

# Improving Outcomes for Students Experiencing Homelessness in New Jersey's Region III

May, 2022

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Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning  
and Public Policy at Rutgers University

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**Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University**

May 2022

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# Preface

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## Acronyms Used in Report

ACF = American Children and Families Head Start Program

CFA = Code For America

CoC = HUD's Continuum of Care

DCA = New Jersey Division of Housing and Community Resources

DCF = New Jersey Department of Children and Families

DHS = Department of Human Services

DOC = New Jersey Department of Corrections

DOE = Department of Education

DOH = Department of Health

DOT = Department of Transportation

ED = Department of Education

EHCY = Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program

ESG = Emergency Solutions Grants programs.

ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

FAPE = Free and appropriate public education

FERPA = Family Education Rights and Privacy Act

GAO = Government Accountability Office  
HMIS = Homeless Management Information System  
HUD = Department of Housing and Urban Development  
LEA = Local Education Agency  
MOESC = Monmouth-Ocean Regional Educational Services Commission  
NGO = Non-governmental organization  
NHLC = National Homelessness Law Center  
NJ = New Jersey  
NJDOE = New Jersey Department of Education  
NJOAG = Office of the Attorney General  
NRC = National Research Council  
OMB = Office of Management and Budget  
OSSE = Washington, DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education  
PA = Pennsylvania  
PA TFHCE = Pennsylvania Task Force on Homeless Childrens' Education  
SDA = School Development Authority  
SEA = State Education Agency  
USDA = United States Department of Agriculture

## **The Bloustein School**

The Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy ("Bloustein School") at Rutgers University, located in New Brunswick, New Jersey, strives "to create just, socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and healthy local, national, and global communities." The Bloustein School's namesake was a respected constitutional scholar, teacher, and active citizen. Accordingly, the Bloustein School promotes improvement of public policy, urban planning, health administration, and public informatics by fostering quality discourse and research that produces positive impact within communities.

The Bloustein School serves both undergraduate and graduate students. In 2019, Planetizen ranked its Master of City and Regional Planning program third nationally. U.S. News & World Report ranked its Masters of Public Policy (MPP) program among the nation's top 50 public affairs programs in 2018. The MPP program is also accredited by the National Association of Public Administration and Affairs.

Most notably, the Bloustein School hosts several nationally-recognized research centers. These include the Social Policy Lab, the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, the Environmental Analysis and Communications Group, the Rutgers Urban and Civic Informatics Lab, and the recently-founded New Jersey State Policy Lab. Faculty, staff, and graduate students participate in cutting-

edge research at these centers and often collaborate with New Jersey nonprofits, governments, and private firms to produce innovative models and policies in the fields of neighborhood revitalization, public health, workforce development, climate resilience, and more.

## **The Public Policy Practicum**

Master of Public Policy Candidates must successfully complete a practicum, or capstone project, before graduation. Practicums provide students opportunities to work with clients and support major projects that address contemporary policy issues. Students complete practicums during their last semester of their graduate programs so they can apply the skills and knowledge gained during their previous semesters. Practicum clients include public agencies and nonprofit organizations, such as Monarch Housing Associates.

In Fall 2021, Monarch presented a proposal to the Bloustein School's 2022 MPP cohort about identifying the needs of students experiencing homelessness in Monmouth, Mercer, Middlesex, and Ocean Counties, New Jersey. Monarch's proposal resonated with the authors of this report, who are especially passionate about the equitable distribution of social services and resources to vulnerable populations and the use of public policy to make a difference. The partnership between the Bloustein School and Monarch reinforces the idea that positive change requires evidence-based methodologies and cross-sector collaboration.

## **Our Partner Organization**

Monarch Housing Associates ("Monarch") is a nonprofit located in Cranbury, New Jersey. Its goal is "to expand the supply, accessibility, and variety of affordable, permanent supportive housing" across the Garden State. Its three program areas - housing development, ending homelessness, and public policy – synergistically create mechanisms that encourage diverse housing outcomes, especially for seniors, families, and persons with special needs.

Monarch excels in cross-sector collaboration to achieve successful results. Its Housing Development Team, for example, possesses 30+ years' experience working with private developers, housing authorities, and social service agencies to create mixed-income, accessible rental housing. Its homelessness planning team works with 18 of the 21 counties in New Jersey on homeless system planning and program development. Lastly, Monarch's public policy work focuses on strengthening legislative partnerships to create models for change for housing policy at its various stages of formation.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Monarch Housing Associates, particularly Taiisa Kelly and Kasey Vienckowski, for the opportunity to collaborate on this complex, pertinent project and Dr. Andrea Hetling, Professor of Public Policy at the Bloustein School, for her guidance as our Practicum Advisor.

We would also like to express gratitude to Alan Ferraro and Sally Potter of the Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission; Pheobie Thomas, New Jersey State Coordinator for McKinney-Vento; and Aislinn Brennan, Deputy Chief of Staff for New Jersey State Senator Vin Gopal, for their time and insight as homelessness policy professionals in the State of New Jersey.

Additionally, we would like to recognize Sweety Patel of Carteret Township School District, Marilyn Crawford of New Brunswick School District, Denise Casper of Neptune Township School District, and Joy Forrest of Tom's River Regional School District for their contributions to this report as school district homeless liaisons. Dr. Patricia Popp of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Sarah Slutterback of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and Nicole Lee-Mwandha of the District of Columbia, additionally, served as meaningful subject experts for this report.

Lastly, we would like to show appreciation to Jessica Roman, Research Associate at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling and Sean Simone, Ph.D. Director of Research and Evaluation at the Heldrich Center for their guidance in developing our survey instrument.

# Executive Summary

Homelessness persists in America in every state. On a single night in January 2020, 580,466 people were identified as experiencing homelessness, which is representative of the nation's yearly count. During that same period, New Jersey identified 13,929 students experiencing homelessness. Experiencing homelessness as a child not only affects educational outcomes but one's mental and physical health as well.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act dictates care for youth experiencing homelessness in the United States. It is managed by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by states and local school districts. This administrative structure enables three different levels of implementation.

To understand these dynamics, at the request of Monarch Housing Associates, graduate students at Rutgers University's Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy conducted an analysis of McKinney-Vento's federal policies, as well as its state, county, and local implementation in the State of New Jersey. Comparatively, high- and low-ranking states per the State Index of Youth Homelessness were analyzed to understand policy mechanisms that prove successful in addressing the needs of children experiencing homelessness. From this analysis, policies were identified within high-performing states that could be implemented in New Jersey and Region III.

## Our research process and findings prompted six recommendations:

**First**, we believe that a state- or regional-level steering committee that coordinates transportation is vital for all school districts attempting to bring all their students experiencing homelessness to their school of choice.

**Second**, a state-wide digital product can be developed to ensure that services to children and families experiencing homelessness are being delivered, and ensure students are not falling through the cracks.

**Third**, there is a distinct need to reform the onboarding process for new school district homelessness liaisons to ensure that institutional knowledge is not lost when employee turnover occurs. This turnover reform could take such forms as implementing online workshops or implementing new training modules.

**Fourth**, there is potential in resurrecting the New Jersey Interagency Council on Homelessness. Created during the Christie administration, it was abandoned before any work of substantial nature was completed.

**Fifth**, a uniform definition of homelessness across all departments can immensely help converge the efforts towards combating child

homelessness. These conflicting definitions have policy ramifications that go down to the local level. Making the Department of Education, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Department of Health and Human Services definitions the same will allow funds related to homelessness to flow to programs much more seamlessly.

**Lastly**, we recommend that school districts strategically integrate the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness into their wraparound support services in order to help students manage adverse effects.

With these six recommendations, we hope to build systemic pathways for children experiencing homelessness to attain successful educational outcomes. We look forward to Monarch Housing Associates and the Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission incorporating them into their larger research project.

## Chapter I

# Background and Research Motivation

During the 2018-19 school year, 13,929 public school students in New Jersey experienced homelessness.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> 1,754 resided in shelters, 1,538 resided in hotels or motels, and 10,595 were doubled-up in family members' or friends' residences. 42 students were unsheltered.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of factors influence a child's risk for homelessness. Evictions can displace entire families and force them to relocate into shelters or force them to double-up with family members or friends. Affordable housing shortages prevent families from settling in permanent, safe environments.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, children and family members can become displaced because of negative family dynamics like domestic abuse.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing youth homelessness is needed now more than ever. The effects of the pandemic on youth homelessness and educational attainment are substantial. Children living in a shelter, for example, are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19, and therefore more likely to have their educational experience interrupted. Similarly, children with unstable housing often do not have access to the Internet or quiet learning spaces, which can further exacerbate learning obstacles during remote learning.

Disrupted education prevents children experiencing homelessness from acquiring the skills they

need to escape poverty.<sup>5</sup> It also delays graduation, which could prevent future earnings or vocational opportunities. These children are more likely, then, to participate in work outside of the formal labor market, like "under the table" work, or illicit activities like sex work, drug dealing, and organized crime. Successful education outcomes for children experiencing homelessness, therefore, can be seen as a considerable factor in combating cyclical poverty.

Monarch Housing Associates, to this point, works to establish identification and support processes that address the holistic needs of students experiencing homelessness to better enable successful engagement in educational opportunities. This report intends to inform Monarch's strategies for improving educational outcomes for children experiencing homelessness within New Jersey, particularly in Monmouth, Ocean, Middlesex and Mercer Counties.

This policy practicum began in January and ended in May 2022. Research included a comprehensive literature review, policy review, and interviews with government officials, practitioners, and subject matter experts in New Jersey and across the nation. The literature review included reports from a variety of sources, including state governments, academic research, and research from nonprofit and advocacy organizations. In-state interview subjects were identified through recommenda-

tions from the Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission's Regional Director for McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, while those outside New Jersey were identified from True Colors United and the National Homelessness Law Center's (NHLC) 2021 State Index on Homelessness and contacted by a member of the practicum team. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted from 30-minutes to one hour, and primarily took place virtually.

As with all research, the findings shared in this practicum report are shaped by certain limitations. Specifically, the timing of the project hindered both the collection of comprehensive interview data and the use of post-COVID secondary data. Regarding interviews, the findings of this practicum were limited by email responsiveness. Insights from school district homeless liaisons and state coordinators for McKinney-Vento were affected in this manner. Additionally, the findings of this practicum report are limited to only a partial understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the currently available data have not been updated to reflect the COVID-19 pandemic's effects, including much of the academic literature and counts of populations experiencing homelessness.

The following research questions guided our research and map onto our report chapters as follows:

**Chapter II:** What does existing literature tell us about the unique experiences of children experiencing homelessness?

**Chapter III:** How does the McKinney-Vento Act encourage successful educational attainment for children experiencing homelessness in New Jersey?

**Chapter IV:** What are some promising practices (policies, programs, initiatives) in other states?

**Chapter V:** What are the successes and challenges of McKinney-Vento implementation in New Jersey's Region III?

**Chapter VI:** How can our findings inform future survey studies with stakeholders?

**Chapter VII:** What best practices can be implemented in New Jersey?

## Chapter II

# Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Student homelessness in the United States grew at an unprecedented rate prior to the statewide eviction moratorium implemented to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from academic and nonprofit literature highlight various poor academic and socio-emotional outcomes associated with student homelessness, underscoring the need for effective policy solutions. This section will discuss evidence of the negative impacts of homelessness, barriers to success for children experiencing homelessness, and some of the ways to effectively overcome these barriers by fostering the resilience of students experiencing homelessness.

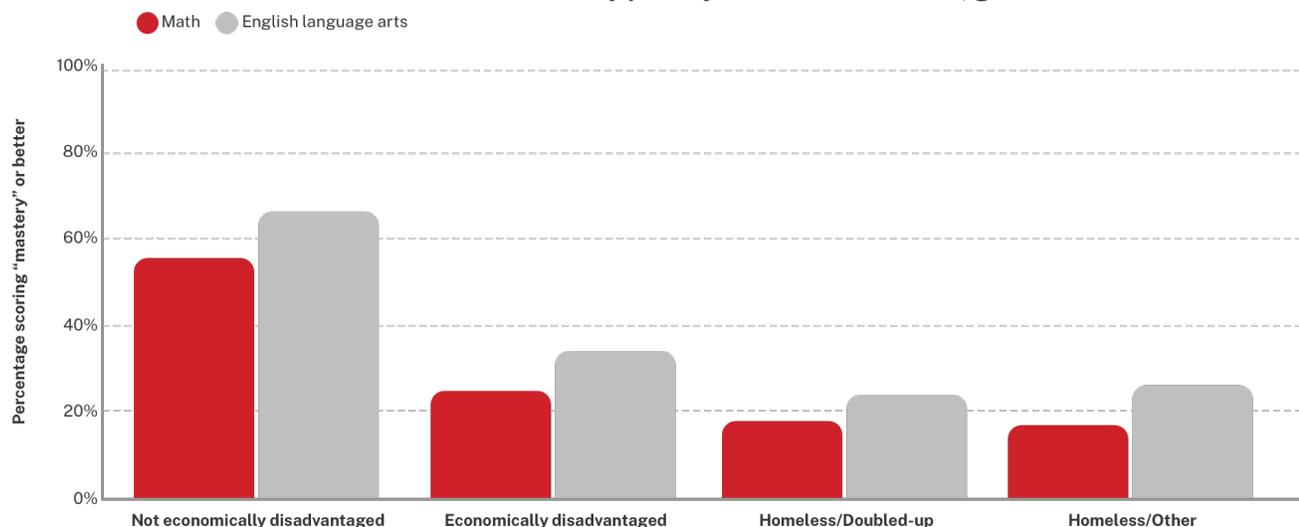
### Academic Impacts of Homelessness

Several studies suggest a correlation between homelessness and poor academic achievement

across all metrics. Using various test metrics, academic studies found that children experiencing homelessness demonstrated poor math, reading and spelling skills as compared to their housed peers.<sup>6,7</sup> Students who experience homelessness perform lower on vocabulary and reading tests than the average scores for their respective age and grade.<sup>8</sup> In terms of statistics, evidence from research suggests that this population segment is four times as likely to score at, or below, the tenth percentile in receptive vocabulary and reading as compared to similar age groups.<sup>9</sup> Standardized testing in math and English language arts yield similar associations between homelessness and struggles in the classroom.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 1.

