeless.⁷⁸ Under Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, parents are able to participate in their children’s

⁷¹“Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students.” Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. Federal & State Legislation Related to Homelessness & Education Handout. Retrieved April 7, 2017.

⁷²National Center for Homeless Education. “Summary of McKinney-Vento Act and Title 1 Provisions.” nche.ed.gov. <http://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/summary.pdf> (accessed October 27, 2016).

⁷³“Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged,” Home, December 19, 2005, 1, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

education.⁷⁹

Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Barack Obama.⁸⁰ Every Student Succeeds Act “amended the McKinney-Vento, Title 1, and other programs/provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with public school district plans and policy supports in place at the beginning of the 2017 academic year.”⁸¹ Every Student Succeeds Act requires all states and school districts to report high school graduation rates for homeless students beginning in the 2016-2017 school year.⁸² They did this so that homeless youth would not fall under the radar of school districts and so that school districts can pay attention to the achievement gap of these students specifically. President Obama recognized that the No Child Left Behind Act, which is the predecessor of the Every Student Succeeds Act, became unworkable for schools and educators.⁸³ The ultimate goal of the Every Student Succeeds Act is to make sure that the public schools are fully preparing students for life success.

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2013- 2014 California State Legislation on the Education of Homeless Youth

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students.” Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. Federal & State Legislation Related to Homelessness & Education Handout. Retrieved April 7, 2017.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Hidden Epidemic of Student Homelessness Threatens Futures of More Than 1 Million Young People Every Year,” America's Promise, June 10, 2016, accessed May 02, 2017, <http://www.americaspromise.org/press-release/hidden-epidemic-student-homelessness-threatens-futures-more-1-million-young-people>.

⁸³ “Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),” Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education, accessed May 03, 2017, <https://www.ed.gov/ESSA>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

During the 2013-2014 legislative season, the State Legislature of California passed more laws that promoted homeless rights for youth than in any other legislative session.⁸⁵ This effort was led by the California Youth Task Forces, which included the California Homeless Youth Project, Housing California, and California Coalition for Youth. The 2013-2014 legislative session proved to be a vital year for the homeless youth population, otherwise they would have limited rights within California. Some of the legislation that passed in the state legislature included Assembly Bill 1806 which “facilitates high school graduation for homeless youth who have to change schools in the last two years of high school and helps ensure consideration of homelessness in potential suspensions and expulsions.”⁸⁶ Assembly Bill 982, “empowers homeless liaisons, Head Start programs and transitional shelters to identify children experiencing homeless, giving them categorical eligibility for subsidized child care.”⁸⁷

Assembly Bill 1228 “gives currently and formerly homeless college students a priority for on-campus housing.”⁸⁸ Assembly Bill 1733 “provides free birth certificates and state IDs for homeless youth.”⁸⁹ Assembly Bill 309 “eliminates barriers to SNAP benefits for unaccompanied youth. A statewide survey indicated this law helped over 11,000 homeless youth access food.”⁹⁰ Assembly Bill 1068 “gives unaccompanied homeless youth the right to access and disclose their own educational records and protects the privacy education information.”⁹¹ Assembly Bill 652 “clarified that being unaccompanied and homeless is not sufficient reason to report a youth to

⁸⁵ “Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students.” Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. Federal & State Legislation Related to Homelessness & Education Handout. Retrieved April 7, 2017.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

child protective services.”⁹²

The California State Senate sponsored Senate Bill 252 which “established a fee waiver for students experiencing homelessness to take the GED and the High School Proficiency Exam.”⁹³ The State Senate also sponsored Senate Bill 177 which “ensured immediate enrollment and full participation in school for students experiencing homelessness and creates a state-level work group to develop policies and practices to support homeless children and youth and ensure that child abuse and neglect reporting requirements do not create barriers to the school enrollment and attendance of homeless children or youth.”⁹⁴

Former State Assembly member Tom Ammiano believed the main reason why the 2013-2014 legislative session saw the most action in the passage of laws regarding the rights of homeless youth, was because the homeless youth advocacy groups lobbied tirelessly for policy solutions that would benefit the homeless youth population.⁹⁵ These advocacy groups were able to persuade the differing views of politicians from both sides of the state legislature to pass these laws.⁹⁶ The passage of these laws were crucial for the homeless youth population.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Tom Ammiano. Email with author. April 17, 2017.

