College and Career Counseling for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Promising Practices for Secondary School Counselors

A National Center for Homeless Education Research Summary

December 2017

National Center for Homeless Education

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Introduction

The education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended in December 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), includes a new requirement for school counselors to support students experiencing homelessness in their college and career readiness. In their roles, school counselors can identify and facilitate services and coordinate programs and interventions to support the college and career preparation and transition for students experiencing homelessness. In order to equip school counselors to meet this new requirement and to contribute to the overall success of students experiencing homelessness, this research summary provides an overview of the research, issues, and practices related to secondary school counselors' roles in supporting students experiencing homelessness in their postsecondary planning.

Homelessness and Education

Defining "Homeless Children and Youths"

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance establishes the definition of homeless used by U.S. public schools. According to the Act, homeless children and youths means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes:

- 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; or are abandoned in hospitals;
- 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 11302(a)(2)(C) 1 of this title);
- 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 who qualify as homeless because they are living in the circumstances described above [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)].

Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Youth

One subgroup of students experiencing homelessness includes those who are considered unaccompanied. According to the McKinney-Vento Act, the term unaccompanied youth includes a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6)]. Unaccompanied homeless students may face unique challenges related to college and career development, as compared to students who are experiencing homelessness who have parental or guardian support.

Background on Homelessness and Education

The number of students identified as homeless and enrolled in schools increased by 3.5% over a three-year span during the 2012-2013 to 2014-2015 school years (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2016). That is, approximately 2.5 million, or one in every 30 children, are identified as homeless in the United States (NCHE, 2014). According to NCHE (2016), in the 2014-2015 school year nearly 1.3 million students experiencing homelessness were enrolled in public school districts across the country. Further, although the data is limited on the numbers of students experiencing homelessness transitioning to college after high school, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data indicates that in 2015-2016 school year 31,948 unaccompanied homeless youth applied for financial aid (NCHE, n.d.). Moreover, homelessness may continue into college, with 13-14% of a national sample of community college students identifying as homeless (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017).

Homelessness among families with children can be caused by several factors, including a lack of affordable housing, extreme poverty, decreased governmental supports, racial disparities, and/or trauma, including domestic violence (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014;

National Coalition for the Homeless, 2017). With large cities across the U.S. reporting a shortage of affordable housing (United States Conference of Mayors, 2016), families may be unable to keep up with rising housing costs leading them towards homelessness. For youths who are unaccompanied and become homeless, their loss of housing is often related to running away from home or being asked by parents or other family members to leave the home, or to situations and circumstances that make it impossible for them to come back home (Child Trends, 2015). Unaccompanied homeless youth often experienced dysfunction in their home associated with substance abuse, sexual activity or orientation, parental abuse or neglect, or incarceration, and other factors like deportation, illness, or death that made it necessary to leave home (NCHE, 2013).

In general, NCHE (2016) reports that the housing locations of students experiencing homelessness break down as follows:

- 76% live doubled-up with other families due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- 14% live in shelters;
- 7% reside in hotels or motels due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; and
- 3% are considered unsheltered.

It is important to note that the numbers above may not capture many of the youths who are homeless because they are difficult to track due to their high levels of mobility (Child Trends, 2015). Additionally, the highest numbers of students experiencing homelessness can be found residing in cities, followed by the suburbs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

A loss of housing can impact children and youths in myriad ways. With the largest percentage of students experiencing homelessness living doubled-up, or "couch surfing" between residences, it presents unique issues for them. Regular moves back and forth between family and friends may eventually lead youths into long-term homelessness (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Youths experiencing homelessness may also feel unsafe, lack privacy and a quiet space to do schoolwork, and/or miss having the security afforded to those with safe and stable housing such as friends, pets, or possessions (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014). Moreover, research indicates that high school students experiencing homelessness feel shame and isolation from their peers (Hart, 2017).

Youths experiencing homelessness also may face mental health issues, including depression and/or low self-esteem (Aviles & Helfrich, 2004), which may be related to the trauma that they often experience. In fact, one study found that 57% of a sample consisting of 146 youths experiencing homelessness reported facing a traumatic event and 24% of the sample reported having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bender, Ferguson, Thompson, Komlo, & Pollio, 2010). Many youths experiencing homelessness are exposed to various forms of trauma, including witnessing abuse, being bullied, facing sexual or physical assault, being mugged or assaulted with a weapon, or witnessing a death (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Violence, which is often linked to substance abuse and can extend beyond the immediate family to include other adults in the home or shelter, can leave youths experiencing homelessness feeling disconnected and unsafe where they are living and make it difficult for them to feel safe and secure when eventually they are removed from the situation (Jordan, 2012). This disconnection and feelings of being "trapped" or lonely can be related to mental health issues (Kidd & Shahar, 2008). Further, students who are experiencing

homelessness and enrolled in K-12th grade school settings may also face increased incidents of bullying (Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, & Knight, 2011).

Although school can be a place of support and security for students experiencing homelessness with all of the challenges they face related to their housing circumstances, it is not surprising that homelessness impacts their academic development and achievement. For instance, school districts across the U.S. cite challenges related to serving students experiencing homelessness including identification, transportation, and the lack of basic needs (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY], 2010). For students experiencing homelessness, being highly mobile and having increased absences can lead to lower levels of achievement, including lower standardized test scores, compared to their peers with stable housing (Cutuli et al., 2012; Tobin, 2016). Compared to their peers with consistent housing, children and youth experiencing homelessness may be more likely to have emotional and behavior problems, experience health issues, repeat grades, be more vulnerable to dropping out, or be expelled from school (Child Trends, 2015; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016). Students experiencing homelessness may also struggle finding additional support to address their academic needs, as research indicates that shelters often lack needed supportive services, such as tutoring, parent groups, study time, or transportation (Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003).

In order to address the educational barriers and challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness, the McKinney-Vento Act was passed into law in 1987. The education subtitle of the Act, as most recently reauthorized by ESSA requires States and school districts to take steps to address the challenges that homeless children and youths have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. This legislation provides a foundation for school counselors and other educators to advocate for supportive services for students experiencing homelessness, and offers the assurance for students and families that if they experience homelessness, they will be supported by the school district.

ESSA and The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

ESSA was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act. This education law, which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), builds on key areas of progress in recent years, and includes provisions that will help to ensure success for students and schools. ESSA includes provisions focused on advancing equity for disadvantaged youths and requires that all schools teach to standards that prepare students to ready for college and careers. Further, through annual assessments, ESSA holds schools accountable to enhance performance, particularly at low-performing schools. ESSA also increases access to high-quality preschools. (United States Department of Education, 2016b)

Within ESSA, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program is intended to provide direction for school districts to implement the requirements under Subtitle VI-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Under the Act, State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to ensure that barriers faced by students experiencing homelessness related to their attendance, enrollment, and achievement are removed. Under McKinney-Vento SEAs must appoint a State Coordinator for Homeless Education and LEAs must appoint a local homeless education liaison to ensure the effective implementation of the Act in schools throughout the State.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless children and youth have the right to

- receive a free, appropriate public education;
- enroll in school immediately, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment, or having missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness;
- enroll in school and attend classes while the school gathers needed documents.
- enroll in the local school; or continue attending the school of origin (the school they attended when permanently housed or the school in which they were last enrolled), according to each student's best interest. *(If the school district believes that the school selected is not in the student's best interest, the district must provide the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of its position and inform the parent, guardian, or youth of the right to appeal its decision;
- receive transportation to and from the school of origin, if requested); and
- receive educational services comparable to those provided to other students, according to each student's needs.