#### 2019 Math and ELA scores in Louisiana by poverty and homeless status, grades 3-8\*



\*LEAP 2025 assessment, Louisiana Department of Education.

Figure 1 (seen on the previous page) succinctly captures the effects of poverty and homelessness on students' academic achievement. This disaggregated data separates doubled-up students to demonstrate the similar outcomes between doubled-up students experiencing homelessness and other students experiencing homelessness. This chart's most striking feature is the vast difference in math and English language arts scores between students not facing economic hardships and all other students – which includes doubled-up students.<sup>11</sup>

Other research demonstrates similar effects in standardized testing performance among doubled-up students experiencing homelessness and students experiencing homelessness residing in shelters. Figure 2, created by the Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness using data from New York City, displays sharp disparities in academic achievement between those two distinct populations of students experiencing homeless-

ness, especially in math.<sup>12</sup>

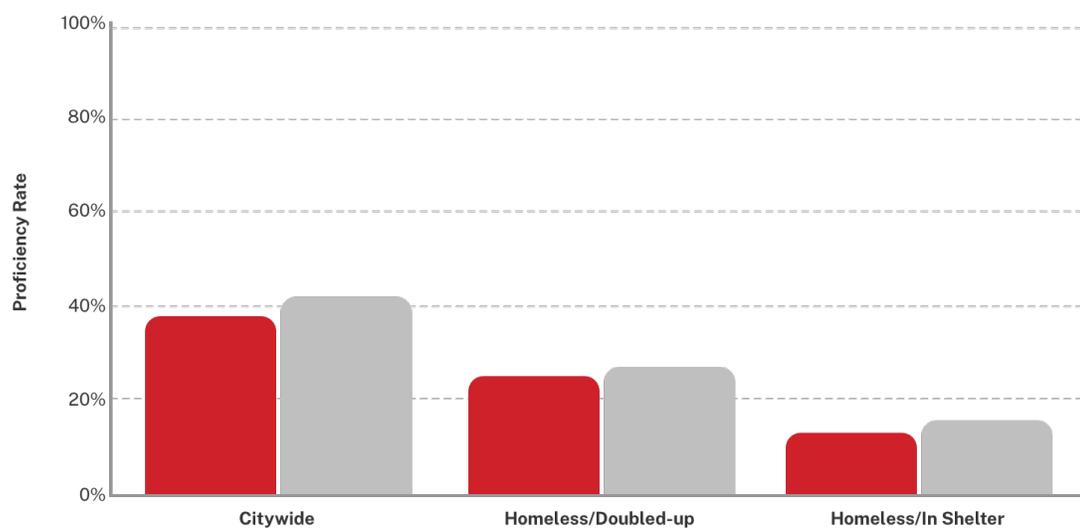
In addition to descriptive studies, other studies compared achievement of children experiencing homelessness with housed children, as well as examined various characteristics of children and their families to explain differences between achievement scores. Comparing cognitive ability and academic achievement between children experiencing homelessness and housed children, some research shows no association between housing status and cognitive ability but a direct association of housing status with academic achievement.<sup>13</sup> Controlling for demographic variables, children experiencing homelessness in comparison to housed children were more likely to score below the average grade level in reading, spelling and arithmetic. Other research found a link between residential instability of children experiencing homelessness and low achievement scores in math and reading, finding the academic risks associated with homelessness chronic, persistent, and significant, beyond the risks associated with

poverty.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, research on academic achievement between children experiencing homelessness and low-income fully housed children reveal that a child staying in a shelter is not a predictor of academic achievement beyond race, gender and age. The only significant difference in academic achievement is associated with the number

Figure 2.

**2016/17 Math and ELA scores in New York City by poverty and homeless status, grades 3-8\***

● Math ● English language arts



\*Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. December 2019.

of schools attended in the past year - in other words, school mobility.<sup>15</sup>

Although findings from various studies on homelessness are mixed, they do indicate that the cumulative risks to children and youth experiencing homelessness in terms of academic achievement are much more significant than the risks associated with poverty in general. Hence, concerted efforts are needed to address the unique academic risks faced by children experiencing homelessness.

### **Mental and Physical Health Risks of Homelessness**

In addition to poor academic achievement, the hardships of homelessness take a particular toll on the socio-emotional wellbeing of children. According to a report from the California-based Learning Policy Institute, “Students and families experiencing homelessness are...more likely to experience depression, anxiety, or symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.” Homelessness can also alienate children from family and friends, cutting them off from those providing social and emotional support, creating ripe conditions for mental distress.

Furthermore, as poverty remains the strongest predictor of homelessness, food insecurity remains a prevalent issue, compounding the mental unwellness experienced by students experiencing homelessness while also creating the potential for physical health issues. Given the extensive costs associated with healthcare, students experiencing homelessness oftentimes face a financial barrier to receiving treatment for any medical issues emergent from their experience with homelessness.<sup>16</sup>

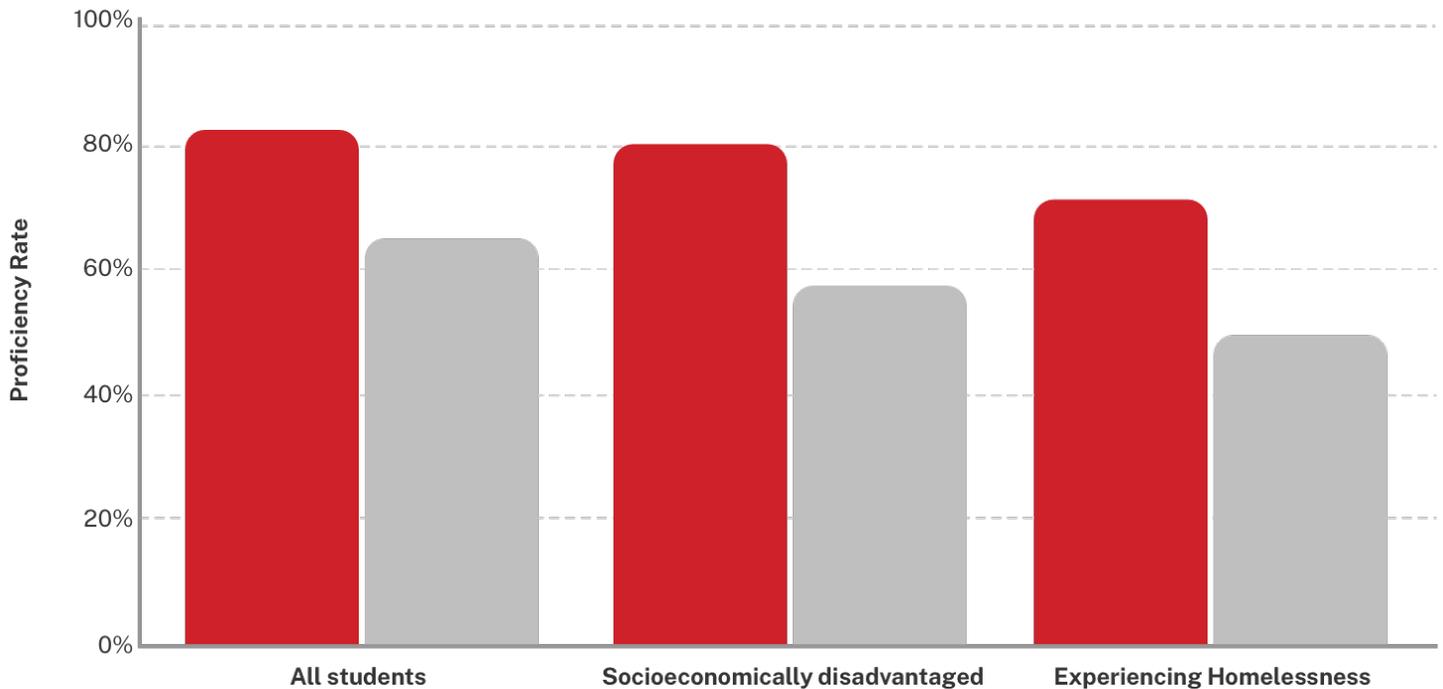
In terms of mental health, research suggests that homeless youth are more likely to experience childhood physical and sexual abuse and suffer from long-term traumatic experiences.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, children experiencing homelessness continually face major conflicts with their caregivers that hamper their healthy social and emotional functionality, at times, leading to their decision to also leave home. Research also indicates that in comparison to housed children, the prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders for children experiencing homelessness is twice as high.<sup>18</sup> A clinical study found that more than half of youth experiencing homelessness meet the criteria for disruptive behavior disorder and almost a quarter meet the criteria for mood disorders.<sup>19</sup> Compared to children experiencing homelessness, only around 10% of all other children meet the criteria of being diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder during their K-12 education.<sup>20</sup> Such drastic differences in mental health statistics between homeless and housed children further highlight the need for timely policy interventions.

### **School Instability Factors and Barriers to Success for Children Experiencing Homelessness**

School and home instability associated with homelessness presents barriers to future success. Research shows that students experiencing homelessness are 60% more likely to be chronically absent than socioeconomically disadvantaged students – a 25% and 15% rate of chronic absenteeism, respectively. As displayed in Figure 3, homelessness among children is also associated with repeating grades, lower graduation rates, and a lesser chance of pursuing a college education.<sup>21</sup>

## 2017/18 Four-Year Cohort Graduation and College-Going Rates\*

● 4-year graduation ● English language arts



\*Burns, D, Espinoza, D., Ondrasek, N., & Yang, M. (2021). *Students Experiencing Homelessness: The Conditions and Outcomes of Homelessness Among California Students*. Learning Policy Institute.

Although children experiencing homelessness understand the importance of attending school, they often do not seek extra help to ensure their success in school, which further complicates the identification and service delivery efforts to address their needs.<sup>22</sup> Research suggests that parents and children may be reluctant to declare their homeless status due to stigma and concerns about privacy.<sup>23</sup> This can further exacerbate the plethora of issues that children and their families experiencing homelessness already experience.

A high rate of school mobility, or the number of different schools attended in the past year, is another major factor for academic failure in the general population. However, children experiencing homelessness experience higher rates of school mobility due to their living situation,

compounding their risk for issues at school. Research has found that children experiencing homelessness in New York City changed their schools as many as three times.<sup>24</sup> Children experiencing homelessness have higher rates of school mobility than their housed peers. High school mobility translates into children adapting to a new environment and peers more frequently than their housed peers. They are also at a risk of not building strong bonds with teachers, putting them at a potential disadvantage in the classroom.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond social stigma and high rates of school mobility, research indicates that students experiencing homelessness experience additional barriers such as parental absenteeism, transportation problems, caregiver instability, social disconnectedness, and limited access to

food, clothing, and other basic necessities.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, some students suffer from serious social-emotional problems because of their life experiences. These problems, combined with other factors mentioned above, threaten to overwhelm children experiencing homelessness, posing significant barriers to their overall success.

### **Overcoming Barriers: Capitalizing on Resilience**

Despite being at a high risk of academic failure and mental and physical health problems, research shows that children experiencing homelessness often demonstrate remarkable resilience. Resilience refers to the ability to display healthy adaptation during or after experiencing a threat or disturbance to one's well-being.<sup>27</sup> To date, research identified some internal resilience factors in children experiencing homelessness. These factors include healthy self-esteem, a positive outlook on life, and an internal locus of control, that is to say, feeling in control of one's life.<sup>28</sup> In addition, strong early literacy skills, good self-regulation skills, above-average intelligence and high executive functioning skills can provide a buffer between children experiencing homelessness and adversity.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of school-based delivery platforms, one of the most relevant and malleable resilience factors is the opportunity for children to form close relationships with competent adults. A close relationship with an adult such as a teacher, case worker, principal, relative or a mental health professional can help a child experiencing homeless mitigate feelings of hopelessness, abandonment and isolation.<sup>30</sup> Forming close

relationships with competent adults can also foster feelings of connectedness in children experiencing homelessness, provide mentorship opportunities and facilitation for navigating school and social services as well as support with learning functional skills.<sup>31</sup>

Although some of the factors mentioned above are more malleable than others, all of them have important implications in terms of the nature and timeliness of effective policy interventions to best serve the needs of children experiencing homelessness. For example, policies facilitating the development of close bonds between students experiencing homelessness and caring adults can bolster effective school-based service delivery to ensure that the needs of students experiencing homelessness are fully met.

To address the educational needs of children experiencing homeless, President Ronald Reagan signed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act into law in 1987. The next section of this report will unpack the law, its background and application, as well as the barriers to its implementation that affect the educational outcomes of children experiencing homelessness.

## Chapter III

# The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The primary policy driver surrounding the way states, counties, and school districts interact with students experiencing homelessness is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento). Federal lawmakers passed McKinney-Vento in 1987 to ensure that students experiencing homelessness receive access to the schools in which they are enrolled.

The most important aspect of McKinney-Vento is the ‘bill of rights’ it provides to eligible children and youth. The rights are:

1. Immediate school enrollment even when records are not present (e.g., immunizations

records or proof of residence);

2. Remain in the school of origin even if they are no longer residing in the area if in the student’s best interest;
3. Receive transportation to and from school and extracurriculars; and
4. Receive support for academic success.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 4 (below) summarizes the legislative history of the law, showing the growing scope of the programs as amendments were passed to address gaps in service.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Figure 5 presents the funding progression for the law, which stayed flat between 2008 and 2015, before averaging

Figure 4.