⁹⁶Ibid.

How does the San Francisco Unified School District enforce the Mc-Kinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Act?

The San Francisco Unified School District use the McKinney-Vento’s definition of homeless youth when they provide services to homeless youths and their families. The San Francisco Unified School District places the homeless students and families in a program called the Families and Youth in Transition (FYIT) Program.⁹⁷ Once homeless students and families are enrolled in the program, liaisons (social workers) outline responsibilities for the parents so that they are participating in their student’s education as required by the Elementary and Secondary Act, under Title 1.⁹⁸ This policy reflects the prevailing the pull yourself up by the bootstraps philosophy in the United States.

2015-2016 Family and Youth in Transition Student Enrollment Data

For the 2015- 2016 academic year, the San Francisco Unified School District identified that there were 2,144 students categorized as families and youth in transition (F.Y. I. T.) in all of their schools. ⁹⁹ By contrast, in the 2013-2014 academic year in New York City, there is an estimate of 87, 210 homeless students that are enrolled across the public schools there.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement of The Disadvantaged," Home, December 19, 2005, 1, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students.” Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. San Francisco Unified School District 2015-2016 FYIT Student Enrollment Handout. Retrieved April 3, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, "A Tale of Two Students: Homelessness in New York City Public Schools," ICPH: Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, June 2014, 1, accessed December 1, 2016, http://www.icphusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ICPH_policyreport_ATaleofTwoStudents.pdf.

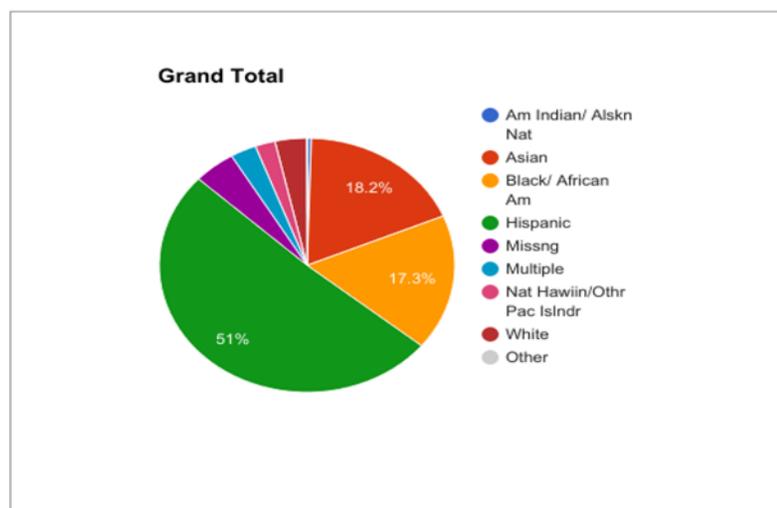


Figure 1. Data is based on San Francisco Unified School District's enrollment numbers on the family and youth in transition population's ethnic identities.¹⁰¹

San Francisco Unified School District counted that 1, 093 Hispanics (51%) 390 Asians (18.2%), 370 African Americans or Black (17. 3%), 74 White, 47 National Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 61 multiple ethnicities, and ten Native American or Alaskan National students, were categorized as families and youth in transition for the 2015-2016 school year.¹⁰² There were 98 families and youth in transition students reported to be missing.¹⁰³

These enrollment numbers do not include homeless students that were: in preschool, unaccompanied youth, transitional-age youth, and former students that might have enrolled at another educational institution within the school district.¹⁰⁴ This data were presented on January, 12, 2017 as a part of the optional trainings and workshops that are facilitated by the school district.¹⁰⁵ These enrollment numbers are reported annually to the U.S. Department of Education