LEAs may also be eligible for competitive subgrants under McKinney-Vento to support the "enrollment, attendance, and success" of students experiencing homelessness.

New Requirement for College and Career Readiness

With the 2015 reauthorization of the law, school counselors now are required to provide college and career support for students experiencing homelessness. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) Non-Regulatory Guidance explicitly states that: "The local liaison, along with guidance counselors and other LEA staff tasked with college preparation, should ensure that all homeless high school students receive information and individualized counseling regarding college

readiness, college selection, the application process, financial aid, and the availability of on-campus supports" (United States Department of Education, 2016a, p. 48)." Statutory amendments also require local liaisons to inform unaccompanied homeless students of their independent status for purposes of applying for federal student aid under the FAFSA, and assist these students in obtaining documentation of this status. Independent students, including unaccompanied homeless youth, do not include parent information on their FAFSA; as a result, independent students' federal aid packages are calculated based solely on the student's own income and assets [42 U.S.C. § 11432g(6)(A)(x)(III)].

School Counseling

School counselors are positioned in elementary, middle, and high schools and are uniquely trained and certified to facilitate programs and provide services with a minimum of a master's degree (ASCA, n.d.). According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national model, school counseling programs should meet the needs of *all* students, regardless of their backgrounds, across three domains: (a) social/emotional (i.e. managing emotions and applying interpersonal skills), (b) academic (i.e. maximizing students' ability to learn), and (c) career (i.e. supporting students' college and career planning and development). School counselors deliver services and programs to students through large group, classroom, small group, and/or individual methods, such as short-term counseling (ASCA, 2012a). They offer direct services including: (a) providing a school counseling curriculum through instruction or group activities, (b) engaging students in individual planning through appraisal and advisement, and (c) facilitating responsive services such as counseling and responding to crises (ASCA, 2012a, p. 84). Indirectly, according to the national model, school counselors serve students by providing referrals, engaging in consultations with teachers, parents, or other key stakeholders, and collaborating to provide a systemic model of support. Strong school counseling programs are based on evidence, where data is used to demonstrate and enhance the outcome and impact of various programs and counseling interventions (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007).

Research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of school counseling programs in supporting students. For instance, in a study of two States (i.e. Nebraska and Utah), Carey and Harrington (2010a, 2010b) found that participation in school counseling programs positively impacted students' attendance, graduation rates, and academic achievement in Math and Reading, as well as lowered their discipline and suspension rates. Moreover, research by Belasco (2013) suggested that high school students who met with their school counselor were more likely to enter four-year institutions after they completed high school. School counseling interventions, such as small-group or classroom-based interventions, have also been shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement, particularly on test scores (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Duarte & Hatch, 2015), as well as the emotional and behavioral development of students (Ohrt, Webster, & De La Garza, 2015). Moreover, one school district found that through expanding and enhancing their comprehensive school counseling programs, they were able to decrease unexcused absences and discipline referrals (Duarte & Hatch, 2015). Thus, the role of school counselors is particularly important in providing supportive services and interventions to meet the ever-changing needs of K-12th grade students.

School Counseling and College and Career Development

The ASCA school counselor competencies (ASCA, 2012b), which highlight the critical areas of knowledge and skills that all school counselors should possess, describe career planning and development with K-12th grade students as a major component of comprehensive school counseling programs. Within the competencies it is stated that school counselors should provide equitable access to career development and support for *all* students. This involves having knowledge of "career planning and college admissions, including financial aid" (Standard IV-A-6). Additionally, school counselors must understand the intricacies of career outcomes including "career opportunities, labor market trends and global economies" (Standard IV-B-2d). Important to

this work is ensuring that students become empowered to direct their own career development (Standard IV-B-2g).

The "ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success" (ASCA, 2014) further describe the critical knowledge and skills that all students need in order to be college and career ready. These research-based standards highlight what K-12th grade students should be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program. For instance, every student should understand that "postsecondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success" (Standard M.4). The standards also highlight the need for students to develop short- and long-term goals related to their careers and engage in challenging coursework. Additionally, through school counseling interventions, schools can support students in becoming college-ready by helping them to learn self-discipline, effective writing and communication skills, relationship building with other students and adults, role balancing related to school, family, and home activities, and self-advocacy skills. These and other skills are critical to college success. (ASCA, 2014)

School counseling programs nurture students' college and career development, and support them in understanding how their current education connects to their postsecondary endeavors. School counselors can work with students in the career domain to facilitate a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education and/or long-term careers. This work begins as early as elementary school (Knight, 2015), when school counselors can teach students about occupations and job-related skills, such as self-management (Niles, Trusty, & Hutchinson, 2010). Through college and career readiness interventions coordinated by school counselors, research has indicated that elementary students can increase their knowledge about careers and their interest in pursuing postsecondary education (Mariani, Berger, Koerner, & Sandlin, 2016). Niles et al. (2010) adds that middle school counselors should also engage students in career exploration through teaching them about career clusters, providing them with career interest inventories, and educating them on how different life roles (such as becoming a parent) impact career pathways. In high school, school counselors can work closely with students to develop long-term goals and realistic educational plans that lead them to college or to a career path that best aligns with their interests (Duggar & Boshoven, 2010). Further, school counselors play an integral role in preparing students for important college-entrance tests such as the PSAT or SAT, teaching them about various forms of financial aid and scholarships, and assisting them with all elements of the college selection and application process (National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2013).

With all of their important roles related to college and career development, school counselors are vital in helping students get to college. Supporting this claim, Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) found that in schools with higher numbers of school counselors, students were more likely to apply to more universities than those with lower numbers school counselors. The study also found that by the time students entered 10th grade, if they had met with a school counselor for college information, they had a marked advantage over and applied to more colleges than their peers who did not meet with a school counselor. Relatedly, in a second study, high school students reported that after themselves and their parents, school counselors were the most influential individuals in helping them think about their postsecondary planning and education (Blaire, Burkhardt, & Hull, 2015). This study also found that the role of school counselors in providing college and career support may be particularly important for underrepresented students, such as first-generation college students (i.e. students whose parents did not complete college), who reported their school counselor as most influential in their postsecondary planning two and a half times more frequently than their peers whose parents attended college (Blaire et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, despite the important role of college and career counseling for school counselors, their work may be hindered by large caseloads and insufficient college-counseling information, particularly in lower-resourced schools (Perna et al., 2008). Carey and Harrington (2010a, 2010b) indicated that in schools with lower ratios of students to counselors, attendance rates were higher and discipline rates were lower. This might suggest that in schools where students may benefit the most from school counselors, such as high poverty schools with increased numbers of students experiencing homelessness, their services are not as readily available as they are in schools where there are more resources. Therefore, it is important to further explore the role of the school counselor in supporting the college and career preparation of students experiencing homelessness in order to highlight how they can benefit this unique population of students and encourage school districts and States to recognize the value of their work with these and other vulnerable students.