## Legislative History of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act\*

1987	The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is signed into law, requiring states to review and revise policies to ensure the immediate school enrollment of homeless children and youth.
1990	The McKinney Act is amended, requiring states to eliminate enrollment barriers, and provide school access and support for academic success to students experiencing homelessness.
1994	The education portion of the Act is reauthorized by the Improving America’s Schools Act, adding preschool services, greater parental input, and a focus on interagency collaboration.
2002	The education portion of the Act is reauthorized by Title X, PArt C of the No Child Left Behind Act, strengthening legal requirement, and requiring all school districts to appoint a local liaison.
2015	The education portion of the Act is reauthorized by Title XI, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act, expanding school of origin rights to include public preschools and receiving schools.

\*Federal Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) Program Profile

Figure 5.

## Federal Allocation for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act\*

2011 / \$62,296,146	2015 / \$65,042,000	2019 / \$93,500,000
2012 / \$65,172,591	2016 / \$70,000,000	2020 / \$101,500,000
2013 / \$61,771,052**	2017 / \$77,000,000	2021 / \$106,500,000
2014 / \$65,042,000	2018 / \$85,000,000	

\*Federal Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) Program Profile

\*\*Reduced due to federal budget sequestration

close to 10-percent growth per year starting in 2016.<sup>34</sup>

McKinney-Vento established the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), an office that produces research and policy guidance on the federal response to homelessness. It also created the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (“EHCY”) program. Administered by the Department of Education, the program facilitates federal funds to states to ensure children and youth experiencing homelessness, including preschoolers, have equal access to free and appropriate public education.

### Conflicting Definitions of Homelessness

The legal definition of homelessness is important to understand, as funding for homelessness

related programs is typically contingent on specific clauses within the law. McKinney-Vento is a Department of Education (DOE) program, so the DOE definition of homelessness is most important to understand. Subtitle VII-B of McKinney-Vento defines homelessness as:

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and

(B) includes--

(i) 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;\*

(ii) 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;

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) 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 because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

While this definition is thorough in its scope, inconsistencies and contradictions exist between the DOE definition, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) definition, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition. HHS defines youth experiencing homelessness through *The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)* as

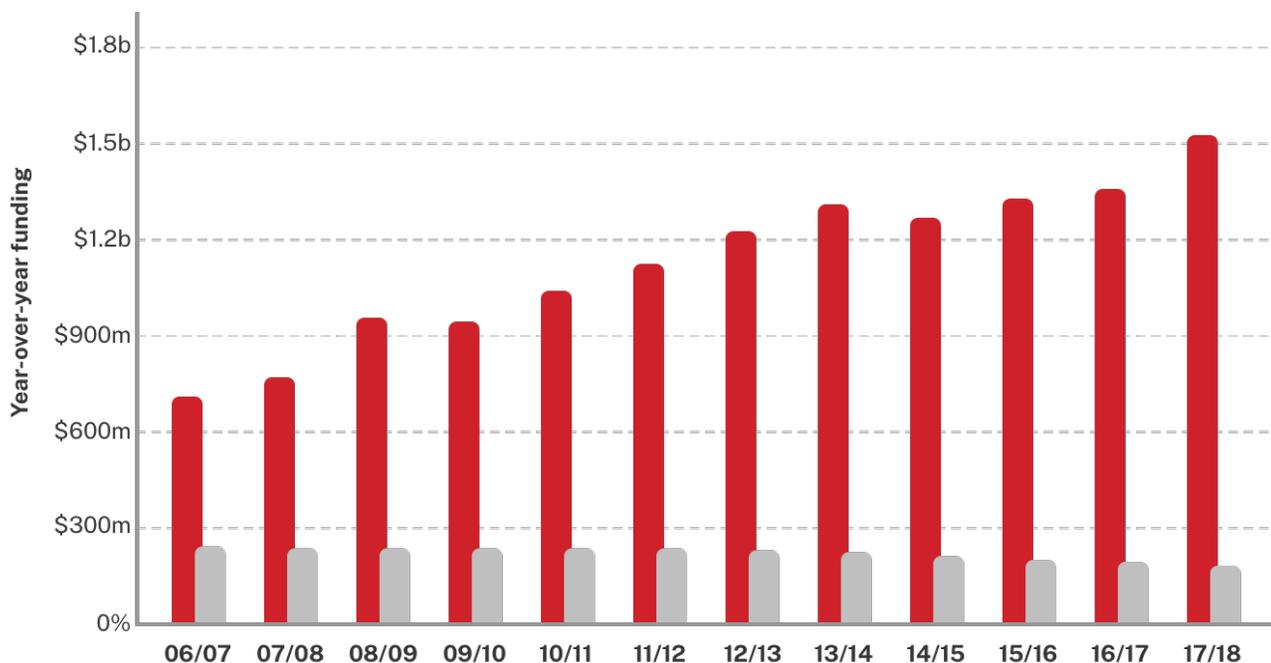
less than 21 years of age...for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.<sup>35</sup>

HUD defines homelessness through four lenses:<sup>36</sup>

Figure 6.

### Year-Over-Year Funding For DOE v. HUD

● DOE ● HUD



*\*\*The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.\*\* ICPH. 2020.*

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Literally Homeless</li> <li>2. Imminent Risk of Homelessness</li> <li>3. Homeless under other Federal statutes</li> <li>4. Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence</li> </ol> | <p>Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) programs. Despite the aforementioned data clearly pointing to severe academic risks associated with students experiencing</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

These varied definitions reveal a common goal between organizations; but it shows a lack of communication between agencies, thus creating issues for non-governmental organizations (NGO) that collaborate within this space. Due to these inconsistent definitions, approximately 75-percent of children and youth experiencing homelessness, as defined by the DOE, are not eligible for the homeless assistance programs administered by HUD.<sup>37 38</sup> The Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a September 2021 report titled 'Youth Homelessness: HUD and HHS Could Enhance Coordination to Better Support Communities' discussing these conflicting definitions, while also providing recommendations to clarify these definitions and clarify any issues.<sup>39</sup>

The DOE plays a critical role in supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness; however, HUD oversees the bulk of federal policies and corresponding fund allocation. Children and youth who meet the DOE definition of homelessness but not the HUD definition are ineligible to receive assistance from HUD's Continuum of

Figure 7. Federal Funding for Targeted Homeless Assistance Programs\* (in millions)

Agency	Program	2019	2020	2021
DOJ	Transitional Housing Assistance Grants to Victims of Sexual Assault	\$36	\$37	\$40
DOL	Homeless Veterans' ReIntegration Program (HVRP)	\$50	\$55	\$58
DOE	Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY)	\$94	\$102	\$107
FEMA	Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)	\$120	\$125	\$130
HHS	HRSA: Health Care for the Homeless	\$478	\$479	\$498
HHS	SAMHSA Projects for Assistance in Transitions from Homelessness	\$65	\$65	\$65
HHS	SAMHSA Methal Health Programs of Reg/National Significance	\$33	\$33	\$33
HHS	SAMHSA Substance Abuse Programs of Reg/National Significance	\$36	\$36	\$36
HHS	ACF: Runaway and Homeless Youth	\$127	\$132	\$137
HHS	ACF: Head Start	\$551	\$582	\$591
HUD	Homeless Assistance Grants	\$2,636	\$2,777	\$3,000
HUD	HCV Homeless Vouchers	-	-	\$43
HUD	New HUD-VASH Vouchers**	\$40	\$40	-
USDA	USDA/FNS: The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)	\$374	\$402	\$422
USICH	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness	\$3.6	\$3.8	\$3.8
VA	Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV)	\$167	\$173	\$187
VA	Domiciliary Care	\$182	\$196	\$204
VA	Comp Work Therapy/TR	\$84	\$62	\$64
VA	HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)	\$586	\$644	\$699
VA	Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program	\$255	\$237	\$252
VA	Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO)	\$59	\$59	\$63
VA	Supportive Services for Veteran Families	\$386	\$381	\$420
VA	Other	\$29	\$94	\$99
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$6,391</b>	<b>\$6,715</b>	<b>\$7,150</b>

\*\*FY 2021 Targeted Homelessness Assistance." USICH, 2022.

homelessness, federal funding allocations for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program is marginal relative to other targeted homelessness assistance programs. For example, in 2021, 591 million dollars was appropriated to the American Children and Families (ACF) Head Start Program compared to the 107 million dollars appropriated to the EHCY Program, as shown in Figure 7.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the conflicting definitions make it difficult for communities to provide comprehensive wraparound support services to students experiencing homelessness.

### **Proposed Federal Amendments to McKinney-Vento and Related Programs**

While the most recent amendments to McKinney-Vento were included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, policy makers have been actively working to expand and improve existing programs. Since 2021, Congress has introduced three bills that would expand program opportunities within McKinney-Vento.

In December 2021, Representative Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) introduced the Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2021, a bipartisan bill that would align the federal definitions of homelessness across agencies. The Act amends the definition of homelessness used by HUD and other federal agencies to align with the more accurate and inclusive definition employed by the DOE. If signed into law, this would increase eligibility for and access to federal programs that support children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.<sup>41</sup>

In March 2022, Congresswoman Cynthia Axne

(D-IA) introduced H.R.7196, or the Flexibility in Addressing Rural Homelessness Act of 2022.<sup>42</sup> Referred to the House Committee on Financial Services, the bill would allow McKinney-Vento funds to be used in rural areas for emergency lodging, the repair of lodging, and for staff training. The bipartisan effort, co-sponsored by Congressman Frank Lucas (R-OK), would expand benefits from McKinney-Vento programs in rural areas. However, without a commiserate raise in funding, this legislation could ultimately restrict currently operating programs as funds are diverted to these new opportunities.

Lastly, efforts to improve school experiences for students experiencing homelessness include one proposal that falls beyond the framework of McKinney-Vento. McKinney-Vento students are categorically eligible to receive free meals under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. To expedite enrollment, the program application process is waived for McKinney-Vento students.<sup>43</sup> Enacted in March 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act gave the USDA, the agency administering the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, the authority to issue regulation waivers.<sup>44</sup> These actions have permitted schools to provide free meals for all students, regardless of income, for the last two years. However, funding for the program is set to expire on June 30, 2022. On March 31, Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) introduced the Support Kids Not Red Tape Act, which would expand the free school lunch program through September 30, 2023.<sup>45</sup>

## New Jersey State Policy

Taking a closer look at important milestones in the history of education policy in the state of New Jersey contextualizes the implementation of McKinney-Vento at the state level. In 1981, the Education Law Center filed a case in the New Jersey Superior Court, arguing on behalf of urban school districts that the state school funding formula, enacted through the Public School Education Act of 1975, is inadequate. The case went before the New Jersey Supreme Court. After nine months of deliberation, the justices ruled that the school funding formula was unconstitutional under the “thorough and efficient” clause.<sup>46</sup> The Abbott rulings mandate that School Development Authority (SDA) school districts receive a similar funding allocation to the wealthiest school system, universal 3-4 preschool, fund supplement at-risk programs, sufficient school facilities, and reform of school curriculum.<sup>47</sup>

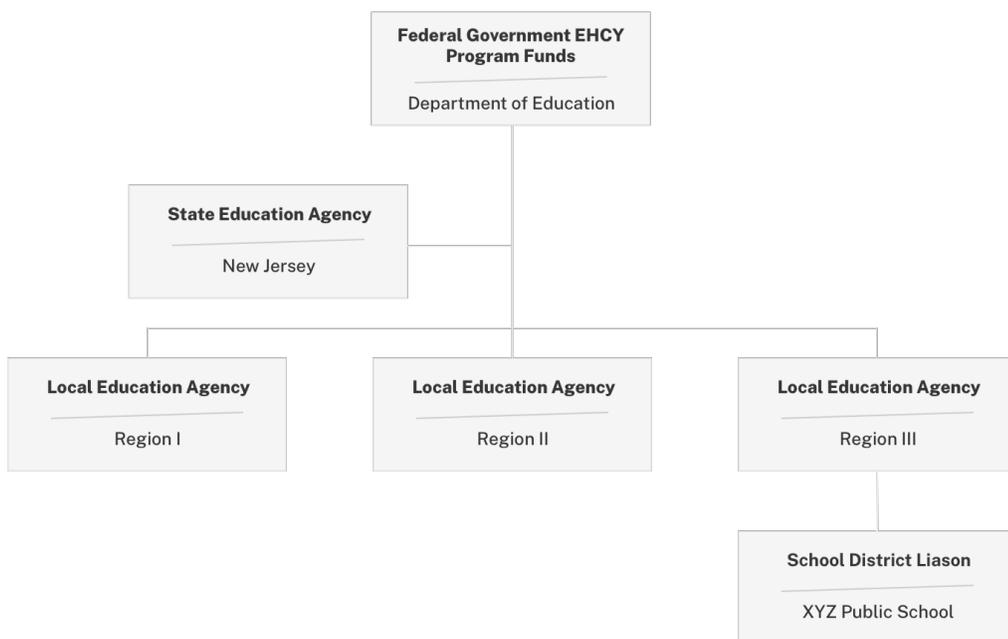
The Education Law Center, a policy advocacy group and a law firm, found that SDA districts over the past decade are below the average spending per student mandated by the state constitution. This result is largely due to eroding tax-based income in the SDA districts, as well as state policy actions.<sup>48</sup> In 2010, the state legislature passed Governor Chris Christie’s 2011 Budget, cutting \$1.1 billion in state aid for schools and modifying

the School Funding Formula Act of 2008. In the following years, the Christie administration kept school funding flat, not keeping pace with inflation and eroding the value of the state aid to SDA and non-SDA districts. In conjunction, the Governor was able to pass a 2% cap on property tax increases in 2010, limiting school districts’ ability to offset the deficit in state aid.<sup>49</sup> During this time, the state also did not adequately fund the SDA.<sup>50</sup> These policies and others resulted in the gaps in school funding over the past decade.