¹⁰¹ Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students." Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. San Francisco Unified School District 2015-2016 FYIT Student Enrollment Handout. Retrieved April 3, 2017.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Richards and Nicole Magtoto. Interview with author/researcher. April 3, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

as required by the McKinney-Vento Act.¹⁰⁶

Of the 2144, students who were a part of the families and youth in transition student enrollment, 1,345 of the students were identified as English as a Second Language learners.¹⁰⁷ The California Department of Education requires that all English as a Second Language students take a diagnostic test that assesses their English language capacities. English as Second Language students have their enrollment and language assessment test data reported annually to the U.S. Department of Education.¹⁰⁸

The pie chart is a comparison of the different types of families and youth in transition students who were English Learners (EL), Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), and Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) according to the 2015-2016 student enrollment data that was collected by the San Francisco Unified School District.¹⁰⁹ This data set are based on the results of California Department of Education's California Language Development Test for the 2015-2016 school year, which was administered by the San Francisco Unified School District.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ "Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students." Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. San Francisco Unified School District 2015-2016 FYIT Student Enrollment Handout. Retrieved April 7, 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged," Home, December 19, 2005, 1, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Richards and Nicole Magtoto. Interview with author/researcher. April 3, 2017.

¹⁰⁹ "Critical Conversation #2: Educating & Empowering Homeless Students." Training, San Francisco Unified School District, the Office of Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, Student, Family & Community Support Division. San Francisco. January 12, 2017. San Francisco Unified School District 2015-2016 FYIT Student Enrollment Handout. Retrieved April 7, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

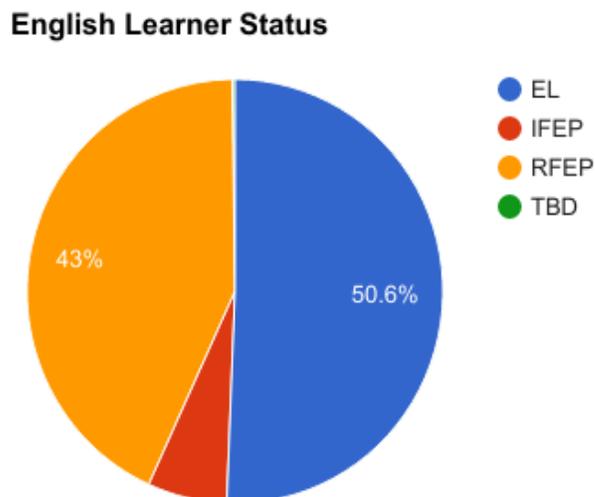


Figure 2. Pie chart indicates the different populations of ESL students among the family and youth in transition population in SFUSD.

Out of the 1,345 students that are a part of the English as a Second Language demographic within the family and youth in transition (FYIT) population, about 50.6% or 681 of the students were English as Second Language learners.¹¹¹ About 43% or 578 of the families and youth in transition (FYIT) students, were reclassified as fluent English learners (RFEP).¹¹² Reclassified Fluent English Learners (RFEP), as defined by the California Department of Education, are students with a primary language other than English that were originally classified as English learners, but have met the criteria for English language proficiency once administered the California English Language Development Test.¹¹³

It is estimated that about 6% of the family and youth in transition students were classified as Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP).¹¹⁴ Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) students are students with a primary language other than English who took the California English Language Development Test within 30 days of enrollment in a U.S. public school and who met

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ "CELDT Glossary- California Department of Education," California English Language Development Test, December 2010, 3, 4, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/documents/celdtglossary.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

the school district's criteria for language proficiency.¹¹⁵ What these data tell us is that most of the families that experience homelessness in the San Francisco Unified School District is that they come from immigrant families.