School Counseling and Students Experiencing Homelessness

School counselors have integral roles in supporting the academic, social/emotional, and career development of students experiencing homelessness. A critical part of this work begins with school counselors and local liaisons partnering to identify students who have lost housing and to assess their particular needs (Havlik & Brown, 2016). School counselors can also coordinate and develop programs, including counseling interventions designed to meet the specific needs of students in homeless situations (ASCA, 2010; Havlik & Brown, 2016). ASCA (2010) further recommends that school counselors work with parents, school-based professionals (i.e. local liaisons, teachers, counselors, administrators, social workers, etc.), and community-based resources (i.e. local colleges, community agencies, churches, food banks, shelters, etc.) to increase their knowledge and awareness of homelessness and to collaborate in order to provide a system of support. Across their roles, school counselors, in partnership with other important stakeholders, can provide comprehensive programming to assist in removing barriers for students experiencing homelessness and support their educational success.

ASCA's 2016 ethical standards address homelessness explicitly by calling upon school counselors to "advocate for the equal rights and access to free, appropriate public education for all youth, in which students are not stigmatized or isolated based on their housing status…"(A.10.f) (ASCA, 2016). Since students and families experiencing homelessness may conceal their loss of housing because they are embarrassed or for fear that they may be stigmatized by the school or forced to leave, school counselors must ensure that there is an atmosphere of support and awareness in the school so that families feel comfortable opening up about their housing status (Havlik, Schultheis, Schneider, & Neason, 2016; Havlik, Rowley, Neason, Puckett, & Wilson, 2017). Research has confirmed that although school counselors recognize the importance of quickly identifying students who are homeless in order to effectively deliver services and remove barriers; they continue to face challenges with students choosing not to self-disclose their housing status (Havlik et al., 2017; McLain, 2015).

School counselors must, therefore, build trusting relationships with families and students to help them feel comfortable disclosing if they lose housing and to advocate for students to remain at their schools of origin, if this is in their best interest, if they lose housing during the year (Havlik et al., 2017). Since students and families may not know what services are available to them and may lack knowledge of the rights and services provided by under the McKinney-Vento Act (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Isreal, 2006), school counselors can work with local liaisons to distribute information widely so that all parties are informed. For instance, if a student becomes homeless during a given school year, the school counselor can partner with the local liaison to educate the school and parents on available McKinney-Vento supports and the importance of educational stability and continuity, as well as encourage the family to seek housing that is within the student's current school district (Sosa et al., 2013).

The partnership between the local liaison and the school counselor is a critical element of promoting awareness of McKinney-Vento requirements and the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness (Strawser, Markos, Yamaguchi, & Higgins, 2000). By working together to ensure that all key stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, and administrators know the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and the supports available to McKinney-Vento eligible students, students and their families can receive needed supports as early as possible. After students are identified as homeless, in order to determine their specific needs and the services necessary, school counselors can conduct informal and formal assessments of students' basic needs

(i.e. food, clothing, or shelter), emotional and social support systems, academic development, and access to supportive services such as transportation or community resources (Havlik, Brady, & Gavin, 2014; Havlik & Brown, 2016). This may involve meeting with students individually to discuss their current living situations, speaking with teachers and parents, observing students' peer interactions, and examining data such as attendance or discipline records, testing reports, and grades. Through determining where each student is facing challenges and needs support, an individualized plan for how to best provide assistance can be developed.

In collaboration with others, school counselors can address the academic, social/emotional, and career planning needs of students experiencing homelessness through facilitating small groups, strengths-based individual counseling, tutoring and mentoring programs, and other preventative programming (Grothaus et al., 2011). Coordinating these interventions and programs is important to ensure that when students face a loss of housing, they receive the necessary supports at the school to level the playing field with their peers in permanent housing. School counselors can also consult with teachers to support them in implementing programs or behavior plans for students experiencing homelessness (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004) and can work with them to help them to adjust policies that may hinder the educational success of students experiencing homelessness, such as rigid homework or attendance policies.

Because students who experience a loss of housing may lack basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, school counselors can collaborate with others to connect students to the resources necessary to fulfill these needs. Meeting basic needs is critical, asa lack of basic needs can overshadow other important academic, social/emotional, and career planning needs for students experiencing homelessness (Havlik et al., 2014; Havlik et al., 2017). To address basic needs, school counselors can first identify a space in the school to store donated clothing, snacks, and other necessary items such as backpacks and school supplies, to have on hand to provide for students who are lacking in these areas (Daniels, 1992; Strawser et al., 2000). They should also coordinate with the local liaison on steps to take to ensure that students experiencing homelessness receive access to free school meals immediately through direct certification, per the requirements of the Child Nutrition Act, so that students have consistent access to breakfast and lunch during the week (Havlik et al., 2014). If funding is needed to support enrichment programming or to provide other basic needs for students, school counselors can work with their school districts and local liaisons to get additional support, such as seeking Title I, Part A funding or applying for a McKinney-Vento subgrant.

Although addressing basic needs is an important task of school counselors in serving students experiencing homelessness (McLain, 2015), it is critical that they attend to the social/emotional and academic needs of students as well. To address the unique emotional needs of students experiencing homelessness, school counselors can apply a variety of strategies. For preventative work, they can run classroom lessons teaching important skills, such as social or study skills, and conduct individual student planning where they assess emotional and behavioral progress in the classroom (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004). Baggerly and Borkowski (2004) further suggest that school counselors provide responsive services, such as play therapy and other counseling interventions that address students' emotional and social challenges. While engaging in this work, they should always be aware of the trauma that students experiencing homelessness may have faced. Through providing trauma-informed care, where they recognize the signs and impact of trauma and respond with approaches that integrate safety, trust, support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural competency (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration 2015), they can be more sensitive to the unique needs of children and youths experiencing homelessness.

School counselors must find ways to help students experiencing homelessness feel safe and connected to the school system through educating parents on how to support their children emotionally, and by teaching all students emotional and relational skills, as well as strategies for stress and anxiety management (Havlik et al., 2014). In one study that examined teachers' work with students experiencing homelessness, authors highlighted how addressing students' emotional and academic needs were interrelated and, for this particular population of students, it was critical for teachers to not simply focus on just teaching technical skills, but also attend to affective needs and recognize the importance of relationship building (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008). To help students experiencing homelessness more readily connect with the school, teachers, and their peers, school counselors can meet with students individually to determine their interests and help them access various clubs, extracurricular activities, and/or other programming. Participation in such activities may help students form stronger relationships with teachers, staff, or students that they may not have otherwise in the classroom setting. For after- or before- school programs, school counselors may have to advocate for the school district to increase access to transportation or connect with the local liaison or State Coordinator to apply for funding.