Through the EHCY program, federal aid is provided to state educational agencies (SEA) to sustain an office for coordination of the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. To receive EHCY program funds, each state must maintain a federally approved plan that addresses issues associated with school enrollment, attendance, and success of students experiencing homelessness. SEAs are responsible for the state-wide implementation of and compliance with

Figure 8.

**McKinney-Vento Policy Implementation Hierarchy and Distribution\***



the McKinney-Vento Act rules and regulations. State coordinators gather comprehensive data about youth and children experiencing homelessness including identification methods, barriers, and best practices. State coordinators are required to review and revise policies and practices that impede students' equal access to free and appropriate public education.<sup>51</sup> In the 2020-21 school year, the New Jersey Department of Education counted 2,493 public schools, 686 operating school districts and 10,542 students experiencing homelessness statewide.<sup>52 53</sup>

### Proposed State Policy Amendments

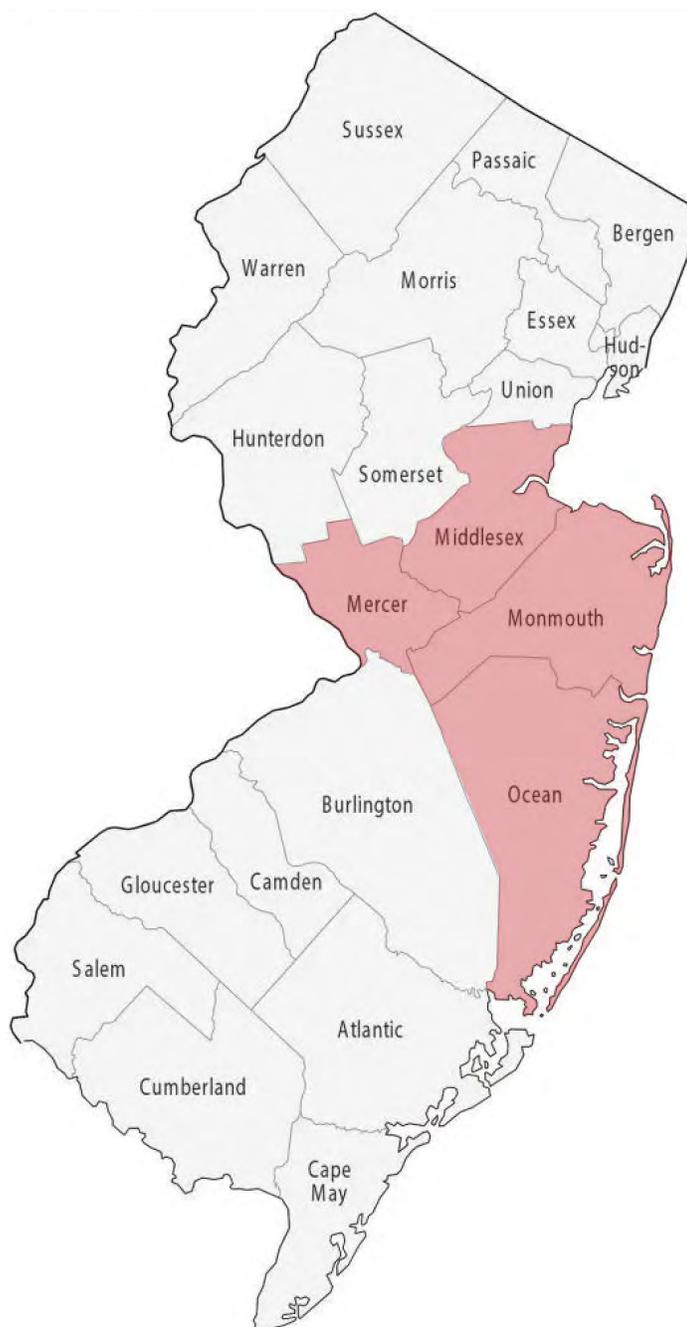
To address student food insecurity throughout the state, the New Jersey State Legislature recently introduced bill A-2368, the Working Class Families' Anti-Hunger Act. This bill would alter existing law by requiring each school in the state to offer a school lunch program and a school breakfast program, regardless of the percentage of students at the school who are federally eligible. The bill would also require each school district to publicize the fact that free meals are available to parents and students.<sup>54</sup>

This bill is necessary to ensure low-income students and students experiencing homelessness receive the meals to which they have a right;

Figure 9.

#### Counties in Region III, New Jersey\*

● Region III



according to current New Jersey state law, if more than 5-percent of the students in a district are categorically eligible for free lunch, the district must participate in the National School Lunch Program. Furthermore, if more than 20-percent of the students are categorically eligible for free lunch then the district must also participate in the free

School Breakfast Program.<sup>55</sup> However, more than 200 public and charter schools in New Jersey that have less than 5-percent of students categorically eligible choose not to participate in the National School Lunch Program.<sup>56</sup> These schools effectively cut their communities off from the universal free lunch program and other pandemic relief related programs meant to help struggling families.

## New Jersey County Policy

County governments are not a part of McKinney-

Vento's administrative structure; rather, LEAs operate throughout several counties and can apply for McKinney-Vento grants via the NJDOE. School districts can then apply for these funds, and regional coordinators assist liaisons in dispersing them. For McKinney-Vento grant purposes, New Jersey is divided into five regions.

**Region I:** Bergen, Hunterdon, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren Counties.

**Region II:** Essex, Hudson, Morris, and Union

Figure 10.

### New Jersey Students Experiencing Homelessness per County and Region\*

Statewide Totals	2017-18   12,960	2018-19   13,528	2019-20   12,333	2020-21   10,542
<b>Region I</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>
Bergen	639	682	545	471
Hunterdon	38	29	40	13
Passaic	807	889	804	536
Somerset	187	210	185	224
Sussex	162	136	122	102
Warren	218	208	181	116
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,051</b>	<b>2,154</b>	<b>1,877</b>	<b>1,462</b>
<b>Region II</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>
Essex	1,016	1,111	1,165	1,208
Hudson	666	508	544	464
Morris	295	291	264	229
Union	653	717	598	714
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,630</b>	<b>2,627</b>	<b>2,571</b>	<b>2,615</b>
<b>Region III</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>
Mercer	267	430	503	460
Middlesex	1,135	1,269	1,200	921
Monmouth	707	804	770	624
Ocean	816	852	790	575
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,925</b>	<b>3,355</b>	<b>3,263</b>	<b>2,580</b>
<b>Region IV</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>
Atlantic	708	741	654	545
Burlington	987	1,054	747	616
Camden	1,639	1,482	1,418	1,074
Gloucester	716	765	688	555
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,050</b>	<b>4,042</b>	<b>3,507</b>	<b>2,790</b>
<b>Region V</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>
Cape May	292	320	343	357
Cumberland	665	734	512	508
Salem	347	296	260	230
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,304</b>	<b>1,350</b>	<b>1,115</b>	<b>1,095</b>

\*\*Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program: Statewide Homeless Student Count by County." NJDOE.

Counties.

**Region III:** Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean Counties.

**Region IV:** Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester Counties.

**Region V:** Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem Counties.

Figure 10 displays statewide counts of students experiencing homelessness by county and regional grantee. The Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission (MOESC) is Region III's McKinney-Vento LEA.<sup>57</sup>

### **New Jersey School District Policy**

New Jersey Administrative Code dictates McKinney-Vento implementation at the school district level, the smallest unit within the Act's administrative structure. For example, a "school district liaison" is defined as a staff member in a school district who facilitates McKinney-Vento services for students experiencing homelessness.<sup>58</sup> Liaisons are responsible for applying for McKinney-Vento funding from their regional coordinators, identifying students experiencing homelessness, and providing resources that encourage positive educational outcomes for students.

A student's "school district of residence" refers to the school district in which his or her parents or guardians resided prior to becoming homeless.<sup>59</sup> It may not be the school district in which the student currently resides. All school districts are required to pay for the tuition of students experiencing homelessness and provide transportation for those children to and from school.<sup>60</sup>

Lastly, per administrative code, school districts' boards of education are responsible for identifying students experiencing homelessness. This occurs at both beginning-of-term registration and on an as-needed basis. Boards of Education also determine if a homeless student should be enrolled within that student's school district of residence or another by consulting with their parents.<sup>61</sup>

Now that the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act's complex provisions and implementation challenges have been established, this report will assess both high- and low-ranking states regarding policy that relates to children experiencing homelessness.

## Chapter IV

# Looking at Other States

Given the differences among states in the implementation of McKinney-Vento provisions, substantial opportunities exist to explore alternative implementation choices and homelessness policy mechanisms. We contacted state coordinators from several high-performing and low-performing states across the country, according to the NHLHC's 2021 State Index on Youth Homelessness.<sup>62</sup> In addition to this index, states were selected due to similar geographic and population metrics to that of New Jersey.

The State Index on Youth Homelessness's methodology includes three categories: Laws and Policies, Systems, and Environment. Laws and Policies analyzes the existing legal and policy structures in place to combat and safeguard the needs of the homeless population by looking at aspects such as licensing and funding of services and criminal proceedings laws against homelessness. Systems examined whether states had larger systematic roadmaps to problems related to homelessness. This includes whether a state has a published plan to end homelessness, and whether that plan included children, as well as whether there existed a statewide council on homelessness. Environment refers to the physical, social, or economic factors that influence state policy related to children experiencing homelessness.

In this chapter, we review four states and

territories. Washington, DC and Massachusetts are included as high-ranking examples, while Virginia and Pennsylvania are included as low-ranking examples.

## Washington, DC

Washington, DC ranks first in the nation in serving children experiencing homelessness according to the State Index on Youth Homelessness.<sup>63</sup> The city comprises 60 school districts serving 6,380 homeless and unaccompanied youth.<sup>64</sup> From those 6,858 students facing homelessness as of January 2020, 108 of those were unsheltered, 1,427 were in shelters, 318 were in hotels or motels, and 4,746 were doubled-up.<sup>65</sup> All located within one metropolitan area, that equates to over 65% of the total New Jersey population of youth facing homelessness.

DC has developed a robust data system, the Comprehensive Homeless Student Data Qlik Sense Application, to serve its student population experiencing homelessness.<sup>66</sup> In 2014, the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) established an agreement with DC's Continuum of Care allowing the city's Department of Human Services Homeless Management Information System to upload homeless student data received from the District's service providers into OSSE's State Longitudinal Education Data system.<sup>67</sup> This monthly data feed is combined with daily homeless student demographic and

housing status information received from each liaison's student information system, and then made available to identified homeless liaisons, data managers and Homeless Education Program staff in OSSE's Comprehensive Homeless Student Data Qlik Sense Application.<sup>68</sup>

The data system is part of a collaborative effort to ensure students identified as experiencing homelessness by service providers and liaisons receive quality wraparound educational services. Previously, if students and parents did not self-identify as experiencing homelessness to their liaison or school, they would go unidentified by the liaison and school, and therefore did not receive McKinney-Vento eligible support. This application permits homeless liaisons to conduct outreach to students and families in a sensitive manner and inform them of their educational rights and available educational resources.

In 2008 the Washington DC city council passed a reform law, *The Housing First and Homeless Services Reform Amendment Act*, that established the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness.<sup>69</sup> Similar to Massachusetts, another high-performing state according to the State Index on Youth Homelessness, a cross-agency council specifically dealing with the issues of homelessness has given the city council a singular location to constantly be exploring how to better serve this vulnerable population.

### **Massachusetts**

Composed of 431 districts serving 25,417 homeless and unaccompanied youth, Massachusetts ranks fifth in serving children

experiencing homelessness according to the State Index on Youth Homelessness.<sup>70</sup> This ranking can be explained by several factors, including prioritizing migrant, military, Native American, and overseas students' access to public education. Because there is substantial overlap between these populations and those facing homelessness, officials are primed to meet those students' needs. This process has, in effect, expanded capacity beyond what would otherwise be possible.

Massachusetts has an Interagency Council on Housing and Homeless, as well as a steering committee that advises the state on McKinney-Vento implementation. These are the efforts that uncovered a meaningful overlap between migrant populations in the state and those who often experience homelessness, putting the Commonwealth on notice. Additionally, work done by the council has documented a 12-percent overlap between foster care and homelessness.<sup>71</sup> In 2018, the Council launched an action plan geared towards supporting unaccompanied youth who were experiencing homelessness. The goals of this program were varied, but focusing on improving identification of those experiencing homelessness, and meeting their needs wherever they arose.<sup>72</sup>

One of Massachusetts' primary differentiating factors is their willingness to utilize the dispute resolution mechanism of McKinney-Vento.<sup>73</sup> When a dispute arises regarding a students' status as "experiencing homelessness," the district enrolls the child in the school he or she would like to attend until the local educational agency liaison can investigate the process. While many states

pursue between three and five cases per year with varying outcomes, Massachusetts pursues three-dozen cases per year, most often resulting in the child's best interest.<sup>74</sup>

## Virginia

Ranked 36th on the State Index for Youth Homelessness, Virginia is similar to New Jersey in geography and population.<sup>75</sup> It comprises 132 school districts serving 20,433 youth experiencing homelessness. From those 20,433 students, 185 students were unsheltered, 1,937 were in shelters, 3,262 were in hotels/motels, and 15,059 were doubled up.<sup>76</sup> Particular focus is placed on the segment that is doubled up as it comprises approximately 75-percent of the total population experiencing homelessness in the state. The administration of the program is handled uniquely in Virginia, where the State Department of Education along with the College of William and Mary run Project HOPE, a LEA.<sup>77</sup>

Contrary to Washington, DC and Massachusetts, Virginia does not currently have an operating interagency council related to homelessness. However, a bill likely to be signed into law this session (HB 717) would convene a workgroup through the Department of Social Services in order to examine access issues relating to housing and health care for unaccompanied homeless youth.<sup>78</sup> This can prove challenging when addressing systemic issues, with no proven whole-of-government approach available.

## Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania (PA) ranked 45th on the State Index for Youth Homelessness. It neighbors New Jersey

on NJ's western border and comprises 500 school districts serving 31,822 students experiencing homelessness.<sup>79</sup> As of January 2020, 526 were unsheltered; 7,281 were living in shelters, 2,428 were living in hotels or motels, and 21,587 were doubled up with friends or family.<sup>80</sup>

In 2012, the Commonwealth established the PA Task Force on Homeless Children's' Education (PA TFHCE) to conduct research on the demographics of students experiencing homelessness throughout Pennsylvania and their needs.<sup>81</sup> Most significantly, in a report to the Governor and General Assembly (GA), PA TFHCE questioned the accuracy of homeless liaisons' counts of students experiencing homelessness.<sup>82</sup> The task force noted that, from 2011-2013, LEAs identified fewer students even though data regarding free and reduced lunch and child poverty increased.<sup>83</sup> PA TFHCE recommended that the Governor and GA further examine this issue.

Additionally, the PA Task Force on Homeless Children's' Education noted that, like Virginia, Pennsylvania does not have a state-level interagency council to discuss and coordinate the educational and social and emotional needs of students experiencing homelessness.<sup>84</sup> It also pointed out that PA does not have statewide mandated program standards related to the development of student homelessness services.<sup>85</sup> TFHCE urged the Governor and GA to establish mechanisms that would support standardization of McKinney-Vento implementation in Pennsylvania so as to avoid limited policy coordination, decreased program quality, and reduced cost effectiveness.<sup>86</sup>

## Chapter V

# Region III

Region III is the focus of Monarch Housing Associate's larger research project with MOESC. This chapter will analyze the successes and challenges of McKinney-Vento implementation at the local level.

### Comparing Region III to Other Regions

Region III is served by the Monmouth-Ocean Regional Educational Services Commission (MOESC). Notably, MOESC identifies more students experiencing homelessness in Region III than its northern neighboring Regions that contain major metropolitan areas. For example, Region I serves Bergen County, the most populous county in the state, and Region II serves the state's first, second, and fourth largest cities: Newark, Jersey City, and Elizabeth. The majority of the state's farmland is located within Region IV and Region V.<sup>87</sup> As a result, Region IV in particular identifies higher counts of students experiencing homelessness by county due to their large populations of migrant and seasonal farm workers.<sup>88</sup>

### Region III and MOESC

MOESC's Regional Director for McKinney-Vento collects Point-in-Time (PIT) counts from every school district in the region, provides training to each school district liaison on how to perform counts, maintain data inventories, and troubleshoots day-to-day issues within districts. When interviewed by members of the practicum team, the MOESC

Director provided significant insights on the dynamics of McKinney-Vento implementation and obstacles that are encountered during this process. The MOESC Director also produced a list of exemplary school district liaisons Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean counties, from which we selected liaison interviewees.

### Region III Insights

All the liaisons we interviewed recognized that experiencing homelessness is traumatic. When children are displaced, "they lose more than just their home," so it is paramount that liaisons employ a "dignity first" empathetic approach.<sup>89</sup> Every liaison interviewed showed deep commitment to the students and families they serve. They understand that reintroducing stability in the form of the child's educational experience can combat trauma. Parents will not deny services, but some have a difficult time declaring themselves as homeless.<sup>90</sup> Many parents of children experiencing homelessness are single mothers experiencing their own form of trauma.<sup>91</sup> It is important to state the significance of making each family feel comfortable, safe, and respected.

### Onboarding

MOESC provides tremendous support, guidance and resources for Region III. MOESC facilitates training programs, helps onboard newly appointed liaisons, assists with dispute mitigation (e.g., districts not wanting to claim and therefore

pay for children), and day-to-day troubleshooting. It is important to note the responsibilities they absorb, as appointed McKinney-Vento Liaisons are accessory to their principal positions (e.g., District Head Nurse or Director of School Counseling Services). Many of the Region III liaisons who we interviewed explained that the McKinney-Vento Liaison onboarding process is ongoing throughout their tenures.<sup>92</sup> It can take years for a liaison to build up a high-functioning support staff typically composed of administrators, registrars, counselors, and social workers. Many of the liaisons with decades of experience have established networks with other social service providers in the community; however, less experienced liaisons often have a harder time identifying these providers.<sup>93</sup> A liaison from Carteret Public School District in Middlesex County expressed interest in creating a database of community resources surrounding her school district, such as shelters and food banks, that she could provide to parents of children experiencing homelessness during the initial McKinney-Vento intake.<sup>94</sup>

### Record Keeping and Data Sharing

Organized and up-to-date internal record keeping and data sharing are extremely important facets of the liaison position. When a student is decidedly eligible to receive McKinney-Vento services, their status is updated, usually by the registrar, in the district's school-wide student information system. Districts use different student information system programs, but their purpose is universal. A liaison from the New Brunswick Public School District in Middlesex County explained that when a child is enrolled in McKinney-Vento, "a symbol is added next to their name in the school-wide student information system."<sup>95</sup> Essential staff like

cafeteria workers receive annual McKinney-Vento training so when an eligible student asks for extra lunch the staff accesses the school-wide student information system to confirm the appropriate symbol is next to the student's name. The entire exchange is seamless and entirely noninvasive to the student.

### Training

According to the interviewees, training is perhaps the most critical component of the liaison position. In March 2022, the New Jersey Department of Education released the McKinney-Vento Training and Resource bundle statewide, an in-depth online training program designed specifically for the school district liaisons. The McKinney-Vento Essential Staff Training Program, part of the larger training program, is an efficient and effective 15-minute training course that provides school staff with heightened awareness and capacity to respond to youth and children experiencing homelessness. Essential staff are classified as: administration, teachers, counselors, early childhood, food service, enrollment, media and librarians, special education, Title I, transportation, and extracurriculars.<sup>96</sup> Several of the Region III liaisons expressed their excitement for the statewide online training program, describing it as a "game changer."<sup>97</sup>

### Region III Major Obstacles

Our interviewees echoed research findings that transportation is a major obstacle preventing students facing homelessness from achieving ideal outcomes. One stakeholder shared that "McKinney Vento is a house of cards, if you pull out transportation it all falls apart." One of the

rights afforded to students under McKinney-Vento grants eligible students transportation to and from school and extracurriculars, with the goal to prevent disruption to students' education. Families dealing with homelessness often move frequently (e.g., district of residence vs. permanent district).<sup>98</sup> In absence of a strong transportation network to facilitate children's mobility, McKinney-Vento cannot realize its full potential as a policy to address homelessness. Coordinating transportation is expensive and logistically complicated.<sup>99</sup> McKinney-Vento specifies that the responsibility for educating and transporting students experiencing homelessness lies with the student's Last District of Residence (LDR), if the LDR is in the State of New Jersey, then that district should be billed for tuition of the student experiencing homelessness.<sup>100</sup> As one liaison explained, other school districts, typically the student's LDR, often choose to not comply or decide on their own as to the status of the child (e.g., displaced or not) and refuse to incur the costs.<sup>101</sup> When this occurs, it causes significant amounts of unnecessary stress for families that are already dealing with so much. Additionally, COVID-19 exacerbated a nationwide shortage of drivers across industries, a hardship that continues to afflict school districts throughout New Jersey.<sup>102</sup>

## COVID-19

Since COVID-19 emerged in the United States in the spring of 2020, it has changed how the public education system operates. The 2020-21 count for students experiencing homelessness fell in every county in Region III.<sup>103</sup> One liaison attributed the count decrease to the nationwide moratorium on evictions that allowed families, who would otherwise become displaced, to stay

in one place.<sup>104</sup> The MOESC Director believes the count decrease stemmed from the lack of a pandemic-proof system that would enable liaisons to function normally during school closures. Every liaison discussed difficulties in processing McKinney-Vento eligible students and having to work around conducting in-person interviews with families and paperwork processing.<sup>105</sup> As one liaison explained, "face-to-face meetings are very important because they help our families understand that liaisons are not a threat and are there to help. When our families know they are in a safe space, they are more willing to share and in turn we can get them the help they need."<sup>106</sup> While all the students in the districts suffered, the McKinney-Vento student population was acutely impacted and displayed a poignant need for mental health services.<sup>107</sup>

## ARP-HCY Funds

In February 2022, Region III was awarded \$824,107 in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (HYC).<sup>108</sup> One liaison envisions using the district's ARP-HCY funds to hire a career and college coach to help students experiencing homelessness prepare for life after high school.<sup>109</sup> Another suggested using the district's ARP-HCY funds to address food security through the development of a take home food program.<sup>110</sup> Using ARP-HCY funds to address the transportation crisis was another recommendation.<sup>111</sup> Lastly, one liaison discussed the idea of offering wraparound services to families. This would include mental health services, by assigning families their own homelessness liaison support person, who would be directly responsible for ensuring families and students needs are met.<sup>112</sup>

## Chapter VI

# Survey Plan

Informed by the information and findings presented in the previous chapters, we designed a survey plan for future use and adaptation to better assess NJ Region III. We recommend implementing four individual surveys focusing on the barriers and knowledge of services authorized by the McKinney-Vento act. The target populations—the group of interest—for each survey includes:<sup>113</sup>

1. Students experiencing homelessness,
2. Parents experiencing homelessness,
3. Homeless service providers, and
4. Teachers and school administrators

Rooted in this survey plan are standards from national organizations and federal agencies, data from prior studies, and evidence-based practices recommended by practitioners within survey research.

### Item Questions

This survey plan recommends utilizing specific item questions and elements from prior survey studies on the homeless population and social service providers. Other survey's item questions have already been field tested to the target populations; hence, incorporating other surveys' questions would be an effective method of reducing errors within the survey instrument. However, as the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) notes, these incorporated item

questions inherent the flaws of the prior studies.<sup>114</sup> The team, furthermore, edited and added new questions based on noticeable trends within the reports.

One method that will offset some of the discrepancies is changing the item questions' visual properties. Manipulating the visual design (i.e., including specific words, graphics, properties, numbers, and symbols) will reduce measurement error—discrepancies with respondents providing inaccurate information—and non-responses to particular item questions.<sup>115</sup> In one comparative analysis, a survey that adopted certain visual techniques increased the response rate from 55% to 96%.<sup>116</sup> Even having physical instructions, indicating the sequence of the item questions, could obtain a higher response rate; one study yielded a 21% increase in respondents answering the question correctly with instructions in the questionnaire.<sup>117</sup> View Appendix I for the list of survey studies used and appendix II to see a draft of the item questions. Incorporating a pre-test survey method would further offset some of the inherited flaws and reduce the risk of various errors.

### Pre-Test Plan

Based on the literature and budget constraints, we recommend cognitive interviews as a robust and low-cost pre-test approach. Cognitive interviewing is the practice of administering the

survey to a subject and probing the participant's thought process. OMB states that cognitive interviews indicate whether an item question captures the intended outcome and identify difficulties with a participant forming the response.<sup>118</sup> Cognitive interviewing in survey design originates from the US National Research Council (NRC); at the time, the NRC developed this technique to assess a respondent's thought process in answering an item question. Since its conception by NRC in 1983, cognitive interviews have been determined to be an evidence-based practice for survey design.<sup>119</sup> For this survey plan, cognitive interviews would reduce the impact of measurement and nonresponse errors.

For this survey study, conducting the interviews with a small number of individuals will suffice. The cognitive interview sample should reflect the demographics of each survey's target population.

- Two students (i.e., homeless, or not) receiving the survey for students experiencing homelessness.
- Two teachers or social service providers receiving the survey for homeless service providers and teachers.
- Two internal staff members receiving the survey for homeless families.

These demographics are analogous to the surveys' target populations; the results, therefore, would resemble how the actual survey participants process and respond to each item question. A sample size of six individuals, furthermore, will ensure the completion of the cognitive interviews

and incorporate the findings into the plan in a time-efficient manner. Substituting internal staff for homeless adults would suffice, as conducting interviews with homeless adults could take time and resources. Based on the proposal's timeline, completing these cognitive interviews should occur two weeks prior to the surveys' implementation, with one week conducting the interviews and another for incorporating the findings. During the pre-test phase, processing the answers from the cognitive interviews should occur as it would assess the potential for processing error—discrepancies in the coding data from the item questions.<sup>120</sup>

Appendix II contains a draft of the item questions, and the cognitive interview's protocol and cognitive prompts. The purpose of the cognitive prompts is to assess the respondent's answers in four areas that are crucial to the design of the survey: (1) question comprehension and ease of responding; (2) the ability to retrieve relevant information from the respondent's memory, relating to question choices and answers; (3) decision processing; and (4) response processing.<sup>121</sup>

### **Contact Protocol**

With the homeless service providers and teachers, we recommend email correspondence as the primary mode of contact. This approach will build rapport between the participant and the survey administrator and the participants disregarding the initial contact. With parents and children experiencing homelessness, emails or letters provided by social services is the most appropriate approach. The reason is the risk of losing certain forms of contact with the homeless participants. Hence, using email or having a homeless service

provider give out letters to homeless individuals would be the most practical approach. The contact materials for the survey participants include three items. These materials' objectives are to initiate contact, build rapport, and motivate participants.