The San Francisco Unified School District's Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Students Policy

On January 6, 2017, San Francisco Unified School District made a preliminary draft of an Education and Homeless Students Policy outlining that it will identify and assign a McKinney-Vento Liaison.¹¹⁶ In the Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Students Policy, the McKinney-Vento liaison is responsible for making sure that homeless families, children, and youths have access to educational services and activities that are provided by the San Francisco Unified School District.¹¹⁷ The liaison will implement identification and outreach systems for the homeless youth population in the city.¹¹⁸ The McKinney-Vento liaison will help create identification and outreach systems by working with district staff, school site staff, and city partners in San Francisco to implement efficient identification and outreach strategies for the homeless youth population.¹¹⁹

Currently, there is not an assigned McKinney-Vento liaison that represents the school district which is why the school district is implementing this new position. The Every Student Succeeds Act, that was signed into law by President Obama in 2015, requires that local educational agencies have a McKinney-Vento liaison that enforces the new policies and

¹¹⁵Ibid., 3, 4.

¹¹⁶San Francisco Unified School District. 2017. *Policy Recommendations/Resolutions Section Extract from: SFUSD Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Student Policy 1/6/17*. San Francisco. Draft.

¹¹⁷ San Francisco Unified School District. 2017. *Policy Recommendations/Resolutions Section Extract from: SFUSD Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Student Policy 1/6/17*. San Francisco. Draft.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

amendments to the No Child Left Behind Act.¹²⁰

The Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Students Policy is San Francisco Unified School District's response to Every Student Succeeds Act. The Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Students Policy implements the amendments that were signed into law through the Every Student Succeeds Act.

The school district wants to tally the pre-school age and unaccompanied youth population with the impending identification and outreach systems.¹²¹ Once the tracking system is implemented, homeless youth could be referred to the services that are required by the McKinney Vento Act.¹²² Homeless youth could also pursue educational opportunities entitled to them through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Some of these programs that homeless youth are entitled to include the Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs), intervention services, enrichment programs, athletic programs, specialized afterschool programs, and preschool programs that are offered through the San Francisco Unified School District.¹²³ The tracking system could potentially provide the opportunity for unaccompanied homeless youth to enroll in school so that they can meet the same challenging State academic standards.¹²⁴

The draft mentions that parents and guardians of homeless children and youths would be informed of educational and other related opportunities available to their children, such as special education services, nutrition services programs, language assistance for English learners, and other educational opportunities that are required through the McKinney-Vento Act.¹²⁵

¹²⁰U.S. Department of Education, "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)," Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education, accessed May 03, 2017, <https://www.ed.gov/ESSA>.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid.

Findings

1. There are problems identifying certain homeless youth populations in the San Francisco Unified School District's Families and Youth in Transition Program (FYIT).

Students and families a part of the Family and Youth in Transition (FYIT) Program are required to have an assigned social worker on staff to provide the necessary services to them. Not all schools in the San Francisco Unified School District have a social worker available on site. This is a potential problem because there could be homeless students that have not been identified yet by the school district.¹²⁶ Some homeless youth and families do not wish to come forward about their living situation. Homeless youth and families might also be unaware of their rights under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. It is important to recognize that pre-school age homeless youth and unaccompanied homeless youth, currently, are not identified by the San Francisco Unified School District.¹²⁷

Why is it a problem?

In January 2015, The City and County of San Francisco estimated that there were 1, 569 unaccompanied children and transition-age-youths who experience homelessness in the city.¹²⁸ The report also found that 21% of unaccompanied children made up the homeless youth population in San Francisco.¹²⁹ The unaccompanied youth population decreased slightly from the point-in-time count taken in 2013, when unaccompanied homeless youth and children

¹²⁶ Robert Riley Mendoza. Interview with author/researcher. March 6, 2017.

¹²⁷San Francisco Unified School District. 2017. *Policy Recommendations/Resolutions Section Extract from: SFUSD Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Student Policy 1/6/17*. San Francisco. Draft.