While keeping in mind the importance of connecting with students, school counselors should provide supportive academic interventions and advisement tailored to students' specific needs. They must also encourage teachers not to assume that all students have access to school supplies at home and, when necessary, provide materials that can be taken home to complete assignments (Havlik et al., 2014). For example, some students may not have access to a computer or internet, so the school may need to provide flexible deadlines for typed assignments, allow laptops with wireless cards to be borrowed, or offer access to computer labs during school hours for students to complete assignments. School counselors can also coordinate tutoring services where students are paired with a regular tutor/mentor with whom they can build a relationship, to help strengthen their academic deficiencies (Grothaus et al., 2011). Importantly, in working with secondary students experiencing homelessness, school counselors should focus on addressing students' postsecondary planning needs, especially when other more pressing immediate needs may tend to overshadow them. They can do this by meeting regularly with students to create educational plans and goals and discuss potential financial planning to college, such as identifying scholarships or universities that offer strong financial aid packages (Havlik et al., 2014). Further, they must advocate for appropriate course placement for students experiencing homelessness to ensure that they are taking classes where they are challenged but can be successful (ASCA, 2010). For students who move frequently, school counselors should contact the students' previous school counselor when records are missing and review transcripts closely. They can also encourage their own school to quickly send records along when students move and give copies to the students and families to keep when they leave. If necessary, they can collaborate with teachers to administer informal academic assessments in reading or math to get students enrolled in appropriate courses. For secondary students, this role becomes increasingly critical, because missing coursework could hinder their ability to graduate or apply for college.

Because higher levels of mobility can be related to dropping out (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007), school counselors and other stakeholders, such as local liaisons, must be aware of challenges that might prevent a student experiencing homelessness from consistently attending school. Since school counselors cite attendance as a major challenge to their work with students experiencing homelessness (McLain, 2015), it is critical that they work closely with local liaisons, attendance

officers, social workers, and other important support staff to help students consistently attend school. Students experiencing homelessness may benefit from school counselors coordinating school-wide interventions where they are exposed to an array of school counseling services and programs. For example, in one school district where a comprehensive school counseling program was implemented, which included school-wide initiatives, class curricula (i.e. a violence prevention program where students were taught social skills such as impulse control and anger management), preventative work, and other important counseling services, there was decrease in the unexcused absence rate across three schools by 39.8% (Duarte & Hatch, 2015). To further prevent students from missing school and later dropping out, school counselors can collaborate with other school professionals to develop an early warning system, provide a school climate where students are engaged in their learning, and involve students in intensive individual academic support to address gaps in their education (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Building relationships with students and getting them involved in supportive school counseling interventions may have lasting effects on their school performance and even postsecondary educational attainment.

Finally, for students who need additional support beyond what the school can offer, school counselors may need to provide referrals to outside services, such as long-term mental health services (Havlik et al., 2017). However, before providing referrals, school counselors should research community resources so that, when needed, they can quickly recommend free or affordable supports that are available to local families (Griffin & Farris, 2010). They can also help to support community agencies and improve services for students experiencing homelessness by collaborating with the local liaison to offer trainings for shelters or community center staff on how to teach students topics such as conflict resolution, active listening, and/or positive communication (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004). School social workers and local liaisons often are knowledgeable on the resources available in the community and can work hand-in-hand with the school counselor to connect students to the services they need. Because school counselors can be critical stakeholders in supporting the needs of students experiencing homelessness, they should continue to collaborate with others and provide intentional interventions that address the barriers students face.

Practical Application: Case Example

Mr. Lucas, a middle school counselor in a suburban setting, has a caseload of about 400 8th grade students. Within his caseload this school year, he has 10 students who have been identified as homeless. The majority of these students are living doubled-up with other families in a nearby apartment complex that serves low-income families. Two of the students currently reside at an emergency shelter for women and children. Periodically, he touches base with the district's local liaison (i.e. the school social worker) to learn more about the families experiencing homelessness in his school and see what their needs may be. Every quarter he meets with each student individually to do a general "check-in" and have an informal conversation in order to build trust and make sure there are no pressing needs that are not being met. He also tries to observe students at lunch and in the classroom to ensure they have social supports. To assess academics, he checks grade reports and attendance records to determine if the students need additional academic support or are having transportation issues. Further, he works with the school's attendance secretary and requests a monthly attendance report with names of students who have high numbers of absences. When any of the students who are homeless appear on this list, he promptly meets with them and the local liaison to determine what is causing the absences and how the school can help get them to school. He works closely with the school administrators and local liaison to develop attendance support plans for students who regularly have high levels of absences.

For students experiencing homelessness that he identifies as struggling in their emotional and social development, he provides short-term supportive counseling and includes students in small counseling groups on social skills, stress management, or anger management. To support students' academic development, he coordinates an afterschool tutoring program where students from the local college come to provide academic instruction and support. He also advocated for the school district to provide additional afterschool transportation so that students who rely on a school bus to get home could still be involved. Mr. Lucas also noted that several of the students experiencing homelessness did not have necessary school supplies, so he was able to secure Title 1 funding to provide them.

To help identify students experiencing homelessness, at the beginning of every year, with the help of the local liaison, Mr. Lucas posts McKinney-Vento posters in the main office that clearly state the definition of homeless and the supports available to McKinney-Vento eligible students, and sends an email to all school teachers, administrators, and staff with background information about homelessness and McKinney-Vento. Further, if a student experiencing homelessness withdraws from his school, he attempts to determine what school they will be attending in order to quickly transfer records, or determines if it may be better for the student to stay at their school of origin.

College and Career Preparation for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Being college and career ready includes having aspirations to attend college, following an academic plan that leads to college, being involved in extracurricular activities, and understanding the college selection process (e.g. financial aid and admissions) (National Office of School Counselor Advocacy [NOSCA], 2010). However, despite students experiencing homelessness recognizing that college is an important option for overcoming their life circumstances, they may face unique barriers in pursuing this path (Gupton, 2009). Perhaps because of these challenges, students experiencing homelessness report intentions to pursue educational training beyond high school at a lower rate than their peers who are permanently housed (Rafferty et al., 2004). Additionally, since homelessness can continue even after students enter postsecondary institutions, as evidenced by one study that found 13% of community college students in a large sample reported being homeless at some point while enrolled (Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Eisenberg, 2015), it is critical for school counselors to consider the unique issues that secondary students experiencing homelessness will face in preparing for, applying to, and transitioning to college.

When preparing for college, students experiencing homelessness report being confused about the college process, including all aspects of admissions and applying for college such as interviewing, essay writing, applying for financial aid, and college visits (Hart, 2017). This confusion may stem from a lack of prior exposure to college, particularly if the student is first-generation college (i.e. neither parent attended college). First-generation college students are often less prepared for college and enroll in college at lower rates than their peers whose parents attended college (Smith, 2015). Student experiencing homelessness with limited prior exposure to college may be intimidated by the college application and admission process, and may lack awareness of available supports to help them apply to and attend college. Further, they may also be struggling academically and have missing coursework due to high levels of school mobility that is often a result of their housing instability.

For students experiencing homelessness who are considering postsecondary education, finding a college that fits their unique circumstances, needs, personality, and goals is critical. For instance, they may need additional employment and job opportunities, access to public transportation, and access to additional academic supports such as tutoring programs that may not be as necessary for students with consistent housing (Dukes, 2013). Additionally, students who do not have a home to return to during extended college breaks when dormitories may close may need to identify universities that offer year-round housing (Fryar, 2014). If students experiencing homelessness enter colleges that do not provide the services they need, they may continue to face barriers to success or even drop out. For instance, research by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2015) indicates that low-income students continue to encounter a lack of affordable housing and experience food insecurity while enrolled in college. It is therefore critical that students experiencing homelessness go to a college where they can be supported across all of their areas of need; as such, they should focus on applying to postsecondary institutions that have strong reputations and also provide the supportive services they will need.