### *Order of Contact Documents*

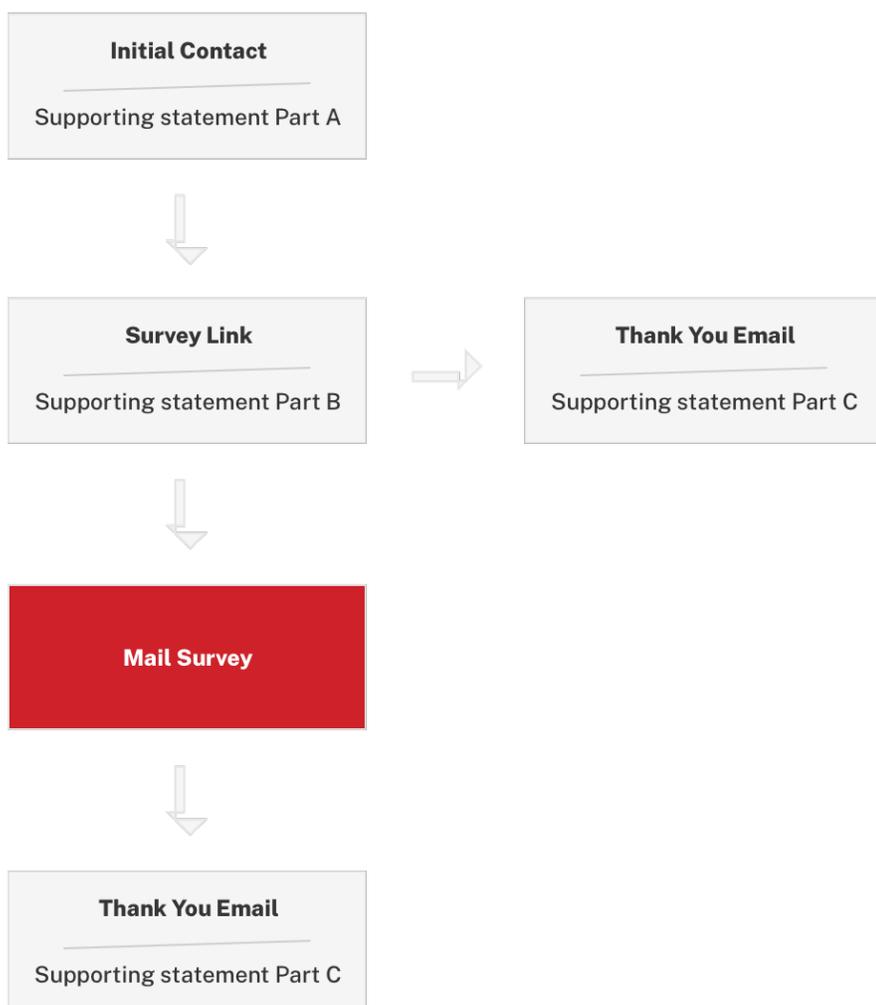
The first item—Supporting Statement Part A—is the first document sent to the sample members, containing the information on the study.

The study team will distribute a follow-up item—Supporting Statement Part B—seven business days after the initial contact. Within this item contains a physical copy of the survey and method to submit the survey online.

A week after receiving a complete survey, or initially after finishing an online survey, the study will send a thank you letter—Supporting Statement Part C\_Letter [or]\_Email—to the participants.

Figure 11.

### **Contact Sequence**



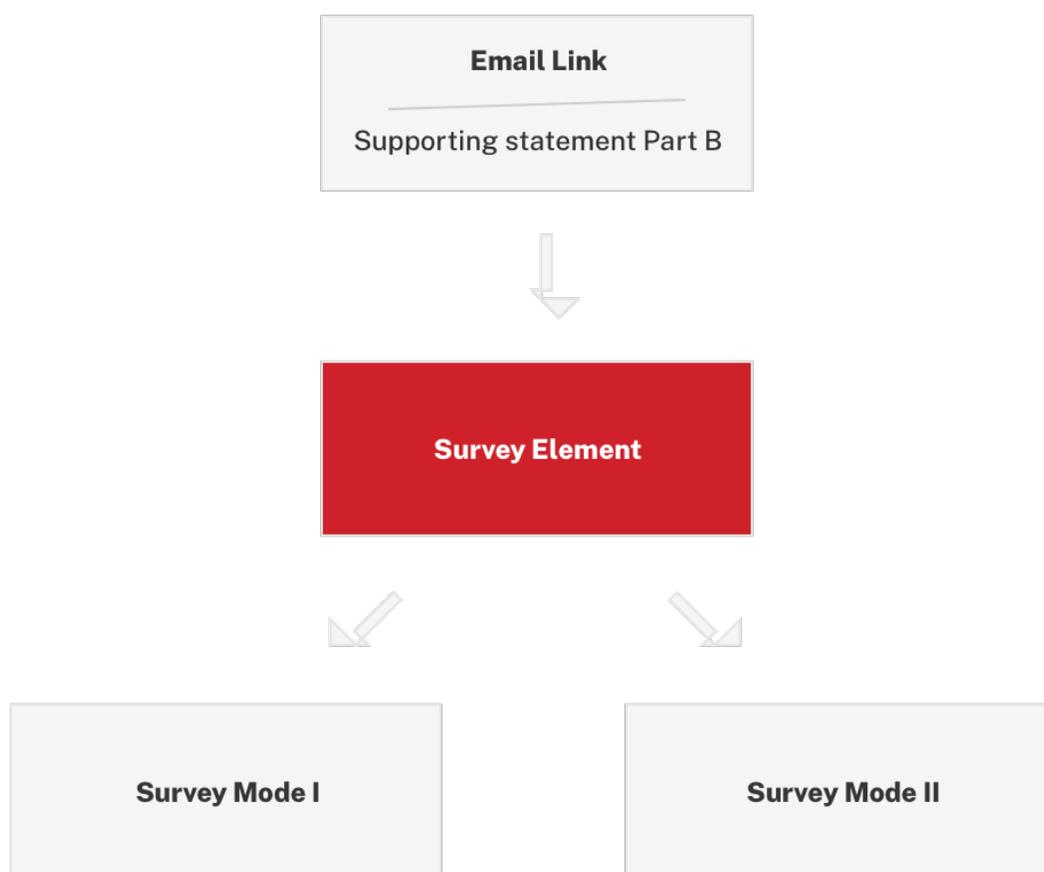
### **Survey Mode**

The last component to the survey plan is determining its mode—method of administering the questionnaire. Given the target populations consist of hard-to-reach units (i.e., homeless students and parents), incorporating a mixed-mode methodology—using multiple modes (e.g., mail, in-person interviews, and online)—is the recommended approach.<sup>122</sup> This approach will reduce coverage error—the discrepancy of the sample

not representing specific attributes of the target population—and non-response error—the discrepancy between the number of individuals in the sample and survey responses.<sup>123</sup> Using a mixed-mode approach, furthermore, tailors the survey's delivery and administration to the participant's preference. The diagram below outlines this methodology:<sup>124</sup>

Figure 12.

### Mixed-Mode Methodology: Typology II



One practical option for homeless service providers and teachers is using a combination of mail and web-based surveys.<sup>125</sup> Ipsos—a survey research firm—highlights the response rate of three survey studies using a mixed-mode methodology; when incorporating a web-based survey approach, each study yielded a higher response rate. One study,

for instance, achieved approximately 175,000 responses while offering mail questionnaires, yielding a 32% response rate, and web surveys, obtaining a 62% rate. For both the homeless service providers and school staff members, utilizing a mixed-modes method of web-based and mail surveys would be effective.<sup>126</sup> The web-based component would enable wide sample coverage that is cost-efficient. The mail aspect of

the survey plan would allow another venue for participants to submit the survey if the web-mode is not their preferred option. The contact material (i.e., Supporting Statement Part B) should notify the participant of their options, with the URL link first asking whether the subject wants a mail questionnaire instead of a web-survey. This mixed-mode approach will allow more data collection from homeless services providers and teachers.

Regarding students experiencing homelessness and their parents, most survey studies utilized a single mode, often an in-person paper questionnaire. Recent studies, however, have discovered that the use of technology with youth experiencing homelessness has been on the rise. For example, using a sample of 169 youth experiencing homelessness, the

researchers found that 62% owned a cell phone; 51% used cell phones to connect with friends; 41% to connect with their parents; 36% to call current or potential employers; and 85% obtained internet access either through their phones, libraries, or social service agencies.<sup>127</sup> In another study, researchers interviewed 150 youth experiencing homelessness using smartphones, finding that most of the sample use their phones for social connectivity, locate services, and communication; this discovery led the researcher to recommend incorporating cellphones and smartphones in intervention strategies.<sup>128</sup> In addition, Code For America (CFA)—a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit addressing digital-relating issues—stated that “two out of every three adults with income below \$30,000 per year own a smartphone, and 31% of them exclusively rely on a smartphone for access to the internet.”<sup>129</sup> Hence, it is feasible to incorporate a mixed-mode methodology identical across all survey studies.

There are, however, risks in relying solely on a web-based survey for homeless participants. For instance, media outlets have documented issues with broadband access for students experiencing homelessness in congregate shelters, resulting in students being un-trackable by the school district.<sup>130</sup> Hence, the survey plan will need to utilize a mixed-mode method, utilizing web surveys and interviews, with students experiencing homelessness and parents to increase the survey coverage and reduce non-response error.

A critical aspect of the web-based survey mode is that the study should be smartphone user-friendly, meaning that typical software systems that require a click or use multiple pages should

be omitted. Data scientists found an increased rate of non-responses with surveys requiring respondents that need to click to the next question.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, this survey should use software systems, such as Google Forms, to allow the participant to scroll to the next question. In conjunction, having the interviews conducted by volunteer school administrators or teachers and social service staff would be more time-efficient and drain fewer resources than hiring volunteers. In short, implementing a mixed-mode method—web and mail surveys for homeless service providers and teachers and web and face-to-face surveys for students experiencing homelessness and parents—would reduce error and increase the response rate.

### **Other Recommendations and Conclusion**

There are additional aspects of this survey plan that merit discussion. For instance, if the sampling frame—list of all potential sample participants—is from the school, the study will need to work with the school district, ensuring compliance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other regulations.<sup>132</sup> State governments, such as California’s Department of Education, have published guidance on administering a survey to students experiencing homelessness. Some of the recommendations include notifying the guardian, explicitly explaining the purpose of the survey, avoiding homeless verification, and maintaining a data system of contact information (i.e., address, phone, and email).<sup>133</sup> Assessing the privacy barriers on obtaining the survey stem is a critical area that needs to be addressed prior to implementation.

In conjunction, there are other areas to address,

one of which is the application of administrative data. The Government Accountability Office (GAO), for instance, recommends incorporating HUD-PIT standards and administering services while implementing the survey. With this survey plan, relying on administrative data to answer simple questions (e.g., demographics) will shorten the survey instrument to focus on topics of interest (i.e., transportation, school services, and knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act).<sup>134</sup> Another area to consider is marketing the survey prior to implementation. Raising awareness of the study across the four counties might, theoretically, increase the response rate for each target population. The tactics and recommendations outlined within this survey plan will effectively capture the data to provide insight in NJ Region III.

## Chapter VII

# Recommendations

Our research included an extensive review of existing literature and policies and interviews with government officials, practitioners, and subject matter experts in New Jersey and across the nation. Based on this research we offer several recommendations related to Monarch Housing Associates' goal of improving outcomes for students experiencing homelessness in New Jersey's Region III.

### **Recommendation I: Enhance mobility of children via robust transportation network.**

One of the key aspects tied closely to homelessness is mobility of children. In order to address the overall shortage of drivers discussed above, Region III might find it helpful to come up with creative recruitment and retention strategies for drivers such as benefits or increased pay. In addition to that, Region III can conduct a careful assessment and forecast of the number of children requiring transportation in the near future to line up the supply of drivers in a timely manner.

For this, a state-level steering committee, as utilized by other high-ranking states, might prove helpful to address overall transportation concerns in terms of budget requirements, forecasting needs and coordination. Moreover, the state-level steering committee can also explore public-private partnerships with transportation companies such as Lyft and Uber to address driver shortages.

In order to effectively manage transportation issues at the regional level, a regional committee can be notified by the state-level steering committee to undertake discussions and solutions on issues such as regionalization of drivers by McKinney-Vento regions, route planning and coordination of regional level inspections, energy efficiency and child and safety measures.

### **Recommendation II: Enhance service coordination by utilizing digital applications.**

Several high-performing states and municipalities utilize digital applications to coordinate services among schools, care providers, and government agencies, as discussed earlier in this report. New Jersey should join their ranks through the implementation of a state-wide digital product to ensure services to children and families experiencing homelessness are being delivered, and that they are not falling through the cracks.

Coordination among schools, shelters, and government agencies is a critical mechanism to ensure that students experiencing homelessness are identified and services are provided without relying on voluntary identification by students themselves. Homelessness often carries a great deal of stigma, and unburdening students from stigma that may come with self-identification can facilitate their receipt of the services to which they are legally entitled. When a student is identified and enters into the application process, care

providers can offer their services to the identified children and families. This would not only include shelter services, but free meals programs, wraparound social services, and any digital services associated with distance learning that have become commonplace during COVID-19. Many opportunities and services exist for those experiencing homelessness, and this app would ensure that students and families facing those difficulties receive everything meant for them.

**Recommendation III: Reform the onboarding process for new liaisons, such as implementing online workshops and training modules.**

The New Jersey Department of Education recently released a new virtual training program. Continuing to pivot towards virtual platforms, such as online bi-monthly workshops and monthly newsletters, would make training seminars and information more accessible for the liaisons and school personnel. Additionally, we recommend that districts have a deputy or associate liaison. This individual will become the primary liaison in the event of a vacancy. Lastly, we suggest a shadowing period, spanning multiple months, of the current liaison, as part of the onboarding process for the individual who will enter the role. This practice could retain institutional knowledge from the prior liaison to the new one. These three recommendations would better prepare new liaisons for their duties and responsibilities.