¹²⁸*San Francisco Homeless Unique Youth Count & Survey Comprehensive Report 2015* (San Jose, CA: Applied Survey Research, 2015), 12, 2015, accessed April 4, 2017, http://dhsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Youth_SanFrancisco_HomelessReport_2015_FINAL_2.pdf.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 13

accounted for 26% of the homeless youth population in the city.¹³⁰

The homeless youth population in San Francisco also has a high concentration of LGBTQIA youth.¹³¹ Forty-eight percent respondents identified as LGBTQIA in the 2015 homeless youth count in San Francisco.¹³² For the homeless youth who identified as LGBTQIA in 2015, 36% were bisexual, 32% identified as gay or lesbian, 16% identified as queer, and 18% were transgender.¹³³ Some of the unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 25 and children accounted for in the point-in-time survey could be a part of the LGBTQIA demographic.¹³⁴

2. There is no academic achievement performance tracking system for the homeless youth students within the San Francisco Unified School District.

The San Francisco Unified School District does not have any sort of academic performance tracking system in place for the homeless students, especially for the pre-school age homeless and for unaccompanied homeless youth.¹³⁵ The San Francisco Unified School District, at the request of the Superintendent and the Board of Education of San Francisco, is implementing an academic tracking system, since it is now required by Every Student Succeeds Act.¹³⁶ The academic tracking system is expected to be implemented at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.¹³⁷

This is not necessarily the fault of the San Francisco Unified School District. The California Department of Education does not report high school graduation rates among homeless youth, only five states do; Colorado, Kansas, Virginia, Washington State, and

¹³⁰Ibid., 13

¹³¹Ibid., 19.

¹³²Ibid., 20.

¹³³Ibid., 20.

¹³⁴Ibid., 13

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

Wyoming.¹³⁸ Even though it is more of a statewide issue, the San Francisco Unified School District needs to develop and implement efficient tracking systems for their homeless youth students. It is important for the San Francisco Unified School District to track the homeless youth population, especially for the homeless unaccompanied youths and pre-school aged youths. It is necessary because it could close the education achievement gap; which is required by Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

3. Not every school in the San Francisco School Unified District has a liaison (social worker) on site for potential homeless students that have not been identified yet.

Some homeless students do not feel comfortable coming forward about their living situation. It is still important for schools to have outreach services available on site just in case a homeless youth needs to access wrap-around services afforded to them through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and under Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

4. No mandatory training for school administrators, staff, and teachers on the educational rights of homeless youth in the San Francisco Unified School District.

The San Francisco Unified School District does not have mandatory professional development training or workshops about the rights for their homeless youth students.¹³⁹ A school administrator from the San Francisco Unified School District said that there are optional professional development training and workshops that train teachers, staff members, and administrators within the school district on how to deal with the homeless students and families at their respective schools.¹⁴⁰ These trainings and workshops are facilitated by the Office of

¹³⁸Hidden in Plain Sight," America's Promise, June 2016, 15, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.americaspromise.org/report/hidden-plain-sight#recommendations>.

¹³⁹ Robert Riley Mendoza. Interview with author/researcher. March 4, 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Counseling and Post-Secondary Success through the Student, Family, and Community Support Division of the San Francisco Unified School District.¹⁴¹

Unfortunately, this is common among school districts across the country. It was reported that about 34% of liaisons said that they are the only person within their school district who is trained.¹⁴² Nationally, some liaisons (44%) reported that most staff are knowledgeable about the signs and what to look for in students who might be experiencing homelessness.¹⁴³

5. Some homeless students feel there is a lack of emotional support from some of the school staff and administrators.

Becca* said that her main problem as she experienced homelessness was the fact that she had a lack of emotional support from the school administrators and staff members.¹⁴⁴ It is important for staff members to know who is experiencing homelessness within their schools so that there can be intervention strategies for the homeless youths. In the literature review section, some homeless youths implied that they do not come forward about their living situation.