In addition, during the college preparation process, for students who need financial support, fee waivers may be available for them. Students experiencing homelessness qualify for reductions or waivers on their Advanced Placement (AP) testing fees, college entrance exam fees, ACT or SAT programs, and/or college application fees (see Dukes, 2013 for a more detailed summary of each of these areas). While planning to enter college, students experiencing homelessness need to also consider the many related costs, including tuition, fees, housing, school supplies such as laptops

and textbooks, transportation, and other personal necessities (Martin, 2013). Fortunately, there are grants, such as Pell Grants or Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, loans, scholarships, or federal work-study programs (More information can be found here: https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types#aid-from-the-federal-government) that are available for students from low-income backgrounds. For students who were also previously in the foster care system, there are Education Training Vouchers (ETVs) available. This voucher program is a federally funded initiative where youths leaving foster care are eligible for up to $5,000 per year for college, for up to five years, until the age of 23 (for more information see: http://www.fc2sprograms.org). Importantly, students who are homeless and unaccompanied should be made aware that they qualify for independent student status on the FAFSA form, which has a specific item asking them if they are homeless or at risk of homelessness (Martin, 2013). Through receiving additional education and support on the various types of financial aid for which they may qualify, students experiencing homelessness can come to see college as a realistic option for them and have the same college opportunities as their peers with permanent housing.

As evidenced above, students experiencing homelessness can access college, though they may need additional support and knowledge to ensure that they are successful in their preparation and application process. However, transition support is also necessary because after students get into college, they may continue to face challenges. For instance, in describing the personal narratives of youth experiencing homelessness enrolled (or enrolling) in college, Gupton (2009) found that insecure housing made it challenging for college students to maintain supportive relationships. While in college, it may be difficult for students experiencing homelessness to embrace the college experience, because they may feel disconnected from their peers and institutions (Gupton, 2016). Gupton (2017) suggests that although students experiencing homelessness may benefit from entering college and it can be a way to escape their current circumstances, they may not seek the support they need (e.g. academic advising or counseling) while they are there. Hence, due continued experiences of instability once enrolled, college students experiencing homelessness may need to seek out resources in order to be successful in college.

Despite the cited challenges above, many youths experiencing homelessness continue to express a desire to attend college (Emerson, Duffield, Salazar, & Unrau, 2012). Research has indicated that students experiencing homelessness have an intrinsic motivation to succeed and overcome their circumstances or prove themselves (Gupton, 2009; Hart, 2017), which can motivate them to enter and complete college to overcome the barriers they have faced in their lives. This means that school counselors and other key stakeholders should provide comprehensive academic support that ensures that students experiencing homelessness are prepared to enter college after they graduate high school and have a transition plan in place.

School Counselors' Roles in the College and Career Development of Students Experiencing Homelessness

In general, there is scant research on the knowledge, skills, and practices of school counselors providing college and career readiness support for students experiencing homelessness. Below are snapshots of several studies related to this topic. Although the focus of this section is on homeless research, since some studies have indicated similarities in terms of the educational achievement between students who are homeless and low-income students (Tobin, 2016), a few citations related to low-income students and college and career planning are included to provide a more comprehensive research summary.

- The results of one study suggest that role-playing different occupations in elementary school may enhance the self-concept of students experiencing homelessness by helping them to view themselves as capable of success in a career. Baggerly and Borkowski (2004) applied a case study method to investigate the impact of a comprehensive school counseling program on one 7-year old female elementary student who was experiencing homelessness. The school counselor engaged students in career exploration through group play therapy.

- Another study found that students from low-income backgrounds who had multiple contacts with a school counselor in 10th and 12th grade were more likely to enter four-year institutions after high school than their peers who only had one visit. In this study, Belasco (2013) used the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) and found that students (N = 11,260) from low-socioeconomic backgrounds benefited the most from school-based college counseling.

- The results of a quantitative study found that school counselors reported engaging in an average amount of career preparation with students experiencing homelessness. That is, elementary, middle, and high school counselors (N =426), in a survey examining their knowledge, skills, and awareness related to homelessness, provided a mean response of 2.91 on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = Not at all through 5 = Very frequently) on the frequency in which they provided career preparation counseling for students experiencing homelessness (Gaenzle, 2012).

- In yet another study, school counselors emphasized college and career planning as a critical need for students experiencing homelessness. School counselor participants (N = 160) who completed an open-ended survey item asking them to describe the "five most important needs of homeless students" highlighted the need for addressing educational and financial planning related to college preparation (Havlik et al., 2014). As would be expected, high school and middle school counselors placed more emphasis on the importance of engaging students experiencing homelessness in college and career interventions than elementary school counselors. Further, suburban and rural school counselors in the study reported college and career needs more frequently than urban school counselors. Participants in the study shared that one of their roles in helping students experiencing homelessness was to work with them to see college as an attainable postsecondary path.

- When surveyed about their work with students experiencing homelessness, a sample of school counselors reported that they most frequently engaged in providing referrals, individual counseling, and academic support. This study by Havlik and Bryan (2015), who investigated school counselors' (N = 207) roles in working with students experiencing homelessness, found that despite 61% of the participants reportedly working at the secondary level, only 21.8% of the sample selected "college planning" as an intervention they provided for students experiencing homelessness. This finding came from a survey item that provided participants with a list of 25 recommended interventions for school counselors working with students experiencing homelessness. From that list, participants were asked to select those interventions they specifically provided for students experiencing homelessness at their schools.

- The findings of yet another study suggested that school counselors primarily focused on meeting the basic needs of students experiencing homelessness and generally overlooked the topic of college and career planning. Havlik et al. (2017) interviewed 23 school counselors about their experiences and challenges working with students experiencing homelessness. Because the basic needs of students experiencing homelessness were so pressing, these needs seemed to overshadow all others (i.e. educational, social/emotional, and/or college and career planning). In addition to the interviews, participants in this study were also asked to complete a survey. Of the

16 school counselor participants who completed the survey, they had a mean response of 2.4 on scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Not at all through 5 = Very frequently) on the frequency of their engagement in career exploration with students experiencing homelessness.

- In a sample of school counseling webpages, one study found that a limited number of the sites provided information directly related to the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Kennedy and Baker (2015), in a content analysis of 364 Statewide high school counseling websites, found that 37.18% (n = 116) of the websites sampled listed fee waiver information about ACT or SAT tests, and even lower percentages for fee waivers for college applications (12.18%), NCAA Clearinghouse waivers (4.49%), or AP exams (1.92%). Also, related to socioeconomic status, only a few of the websites had material available about accessing food (1.92%), clothing (1.28%), or agencies offering financial assistance (2.24%). Additionally, less than 1% (n =3) of the sample websites listed economic status in their statement of nondiscrimination. Notably, a high number of programs (n = 283, 90.71%) listed financial aid information on their websites specifically geared for low-income families who could not afford college.