**Recommendation IV: Advocate for a state-level New Jersey Interagency Council on Children & Youth Experiencing Homelessness.**

Similar to the now-defunct New Jersey Interagency Council on Homelessness, the focus of this

proposed council would include, but not be limited to, serving the youngest people experiencing homelessness, with the potential for an expanded mission that includes addressing the root of the problem: housing issues. Both advocates and policymakers in New Jersey can look toward the models set by other states in order to develop the Garden State's own interagency council. For example, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts operates an Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness that hosts open meetings on a quarterly basis to provide the public with updates on their progress.<sup>135</sup> The recently established Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness even includes a Youth Homelessness Prevention Subcommittee to provide that population with special attention.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, even the District of Columbia implements its own Interagency Council on Homelessness, forming partnerships with housing providers to combat homelessness in the city.<sup>137</sup>

Although this interagency council would include staff representation from each of the New Jersey's various departments, commissions, and other state government offices, we envision core leadership from relevant state agencies like the Department of Education, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Human Services, the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Corrections.

**Recommendation V: Advocate for alignment of federal definition of "homelessness."**

The federal definition of homelessness needs to be

streamlined, as the contrasting definitions make it difficult for programming to reach those in need, as siloed funding allocations are mismatched with the population. McKinney-Vento is managed by the Department of Education, while most federal funding for homeless programming comes from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. By creating a single, uniform definition of homelessness across all federal agencies, federal funds would be able to more easily flow to the programs and the families that need them.

**Recommendation VI: Strategically plan wraparound support services within school districts.**

Lastly, we recommend that school districts work closely with liaisons to strategically plan wraparound support services that address the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness.

For example, increased access to free meals would be invaluable to students and families experiencing homelessness regardless of their school district. Due to stringent and exclusive eligibility requirements, not all families and students experiencing homelessness can enroll in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). To accommodate these students and families, in addition to participating in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, school districts can provide food on weekends and after school by collaborating with grocery stores, farmers' markets, food pantries, and local restaurants.

Additionally, the practicum team recommends that school districts integrate the social and emotional needs of children experiencing homelessness into their curricula and after-school programming. Art, music, and exercise activities, for example, can serve as stress management tools and opportunities to socialize with peers in an environment separate from living spaces. Having these activities available at school will provide a more seamless educational experience for students, since they will not be held at separate facilities that may make children experiencing homelessness feel isolated nor do they require additional transportation.

# Appendixes

## Appendix I

### List of Prior Surveys

Homelessness Survey	RAND Corporation
Identification Tool for School Staff	THEY
National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients	US Census Bureau
Marshall High School Homeless Youth Survey	Marshall High School
Voices of Youth Count Comprehensive Report: Youth Homelessness in America	H.U.D.
Student Residence Questionnaire	Texas Education Agency
Surveying Local Homeless Service Providers	National Alliance to End Homelessness
Helping Homeless Students Succeed in College	California Homeless Youth Project
NAEHCY's Staff Survey	NAEHCY
Student Services Questionnaire	CDE of California
Survey for Texas Homeless Liaisons on Youth Homelessness and Housing Instability	Texas Network of Youth Services
Voices from the Street: A survey of Homeless Youth by Their Peers	California Research Bureau
Park City School District Student Residency Questionnaire	Park City School District, UT
Navigating Homelessness and Housing Needs Data: Tailoring and Driving Local Solutions	USICH
Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System	C.D.C

## Appendix II

### Item Questions

#### ITEM QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

##### 1a. Which county do you live in?

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Mercer County
- Middlesex County
- Monmouth County
- Ocean County

##### 2a. Did you move during this school year?

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

-

**[SKIP "2b" and "2c" IF ANSWER NO]**

2b. If yes, around how many times did you move?

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 or more times

2c. Are you still going to the same school at the beginning of the year?

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

3a. Do you know other students who are experiencing homelessness?

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**4a. In the past 30 days, how many days did you miss school?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

0 days

1 day

2 or 3 days

4 or 5 days

6 or more day

**5a. What are some challenges you face at school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

A. Access to transportation to/from school

B. Access to mental health and support services

- C. Access to free school lunches
- D. Access to tutoring services
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6a. What are some challenges you face outside of school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to internet
- B. Suitable clothing
- C. Access to food
- D. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7a. Do you know who to talk to at school on issues relating to homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes

No

**7b. Who do you think you could communicate to regarding these challenges?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Teachers
- B. School nurses
- C. Social worker/counselor
- D. Main office
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7c. Have you ever communicated to any of these individuals?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**[SKIP "7d." IF ANSWER NO FOR "7c."]**

**7d. What was the experience when communicating to the staff member/members?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Very positive
- B. Positive
- C. Negative
- D. Very negative

**8a. Please mark the top 3 school services or programs that would benefit you to succeed at school.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Additional transportation services
- B. Additional social-emotional support services (i.e., mental health)
- C. Extra tutoring
- D. Clothing Drive
- E. School Supplies
- F. Designated School Food Pantry
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

ITEM QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

**1a. Which county do you live in?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Mercer County
- B. Middlesex County
- C. Monmouth County
- D. Ocean County

**2a. Did you and your child/children move during this school year?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**[SKIP "2b, 2c, and 2d" IF ANSWER NO]**

**2b. If yes, around how many times did you move?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 or more times: **[HOW MANY TIMES: \_\_\_\_]**

**2c. Which options best describe the cause of the move?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- Unemployment
- Reduced hours at work
- Medical bills
- Domestic abuse
- Eviction or foreclosure
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2d. Is your child/children *still* going to the same school at the start of the year?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes

- No

**3a. Do you know other families experiencing homelessness in the same school system?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**4a. During the past 30 days, how many school days has your child/children missed?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- 0 days
- 1 day
- 2 or 3 days
- 4 or 5 days
- 6 or more days

**5a. Where did you stay last night?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Shared living space with others
- B. Motel or hotel
- C. Emergency shelter
- D. Car, campground, abandoned building, or similar public or private place
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ANSWER "5b." IF SELECTED "A. Shared space with other persons"]**

**5b. Are you sharing living accommodations with another family?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No
- Residing in a homeless shelter

**6a. Where do you plan to stay tonight?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Shared living space with others
- B. Motel or hotel
- C. Emergency shelter
- D. Car, campground, abandoned building, or similar public or private place
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Unknown

**7a. What are some obstacles that you and your child/children face at school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to transportation to/from school
- B. Access to mental health and support services
- C. Access to free school lunches
- D. Access to tutoring services
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8a. What are some obstacles that you and your child/children face outside of school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to internet
- B. Suitable clothing
- C. Access to food
- D. Dealing housing uncertainty
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**9a. Do you know who to talk to at school on issues relating to homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**9b. Who do you think you could communicate to regarding these challenges?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Teachers
- B. School nurses

C. Social worker/counselor

D. Main office

E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**9c. Have you ever communicated to any of these individuals?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**[SKIP "9d." IF ANSWER NO FOR "9c."]**

**9d. What was the experience when communicating to the staff member/members?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

A. Very positive

B. Positive

C. Negative

D. Very negative

**10a. Please mark the top 3 school services or programs that would benefit your child/children to succeed at school.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Additional Transportation services
- B. Additional social-emotional support services
- C. Extra tutoring
- D. Clothing Drive
- E. School Supplies
- F. Designated School Food Pantry
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS

**1a. What county does the school you are employed at reside in?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Mercer County
- B. Middlesex County
- C. Monmouth County
- D. Ocean County

**2a. Please select the option that best describes your position.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Classroom Teacher
- B. Social Worker
- C. Guidance Counselor
- D. Administrator: **Please specify:** \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other District Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

**3a. Have you ever coordinated with the homeless liaison regarding a student that is, or you think is, experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**[SKIP "3b." IF THE ANSWER IS "No"]**

**3b. What factors led you to refer the student to the homeless liaison?**

**[CIRCLE ALL OPTIONS THAT APPLY]**

- Poor grades
- Tardiness

- Student mentioning that he/she/they are homeless
- Other students mentioning the student being homeless
- Lack of school supplies
- Issues with clothing and hygiene (e.g., not matching the weather and poor condition)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4a. Have you participated in the new online McKinney-Vento training module from the NJ Department of Education?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**[SKIP "4b.," "4c.," "4d.," and "4e." IF ANSWER "No"]**

**4b. How informative did you find the new training module?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Very informative
- B. Informative
- C. Somewhat informative
- D. Not informative at all

**4c. How effective does this training module prepare you to identify students experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Very effective
- B. Effective
- C. Somewhat effective
- D. Not effective

**4d. Would you like more training on the McKinney-Vento?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**4e. What mode (i.e., method of communication) do you prefer for McKinney-Vento training?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

A. Online webinars

B. In-person

C. Asynchronous course

D. Hybrid in-person-virtual

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**5a. Please mark the top 3 school services or programs that would benefit students experiencing**

**homelessness in your school.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Additional Transportation services
- B. Additional social-emotional support services
- C. Extra tutoring
- D. Clothing Drive
- E. School Supplies
- F. Designated School Food Pantry
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6a. Students experiencing homelessness cannot attend the school that they were attending before they became homeless.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**7a. A child's enrollment may not be delayed due to lack of proof of residency.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**8a. Students experiencing homelessness are eligible to receive free school meals.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**9a. Students experiencing homelessness are not eligible to receive special tutoring services.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**10a. Students experiencing homelessness are eligible for special transportation services.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

QUESTIONS FOR HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS

**1a. What county does your organization reside in?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Mercer County
- B. Middlesex County
- C. Monmouth County
- D. Ocean County

**2a. If your organization is experiencing personnel shortages, in what areas are they occurring?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Social Workers
- B. Case Management
- C. Mental/Behavioral Health Specialists

- D. Physical Health Specialists
- E. Housing Counselors
- F. Facility Maintenance
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3a. In your opinion, what barriers inhibit your organization's ability to provide services to youth experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Verifying homeless status
- B. Lack of knowledge of services available
- C. Inability to provide basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, and shelter)
- D. Inability to communicate (Foreign born/foreign language speakers)
- E. Lack of communication with school district liaisons
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4a. Compared to last year, the number of homeless families seeking services at your organization has:**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Increased
- B. Decreased
- C. Stayed about the same
- D. Unknown

**5a. Compared to last year, the number of homeless individuals under the age of 18 (without a parent/guardian) seeking services at your organization has:**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Increased
- B. Decreased
- C. Stayed about the same
- D. Unknown

**6a. Does your organization collaborate with schools to provide services?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**[SKIP "6b." IF THE ANSWER IS "No"]**

**6b. If yes, what kind of programs?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- Food security
- Leadership and professional development
- Extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, art, and music)
- Mental health services
- Supplies (e.g., clothing and school supplies)
- Volunteer opportunities
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7a. In your opinion, what school services are most important to students experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE THREE OPTIONS]**

- A. Transportation to/from school
- B. Suitable clothing
- C. Access to Internet, books, resources to complete homework
- D. Dealing with uncertainty of housing

E. Increased access to free meals

F. Mental health services

G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix III

Cognitive Interview

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW FOR **STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

### **[START COGNITIVE INTERVIEW HERE]**

Hello, my name is [NAME OF INTERVIEW]. I'm conducting a research study for [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]. I'm not selling anything and just need a few minutes to ask you some questions. Are you willing to participate in this survey study?

### **[CONSENT]**

Thank you. Your participation is important to this study. This should only take about 10 minutes. Your answers are confidential and will only be reported in combination with others. Your participation is voluntary, you may end at any time, and you may skip questions you do not want to answer. May I ask the first question? **[IF YES]** Thanks!

**1a. Which county do you live in?**

### **[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Mercer County
  
- Middlesex County
  
- Monmouth County
  
- Ocean County

**2a. Did you move during this school year?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

-

**[SKIP "2b" and "2c" IF ANSWER NO]**

**2b. If yes, around how many times did you move?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

1 time

2 times

3 times

4 or more times

**2c. Are you still going to the same school at the beginning of the year?**

**[PLEASE SLECT ONE OPTION]**

Yes

- No

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

Can reword question “2a.” in your own words?

What comes to mind with the word “move” in question 2a. and 2b.?

**3a. Do you know other students who are experiencing homelessness?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes

- No

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

Can you rephrase the question in your own words?

**4a. In the past 30 days, how many days did you miss school?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- 0 days

- 1 day

- 2 or 3 days

- o 4 or 5 days
  
- o 6 or more day

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

**How hard was it to recall how many days your child missed in the last 30 days?**

**5a. What are some challenges you face at school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to transportation to/from school
  
- B. Access to mental health and support services
  
- C. Access to free school lunches
  
- D. Access to tutoring services
  
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6a. What are some challenges you face outside of school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to internet
- B. Suitable clothing
- C. Access to food
- D. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

-

**7a. Do you know who to talk to at school on issues relating to homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**7b. Who do you think you could communicate to regarding these challenges?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Teachers
- B. School nurses
- C. Social worker/counselor
- D. Main office

E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7c. Have you ever communicated to any of these individuals?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**[SKIP "7d." IF ANSWER NO FOR "7c."]**

**7d. What was the experience when communicating to the staff member/members?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

A. Very positive

B. Positive

C. Negative

D. Very negative

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything confusing about this question and sub-questions?
- Can you reword question "9d." in your own words?

**8a. Please mark the top 3 school services or programs that would benefit you to succeed at school.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Additional transportation services
- B. Additional social-emotional support services (i.e., mental health)
- C. Extra tutoring
- D. Clothing Drive
- E. School Supplies
- F. Designated School Food Pantry
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything unclear or confusing about this question?
- Are there any answer options that you think we should include?

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW FOR PARENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

**[START COGNITIVE INTERVIEW]**

Hello, my name is [NAME OF INTERVIEW]. I'm conducting a research study for [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]. I'm not selling anything and just need a few minutes to ask you some questions. Are you willing to participate in this survey study?