San Francisco Unified has to implement strategies so that homeless youths are educated about the opportunities that they are entitled to. Many homeless students believe that their homelessness impacts their ability to succeed in school.¹⁴⁵ It is important for school staff to check-in every now and then on the progress of the homeless youths in their schools, by scheduling counseling appointments or having teachers do one on ones with the students and their families. The Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District and the Board of Education have pledged to make all homeless students feel connected at their respective

¹⁴¹ Mary Richards and Nicole Magtoto. Interview with author. April 3, 2017.

¹⁴² "Hidden in Plain Sight," America's Promise, June 2016, 55, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.americaspromise.org/report/hidden-plain-sight#recommendations>.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 55

¹⁴⁴ Anonymous. Interview with author. March 11, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 19

schools.¹⁴⁶

6. There is no McKinney-Vento Act Liaison that represents the San Francisco Unified School District.

Since the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the San Francisco Unified School District drafted amendments to their Education of Homeless Students Policy. One amended resolution implies that, currently, there is not a McKinney-Vento Act Liaison that collaborates with other city shelters to ensure that homeless students have the resources they need to further their education.¹⁴⁷ However, the San Francisco Unified School District has pledged that the Superintendent of the school district will collaborate with other city shelters to identify the needs of the homeless youth population.¹⁴⁸ The school district plans on designing and developing learning centers at each family shelter and at some of the unaccompanied youth shelters in the city.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ San Francisco Unified School District. 2017. *Policy Recommendations/Resolutions Section Extract from: SFUSD Preliminary Draft of Education of Homeless Student Policy 1/6/17*. San Francisco. Draft.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Policy Recommendations

It is important for the San Francisco Unified School District to conduct quarterly audits throughout the school year on the effectiveness of the Family and Youth in Transition (FYIT) Program. Education analysts from the San Francisco Unified School District and from the City and County of San Francisco should work together on improving and implementing policy changes in the school district; in order to keep up with the recent policy changes that were signed into law through the Every Student Succeeds Act. The Every Student Succeeds Act requires that all local educational agencies develop accountability systems to better improve the educational outcomes of all public school students. The San Francisco Unified School District have already responded by creating a Preliminary draft of their Education of Homeless Students Policy on January 6, 2017.

Further Policy Recommendations:

1) It crucial that the San Francisco Unified School District train every staff member on the rights of the homeless students and mental health services available. SFUSD should make professional development workshops and training mandatory for all of the staff members that work in the school district to better serve the homeless youth students.

2) San Francisco Unified School District should place a liaison, social worker, or a counselor on site at every school, so that a homeless youth can confide in someone for emotional support and receive wrap-around services.

3) San Francisco Unified School District should implement a tracking system, with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing at the City and County of San Francisco, to help identify all homeless youths in San Francisco.

4) San Francisco Unified School District should work with city government officials to

allocate more funding for homeless youth programs in the school district, to meet the growing demand of homeless students.

Conclusion

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is an inadequate policy that does not address the causes of homelessness, only the symptoms of it.¹⁵⁰ That is why the San Francisco Unified School District is only addressing certain homeless student populations, not all. The San Francisco Unified School District is not doing an adequate job in tracking certain homeless youth populations; because there is a lack of funding resources from the McKinney-Vento federal programs to meet the growing demand of homeless students.¹⁵¹ However, it is the responsibility of the federal government to address “the causes of homelessness—lack of jobs that pay a living wage, inadequate benefits for those who cannot work, lack of affordable housing, and lack of access to healthcare.”¹⁵² Under the current political climate, that will not happen anytime soon; which is why it is important for the City and County of San Francisco to come up with appropriate systems and strategies to end homelessness at the local level.

¹⁵⁰ McKinney-Vento Act." National Coalition for the Homeless. June 2006. Accessed May 2, 2017. <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/McKinney.pdf>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

Mary Richards. Interview with author. April 3, 2017.

¹⁵² McKinney-Vento Act." National Coalition for the Homeless. June 2006. Accessed May 2, 2017. <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/McKinney.pdf>.

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