- Finally, a study found that despite many low-income students needing financial aid information to be tailored to their specific needs and situations, college counselors working in urban secondary school settings cited only providing the most basic information about college costs and FAFSA forms to students. In the study, McDonough and Calderone (2006) investigated how 63 college counselors at the secondary level worked with low-income families. One participant in the study emphasized the challenge for students from very low-income backgrounds to have to also contribute to their family's finances, which could impede their college attendance.

Based on the limited studies described above, it seems that some school counselors provide basic college and career counseling for students experiencing homelessness, but may need additional training or backing to provide the more extensive support necessary to ensure that students experiencing homelessness are college and career ready. The research insinuates that many school counselors need to add college and career counseling to the work they do with students experiencing homelessness, while other school counselors may need to tailor existing college and career counseling interventions specifically to the needs of students experiencing homelessness. School counselors may need to discuss financial aid options more in-depth with students experiencing homelessness and help students and families see that college is accessible. Finally, there is a clear need for more research in this area and gaps in the knowledge available on the efficacy of college and career counseling interventions with students experiencing homelessness.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors can support students experiencing homelessness in their postsecondary endeavors by working with them to develop the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to be college and career ready. In doing so, they can provide college and career advisement and counseling that is tailored to students' specific needs, educate students early on about various types of financial supports, including fee waivers, grants, loans, work study programs, and scholarships, and identify college and career options that fit students' unique interests and strengths. By educating students experiencing homelessness about their eligibility for certain scholarships and financial aid, such as Pell Grants, which are need-based funds that do not need to be repaid (for more information see: https://www2.ed.gov/programs/fpg/index.html) they can recognize that college is within their reach. Further, since increased self-esteem has been shown to be positively related to resiliency in students experiencing homelessness (Kidd & Shahar, 2008), school counselors can design programs and interventions focused on students' emotional, social, and behavioral development in order to enhance their self-esteem and self-efficacy related to academics and college success. When school counselors tailor college and career services specifically to the needs of students experiencing homelessness, students will see college admission and completion as an attainable outcome and will be more likely to apply, attend, and graduate.

To ensure that students experiencing homelessness receive the best support in their college and career development, they must be identified early. School counselors, in partnership with local liaisons, can help school staff, students, and families become knowledgeable about the definition of homelessness by hanging posters and distributing information about the McKinney-Vento Act throughout the school and community (NCHE, 2012). Since unaccompanied youths experiencing homelessness qualify for independent student status on the FAFSA, which enables the student to submit the FAFSA without parent information and may qualify the student for more financial aid, it is crucial that counselors, in partnership with local liaisons, identify unaccompanied homeless students early and work with them to apply for college funding (Duffield, Heybach, & Julianelle, 2009; NCHE, 2012). It is critical that unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness are identified by the local liaison during high school because it makes filling out the FAFSA form a simpler process. Unaccompanied homeless students who were not identified by the local liaison and have not received services from a shelter program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, must work with a financial aid administrator at the university to determine their status, which could deter them from applying (United States Government Accountability Office, 2016).

In order to provide comprehensive college and career support for students experiencing homelessness, school counselors should focus first on relationship building. Research indicates that students from low-income backgrounds value strong relationships with school counselors (Williams et al., 2015). The findings of Williams et al. (2015) highlight the significance of school counselors demonstrating that they care, challenging biases against students from lower income backgrounds, and being highly visible in order to connect with students. This may be particularly important for school counselors to consider when working with students experiencing homelessness on their college and career preparation because students often have to share sensitive information such as grades, housing status, family income, or mental health or disability needs to get the best college counseling and advisement. In order to help students feel that they can be effective in their postsecondary endeavors, school counselors can partner with students to select challenging courses where they can be successful, develop four-year high school academic plans that integrate college

planning, and engage in collaborative partnerships with other supportive systems, such as community-based organizations (Brown, 2013). School counselors should not simply provide all students and parents with the same college information and resources, but instead tailor the information to specific individual needs, show parents and students how to use available resources and follow-up with them to check for understanding.

Because the beliefs that parents have about their childrens' ability to succeed may influence students' achievement and career aspirations (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001), it may be equally important for school counselors to work with parents and engage with them as partners to help them understand that college is attainable for their children, while increasing their knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid (Bryan, Griffin, & Henry, 2013). For students experiencing homelessness, who may not often interact with adults who have attended or succeeded in college, having a culture in the school where students are fully exposed to college options is critical. In order to create a "college-going culture" within a school, (a) all students must get consistent messages about going to college, (b) there should be high expectations that all students in the school will go to college, (c) college and career resources need to be readily available for all, (d) college must be seen as achievable for all students, and (e) there must be ample support for students to go to college (Jones, Bensimon, McNair, & Dowd, 2011). This type of school culture will enhance the college preparation of and facilitate a successful college transition for students experiencing homelessness because they will be more knowledgeable on all aspects of college and will see it as something they are capable of achieving. One intervention to create such an environment may include forming a university and K-12 school partnership where high school students learn more about a local university and can interact with undergraduate or graduate students in a variety of forms (Popp, 2000). Engaging in such partnerships can help students experiencing homelessness to learn about college, ask questions they may have, and normalize the college experience.

Since postsecondary education can be an important pathway for youths experiencing homelessness to get out of their current life situations (Gupton, 2009), school counselors may need to provide additional personalized guidance and advisement throughout their college and career planning process. From freshman year on, school counselors can guide students experiencing homelessness through the college planning and preparation process and teach them about potential college majors and a variety of career paths that fit their personalities and interests (Dukes, 2013). Additionally, school counselors should regularly review the transcripts of students experiencing homelessness when they move in or out of school districts to ensure they have the coursework necessary to graduate and meet application requirements for college. For students experiencing homelessness who may struggle paying for the fees that are required to apply to college, school counselors can help them to navigate this process and obtain waivers for fees associated with Advanced Placement tests, college entrance exams, SAT/ACT tests, and/or college application fees (Dukes, 2013). School counselors should be proactive in ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have the awareness of these supports and knowledge of how to apply for them.

For school counselors who have high numbers of students on their caseloads, who therefore may be less accessible to engage in tailored college counseling for individual students (Perna et al., 2008), it is critical that they collaborate and help coordinate group programs where students are provided with the additional support they need. This may include helping students experiencing homelessness to access services, such as tutoring programs or other academic support, and connecting students and families experiencing homelessness to community resources (Grothaus et al., 2011). They can also coordinate programs such as college or career nights and make a concerted

effort to involve low-income and homeless youth and their families, by reaching out to shelters and low-income housing complexes, as well as through providing transportation to increase access. Further, coordinating college visits that include students experiencing homelessness will expose these students to college programs and in turn, normalize the experience for them. This may be particularly beneficial for first-generation college students who may have had limited opportunities to visit a college campus. School counselors can also work with local liaisons, teachers, and administrators to help students experiencing homelessness access transportation to after- or before-school extracurricular activities that strengthen their college applications and expose them to different interests that could lead to potential college majors. Students' involvement in extracurricular activities may also enhance their connection to the school itself, which can ultimately influence their academic achievement (Bryan et a., 2012).

Helping students experiencing homelessness to set realistic short- and long-term goals towards graduation, will also help them work towards a desirable career pathway. Through teaching students experiencing homelessness to set goals and continually revisit them, it educates them on what is needed to achieve their long-term plans. Additionally, teaching them the skills necessary to be successful in college, beginning freshman year of high school, will build the foundation of seeing college as an obtainable goal. This may include teaching executive functioning skills such as impulse control, working memory, and planning (Nilsen, Huyder, McAuley, & Liebermann, 2017), while fostering non-cognitive traits such as motivation, perseverance, self-control, and coping (Gutman & Schoon, 2013). Such skills and traits may be lacking in youth who have limited adult support, have been previously victimized or experienced trauma, or lack a consistent education. Students experiencing homelessness may be less likely to have access to mentors who can model these skills or, due to their higher level of mobility, have limited longer-term relationships with teachers and counselors who can teach them these skills.

One way to fill in gaps of knowledge and connect with students is to do so online. Research indicates that young adults experiencing homelessness engage in social networks, such as Facebook, as regularly as permanently housed students who are in college (Guadagno, Muscanell, & Pollio, 2013), suggesting that school counselors may be able to connect with students online and should enhance their own websites and online professional presence. With one study indicating that high school counseling websites are lacking information tailored specifically to low-income families (Kennedy & Baker, 2015), perhaps posting information about the definition of homeless and the educational rights of McKinney-Vento eligible students will keep students better informed. Since there is limited information targeting the specific needs of students experiencing homelessness on the Department of Education website (United States Government Accountability Office, 2016), it may be difficult for students experiencing homelessness to locate college preparation information tailored to their needs.

When advising students experiencing homelessness on selecting universities that would be a best fit for them, school counselors need to be aware if the students have access to housing over breaks and, if not, connect them to universities that have year-round housing available. For example, there are several universities, including Kennesaw State University (KSU) in Georgia and Florida State University (FSU) who offer this type of housing (Fryar, 2014; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015). School counselors can also help students who need to find options for employment while enrolled for financial support to do searches and identify appropriate contacts at their future school (Dukes, 2013). To support students experiencing homelessness in transitioning to college, school counselors should also identify universities that have strong TRiO programs, which support the transition to college for middle and high school students (Duffield et al., 2009).

Programs such as Upward Bound or Talent Search provide a number of services, including tutoring, counseling, and mentoring, for low-income and disadvantaged students, and can ease the transition to college for these students (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Lastly, to enhance their own knowledge, school counselors can learn about homelessness and education through a variety of resources. Through understanding the federal definition of homeless and identifying the students who qualify as homeless at their schools, school counselors can provide a supportive environment for students experiencing homelessness. For school counselors who would like to learn more about homelessness and education, NAEHCY (www.naehcy.org) and the NCHE (https://nche.ed.gov) are two organizations that provide a wealth of information on the challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness and interventions to support them. Further, school counselors can contact their local liaison or State Coordinator for homeless education (for a list of State Coordinators go to this website: https://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php) to learn more and gain additional training. Ensuring that students experiencing homelessness are supported in their college and career preparation is an important role of school counselors. Through providing additional support and being attuned to students' needs, school counselors can help them to enhance students' self-efficacy and realize positive college-related outcomes. They can also work with students experiencing homelessness to set goals and remove the educational and other barriers they face.

Practical Application: Case Example

Ms. Sara is a high school counselor working with a junior female student named Mia who has been identified as homeless and unaccompanied since her freshmen year. The student is a first-generation college student (i.e. the first in her immediate family to go to college) and has a 2.8 grade point average. Up until recently, Mia had no plans of attending college because she felt it was too expensive for her and was intimidated by the college-planning process. However, in the fall of her junior year, she began meeting periodically with Ms. Sara for brief academic and college counseling. Ms. Sara encouraged her to meet with several college admissions representatives who came to her school. Ms. Sara also helped her to secure fee waivers to take the SAT test. In turn, Mia began to see college as a realistic postsecondary option.

To support Mia getting to this point, Ms. Sara began her counseling sessions by working with Mia to help her see that college was an option for her and that she could be successful there. Although she had already provided information about financial aid and FAFSA forms to the whole junior class, Ms. Sara talked more in-depth and personal way with Mia about the different financial aid options she has such as Pell Grants, loans, and scholarships. Ms. Sara discussed with Mia how she would qualify for independent student status if she continues to experience homelessness on her own (as an unaccompanied homeless youth), which may help her secure more funding for school. In subsequent meetings, she went online with Mia and searched for different local colleges to look at GPA requirements, year-round housing options, and on-campus work-study programs. Through these searches, they created a small list of possible schools that also had strong transition programs. Since Mia was also first-generation, Ms. Sara connected her with a mentoring program where recent alumni from Mia's high school, who were college graduates, meet periodically (in person or via Skype) with students to discuss college planning,

preparation, and the overall college experience. Through this program, Mia also was able to go on group trips to visit some of the colleges on her list. These interventions helped Mia to gain confidence in her college planning and preparation, and she was able to apply and get accepted to a school that met her needs.

Conclusion

School counselors can play important roles in supporting the college and career readiness of students experiencing homelessness. Through collaborating with important stakeholders such as local liaisons and teachers, they can coordinate a system of support where students gain the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to prepare for and transition to college. Since students experiencing homelessness are capable of being successful in college, it is critical that those who need it are taught how to access the college information and services they need. Based on this research summary, it is clear that more research is needed on school counselors' and local liaisons' work on college and career readiness for students experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the college preparation and planning experiences of secondary students' experiences homelessness should be further explored. With increased knowledge and preparation, school counselors, local liaisons, and other important stakeholders can provide a system of support to help students experiencing homelessness transition to postsecondary institutions where they can be successful.

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10 Tips for Secondary School Counselors to Help Students Experiencing Homelessness Prepare for College

1. Regardless of your school population, include information on your website about the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and the rights and supports available to McKinney-Vento eligible students. Include links about financial aid opportunities tailored to students who are low-income, living in poverty, or experiencing homelessness, as well as first-generation college students.

2. Provide tailored individual college and career counseling and advisement for students experiencing homelessness. Don't assume that one size fits all!

3. Educate *all* students early in high school about financial aid options, including grants, loans, work study programs, and scholarships. This will increase students' ability to see college as a goal that is accessible and attainable for them. (Even better, begin to introduce this concept in middle school!)

4. Identify a general list of institutions that are a good fit for students experiencing homelessness. Assess students' need for employment and job opportunities, housing, transportation, counseling, disability support, and additional academic supports such as tutoring programs. Advise students on how to apply to colleges where they can easily access the services they need, and know which universities offer year-round housing.

5. Be proactive in reaching out to students who may need fee waivers for Advanced Placement (AP) tests, college entrance exams, ACT or SAT tests, or college applications. Advertise this information widely so students who may qualify do not miss it. Don't wait for students to come to you!

6. Provide transition counseling for students experiencing homelessness who are heading to college. Meet individually with the students to identify supportive resources at the colleges they plan to attend, and encourage them to seek out those resources when they arrive. Educate students about the services colleges offer such as college counseling centers, career centers, academic coaching, tutoring programs, academic support/success centers, and more. Teach them soft skills, such as how to communicate with professors.

7. Talk with students about the fears and anxieties they may have related to going to college. Provide strengths-based social and emotional counseling to help them become empowered to seek resources for support at the college level. Discuss how they can work through the challenges they may face in being a first-generation college student (if that is the case).

8. Seek training on homelessness and work closely with the local liaison to identify students and provide services.

9. Coordinate college readiness programs that include students who are from homeless situations and first-generation college students. This may include partnering with local

universities to have students go on college visits to normalize the college process, and partnering students with mentor college students with whom they can speak candidly about the college admissions process.

10. Beginning freshman year of high school, ensure that students experiencing homelessness have short- and long-term goals that lead them to the completion of high school towards a college and career path where they can be successful. These goals should be reviewed regularly. This may involve providing additional academic support to help students accomplish their goals.

Important Information about Unaccompanied Youths Experiencing Homelessness

When providing college and career counseling and advising for students who are unaccompanied and homeless, there are several important considerations for school counselors:

- The FAFSA form has an item on it that allows students to mark if they are unaccompanied and homeless. By marking this item, they are able to submit their FAFSA without parental information and may qualify for unsubsidized loans or other funding that they may not have otherwise.
- School counselors should work with the local liaison to identify unaccompanied youths experiencing homelessness as early as possible so that they are aware of this option on the FAFSA and are advised on how to complete the FAFSA. If students are not identified as unaccompanied and homeless by a local liaison during their senior year in high school, they may still be able to be determined to be an unaccompanied homeless youth by a shelter that is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, or by a college financial aid administrator. The determination process may be a deterrent for a youth experiencing homelessness, so it is beneficial for students to be identified before graduating high school.
- For more information about unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and the FAFSA, school counselors can go to this website: https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/homeless-youth.pdf

Beyond Academics: Supporting Youths Experiencing Homelessness in Gaining Control of their Futures

In order to support students experiencing homelessness on their pathways to college, school counselors must provide programming across K-12th grade settings that help them to become empowered to make choices and overcome barriers that lead to a successful career. An overall goal for school counselors should be to ensure that *all* students graduate able to identify resources on their own and, when needed, seek support to meet their needs.

Advising

School counselors can provide academic and career advisement to help students experiencing homelessness take the appropriate coursework that sets them up to be successful in their postsecondary endeavors. If students are struggling academically, the school counselor can provide academic support or coordinate necessary services. They must also teach students about goal setting so that they continue to create, adjust, and meet goals after they graduate. School counselors should also advise students on how to seek support while in college.

Counseling

School counselors should provide short-term strengths-based counseling interventions to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. By focusing on strengths, students can identify their personal assets that will help them to be successful as they transition to college. Through short-term academic, social/emotional, or career counseling with school counselors, students experiencing homelessness can also learn important skills that they can apply in their lives outside of school, such as study and test-taking skills, conflict resolution, anger and stress management, friendship-building skills, and/or career decision-making. For students who need more long-term counseling to address their mental health needs, school counselors should have referral sources readily available and encourage students to identify college counseling services at their prospective institutions.

Collaborating

Beginning in elementary school, school counselors can work with school, family, and community stakeholders, to create a college-going culture across the school district, where all students recognize that they can attend and be successful in institutions of higher education and, eventually, meaningful careers. Since school counselors may have large caseloads, collaboration is critical in providing the various supportive services that students experiencing homelessness may need. The most critical partnership for school counselors in their work with students experiencing homelessness is with the local liaison.

Mentoring

School counselors must build trusting and open relationships with students experiencing homelessness in order to provide support, advice, and guidance, when needed. School counselors should also identify other stakeholders in the school who can provide support and mentorship, such as local liaisons, teachers, administrators, or community partners. This is particularly important for students who have had limited exposure to college. Mentors can teach students college readiness knowledge, skills, and awareness, and discuss the college experience.

Other Considerations

Some school counselors may have large caseloads or are assigned non-counseling related tasks that take away from their ability to provide the one-on-one support that students experiencing homelessness need. These counselors can use the questions in Appendix C to assess students' college readiness needs and then pair them with mentors from the school, university, or community to work with them individually to conduct college and scholarship searches, discuss college issues, and/or answer questions. Further, they can partner with local liaisons by training them to do basic college searches so that students can get more comprehensive support. They can also run small groups that include students from all backgrounds who may need extra college counseling, including students experiencing homelessness.

Questions to Assess the College and Career Preparedness for Youths
Experiencing Homelessness

College preparation background questions:

1. Did your parents attend college? (to determine first-generation status)
2. Where (or from whom) do you get information about college?
3. What information do you need to help you apply to and enroll in college?
4. What are three of your postsecondary goals?
5. What are your fears and/or hopes about going to college?
6. What (if any) universities or colleges have you visited?
   - If the student has not visited a university, schedule a visit to a local college.
7. If you attend college, what would you like to major in?
   - Follow-up questions if the student is unsure:
     i. Have you ever taken an interest inventory or career assessment? If so, what did it show? If not, schedule a time to take one.
     ii. What are your interests or hobbies that could be related to a career?

Best-fit questions that can guide college selection counseling:

When you attend college will you need…
___housing during the academic year
___year-round housing (i.e. housing that is available during winter, spring and summer breaks)
___tuition assistance
___employment or job opportunities
___work-study programs
___transportation
___to be close to family (location)

College transition questions:

1. Who do you consider to be your support system when you are struggling with something?
2. Who will you turn to if you need support or a friend while you're in college?
3. If you needed any of the services below while in college, which one(s) would you know how to access (or be comfortable accessing)?:
   ___counseling
   ___academic support (ex. tutoring)
   ___career advising
   ___class advising
   ___how to find articles for a paper
   ___work-out or swim facilities
   ___religious support (if applicable)
   ___student groups
   ___health center

Follow-up question: Which of the above services would you like to learn more about (or not be comfortable accessing)?

ACTIVITY: A school counselor could also do a scavenger hunt with a student or group of students searching their potential college's websites for each of the above areas. Or students could locate these services while on a college visit.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA)

- https://www.schoolcounselor.org/
- *Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student* https://schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/MindsetsBehaviors.pdf

Better Make Room (Reach Higher Initiative)

- https://www.bettermakeroom.org/

College Access and Success Toolkit for Students Experiencing Homelessness

- http://www.naehcy.org/sites/default/files/dl/toolkit.pdf

College Board Counselor Resources

- https://professionals.collegeboard.org/guidance/counseling/counselor-resources

College and Career Counseling Tools

- https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/school-counselor-connection/college-and-career-counseling-tools

FAFSA Data on Unaccompanied Youth

- https://nche.ed.gov/ibt/fafsa.php

Financial Aid Information:

- https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types#aid-from-the-federal-government
- Pell Grants: https://www2.ed.gov/programs/fpg/index.html
- Homeless youths: https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/homeless-youth.pdf
- Foster Youths: Education Training Vouchers: http://www.fc2sprograms.org/about-etv/

National Association for College Admissions Counseling

- https://www.nacacnet.org/

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

- https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv.php