**[CONSENT]**

Thank you. Your participation is important to this study. This should only take about 10 minutes. Your answers are confidential and will only be reported in combination with others. Your participation is voluntary, you may end at any time, and you may skip questions you do not want to answer. May I ask the first question? **[IF YES]** Thanks!

**1a. Which county do you live in?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Mercer County
- B. Middlesex County
- C. Monmouth County
- D. Ocean County

**2a. Did you and your child/children move during this school year?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

-  
**[SKIP "2b, 2c, and 2d" IF ANSWER NO]**

-

**2b. If yes, around how many times did you move?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 or more times: **[HOW MANY TIMES: \_\_\_\_]**

**2c. Which options best describe the cause of the move.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- Unemployment
- Reduced hours at work
- Medical bills
- Domestic abuse
- Eviction or foreclosure
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2d. Is your child/children still going to the same school at**

the start of the year?

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- What does eviction and foreclosure mean to you?
- What comes to mind with “medical bills?”
- Can you reword question “2a.” in your own words?
- What comes to mind with the word “move” in question “2a.?”

**3a. Do you know other families experiencing homelessness in the same school system?**

**[PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Can you rephrase the question in your own words?

**4a. During the past 30 days, how many school days has your child/children missed?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- o 0 days
- o 1 day
- o 2 or 3 days
- o 4 or 5 days
- o 6 or more days

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- **How hard was it to recall how many days your child missed in the last 30 days?**

**5a. Where did you stay *last night*?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Shared living space with others
- B. Motel or hotel
- C. Emergency shelter
- D. Car, campground, abandoned building, or similar public or private place
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**[ANSWER "5b." IF SELECTED "A. Shared space with other persons"]**

**5b. Are you sharing living accommodations with another family?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No
- Residing in a homeless shelter

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- **Is there an option that does not match your current living conditions?**
- **Can you reword the question “5a?”**
- **Who do you consider family members in question “5b?”**

**6a. Where do you plan to stay tonight?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Shared living space with others
- B. Motel or hotel
- C. Emergency shelter
- D. Car, campground, abandoned building, or similar public or private place
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Unknown

**7a. What are some obstacles that you and your child/children face at school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to transportation to/from school
- B. Access to mental health and support services
- C. Access to free school lunches
- D. Access to tutoring services
- E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8a. What are some obstacles that you and your child/children face outside of school?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Access to internet
- B. Suitable clothing
- C. Access to food
- D. Dealing housing uncertainty

E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Is there an option that does not match any of the challenges you face?
- How do you define “uncertainty housing” with question “8a?”
- Can you reword the question “8a?”

**9a. Do you know who to talk to at school on issues relating to homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**9b. Who do you think you could communicate to regarding these challenges?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

A. Teachers

B. School nurses

C. Social worker/counselor

D. Main office

E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**9c. Have you ever communicated to any of these individuals?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**[SKIP "9d." IF ANSWER NO FOR "9c."]**

**9d. What was the experience when communicating to the staff member/members?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

A. Very positive

B. Positive

C. Negative

D. Very negative

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything confusing about this question and sub-questions?
- Can you reword question "9d" in your own words?

**10a. Please mark the top 3 school services or programs that would benefit your child/children to succeed at school.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Additional Transportation services
- B. Additional social-emotional support services
- C. Extra tutoring
- D. Clothing Drive
- E. School Supplies
- F. Designated School Food Pantry
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything unclear or confusing about this question?
- Are there any answer options that you think we should include?

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW FOR SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS

**[START COGNITIVE INTERVIEW HERE]**

Hello, my name is [NAME OF INTERVIEW]. I'm conducting a research study for [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]. I'm not selling anything and just need a few minutes to ask you some questions. Are you willing to participate in this survey study?

**[CONSENT]**

Thank you. Your participation is important to this study. This should only take about 10 minutes. Your answers are confidential and will only be reported in combination with others. Your participation is voluntary, you may end at any time, and you may skip questions you do not want to answer. May I ask the first question? **[IF YES]** Thanks!

**1a. What county does the school you are employed at reside in?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Mercer County
- Middlesex County
- Monmouth County
- Ocean County

**2a. Please select the option that best describes your position.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Classroom Teacher
- B. Social Worker
- C. Guidance Counselor
- D. Administrator: **Please specify:** \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Other District Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

**3a. Have you ever coordinated with the homeless liaison regarding a student that is, or you think is, experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
  
- No

**[SKIP "Xb." IF THE ANSWER IS "No"]**

**3b. What factors led you to refer the student to the homeless liaison?**

**[CIRCLE ALL OPTIONS THAT APPLY]**

- Poor grades
  
- Tardiness
  
- Student mentioning that he/she/they are homeless
  
- Other students mentioning the student being homeless
  
- Lack of school supplies
  
- Issues with clothing and hygiene (e.g., not matching the weather and poor condition)
  
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Can you rephrase the question in your own words?
- What are some examples of other students “mentioning” that come to mind?
- What does the word “coordinate” mean to you?

**4a. Have you participated in the new online McKinney-Vento training module from the NJ Department of Education?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

Yes

No

**[SKIP “4b.,” “4c.,” and “4d.” IF ANSWER “No”]**

**4b. How informative did you find the new training module?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

A. Very informative

- B. Informative
- C. Somewhat informative
- D. Not informative at all

**4c. How effective does this training module prepare you to identify students experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Very effective
- B. Effective
- C. Somewhat effective
- D. Not effective

**4d. Would you like more training on the McKinney-Vento?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Yes
- No

**4e. What mode (i.e., method of communication) do you prefer for McKinney-Vento training?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Online webinars
- B. In-person
- C. Asynchronous course
- D. Hybrid in-person-virtual
- o Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything unclear or confusing about question 4 and its sub-questions?
- How do you define an Asynchronous course?
- Are there any answer options that you think we should include?

**5a. Please mark the top 3 school services or programs that would benefit students experiencing homelessness in your school.**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Additional Transportation services
- B. Additional social-emotional support services

C. Extra tutoring

D. Clothing Drive

E. School Supplies

F. Designated School Food Pantry

G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

H. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything unclear or confusing about this question?
- Are there any answer options that you think we should include?

**6a. Students experiencing homelessness cannot attend the school that they were attending before they became homeless.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

True

False

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything unclear or confusing about this question?

**7a. A child's enrollment may not be delayed due to lack of proof of residency or other documents.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- What are some examples of “proof of residency” referred to in this question?

**8a. Students experiencing homelessness are eligible to receive free school meals.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Was there anything unclear or confusing about this question?

**9a. Students experiencing homelessness are not eligible to receive special tutoring services.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

**10a. Students experiencing homelessness are eligible for special transportation services.**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- True
- False

COGNITIVE INTERVIEW FOR HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS

**[START COGNITIVE INTERVIEW HERE]**

Hello, my name is [NAME OF INTERVIEW]. I'm conducting a research study for [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]. I'm not selling anything and just need a few minutes to ask you some questions. Are you willing to participate in this survey study?

**[CONSENT]**

Thank you. Your participation is important to this study. This should only take about 10 minutes. Your answers are confidential and will only be reported in combination with others. Your participation is voluntary, you may end at any time, and you may skip questions you do not want to answer. May I ask the first question? **[IF YES]** Thanks!

**1a. What county does your organization reside in?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- Mercer County

- o Middlesex County
- o Monmouth County
- o Ocean County

**2a. If your organization is experiencing personnel shortages, in what areas are they occurring?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- o Social Workers
- o Case Management
- o Mental/Behavioral Health Specialists
- o Physical Health Specialists
- o Housing Counselors
- o Facility Maintenance
- o Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- **Were there any issues answering this question?**

**3a. In your opinion, what barriers inhibit your organization's ability to provide services to youth experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A. Verifying homeless status
- B. Lack of knowledge of services available
- C. Inability to provide basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, and shelter)
- D. Inability to communicate (Foreign born/foreign language speakers)
- E. Lack of communication with school district liaisons
- F. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- Can you rephrase the question in your own words?
- Were there any issues answering this question?

**4a. Compared to last year, the number of homeless families seeking services at your organization has:**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

- A. Increased
- B. Decreased
- C. Stayed about the same

D. Unknown

**5a. Compared to last year, the number of homeless individuals under the age of 18 (without a parent/guardian) seeking services at your organization has:**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

A. Increased

B. Decreased

C. Stayed about the same

D. Unknown

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- What is the key difference with the last two questions?

**6a. Does your organization collaborate with schools to provide services?**

**[CIRCLE ONE OPTION]**

o Yes

o No

**[SKIP "6b." IF THE ANSWER IS "No"]**

**6b. If yes, what kind of programs?**

**[CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY]**

- Food security
- Leadership and professional development
- Extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, art, and music)
- Mental health services
- Supplies (e.g., clothing and school supplies)
- Volunteer opportunities
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7a. In your opinion, what school services are most important to students experiencing homelessness?**

**[CIRCLE THREE OPTIONS]**

- H. Transportation to/from school
- I. Suitable clothing

J. Access to Internet, books, resources to complete homework

K. Dealing with uncertainty of housing

L. Increased access to free meals

M. Mental health services

N. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROMPTS**

- **Can you reword the question?**

## Appendix IV

Contact Material

### [Supporting Statement Part, A]

[MONTH] [DAY], [YEAR]

Name

Street

City, State Zip

Dear [NAME],

I am writing to ask for your help in a study that is being conducted jointly with Monarch Housing Associates LLC. The agency is looking to understand trends in the homeless youth/student population. Within the next 7-10 business days, you will be receiving a request to participate in this study by answering questions.

You will receive both a physical survey in the mail, as well as an invitation to complete the survey online. You may choose to complete either the survey online or return via mail.

The survey will take no more than 10-15 minutes of your time.

My colleagues, [INSERT NAME], [INSERT NAME], and I are working with Monmouth Ocean Education Commission to complete this study and provide the Commission with insight into the homeless service providers within your county. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. Your answers will remain confidential, and all results will be reported in a way that will not allow any individual to be identified. Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me, [INSERT NAME] at [INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS] or 732-000-000.

We are not able to complete this research without the generous and gracious assistance of people like you.

Sincerely,  
[INSERT NAME]

**[Supporting Statement Part, B]**

[MONTH] [DAY], [YEAR]

Name

Street

City, State Zip

Dear [NAME],

Last week, we mailed you a letter to ask for your help in completing a survey to assist the Monmouth Ocean Education Commission.

If you have already completed the questionnaire, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, we respectfully request that you complete and return the questionnaire as soon as possible. You may also take the questionnaire online via access code: **XXXX**.

If you did not receive a questionnaire, or if you have any questions, please contact us by phone at XXX-XXX-XXX or by email at [\[EMAIL ADDRESS\]](#).

We are grateful for your help with this important study.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME]

**[Supporting Statement Part, C\_Email]**

From: [INSERT NAME] [[INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS]

Sent: [DAY], [MONTH] [DATE], [YEAR], [TIME]

To: First Last [fl@gmail.com]

Subject: Thank you - Monarch Housing Associates Survey Study

Dear [NAME],

I am reaching out to thank you for participating in the Monarch Housing Associates Survey Study. Your response has been invaluable to us and this study.

Thank you again for your contribution.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME]

Consultant

Monarch Housing Associates

**[Supporting Statement Part, C\_Letter]**

[MONTH] [DAY], [YEAR]

Name

Street

City, State Zip

Dear [NAME],

I am reaching out to thank you for participating in the Monarch Housing Associates Survey Study. Your response has been invaluable to us and this study.

Thank you again for your contribution.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAME]

## Endnotes

"New Jersey Homelessness Statistics." United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. [https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/nj/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202020%2C%20New,and%20Urban%20Development%20\(HUD\).](https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/nj/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202020%2C%20New,and%20Urban%20Development%20(HUD).)

<sup>2</sup> This school year reflects the last year data on student homelessness was collected by the U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "The Problem." National Low Income Housing Coalition. <https://nlihc.org/explore-issues/why-we-care/problem>.

<sup>5</sup> "Education of Homeless Children and Youth." National Coalition for the Homeless. <https://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/education.html>.

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<sup>15</sup> Buckner, J. C., Bassuk, E. L., & Weinreb, L. F. Predictors of academic achievement among homeless and low-income housed children. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39, (2001): 45– 69.

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<sup>21</sup> Burns, D, Espinoza, D., Ondrasek, N., & Yang, M. Students Experiencing Homelessness: The Conditions and Outcomes of Homelessness Among California Students. *Learning Policy Institute*. 2021. [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Students\\_Experiencing\\_Homelessness\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Students_Experiencing_Homelessness_REPORT.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Rafferty, Y., Shinn, M., & Weitzman, B. Academic achievement among formerly homeless adolescents and their continuously housed peers. *Journal of School Psychology*, 42, (2004): 179–199. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2004.02.002>

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<sup>24</sup> Rafferty, Y., & Rollins, N. Learning in limbo: The educational deprivation of homeless children. New York, NY: Advocates for Children, ERIC Document Reproduction No. Ed 312 363, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Obradovic, J., J. Long, J. Cutuli, C-K. Chan, E. Hinz, D. Heistad, and S. Masten. "Academic

Achievement of Homeless and Highly Mobile Children in an Urban School District: Longitudinal Evidence on Risk, Growth, and Resilience." *Development and Psychopathology* 21, (2009): 493–518.

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<sup>92</sup> New Brunswick Liaison and Neptune Liaison

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<sup>115</sup> Both processing error and measurement error originate from the Total Error Survey (TES) framework—a model that aims to control the six sources of error (i.e., sampling error, coverage error, processing error, measurement error, non-response error, and adjustment error) and maximize data accuracy for a survey study. For more information, please read Robert Groves, Flod Fowler, Mick Couper, James Lepkowski, Eleanor Singe, and Roger Touangeau, *Survey Methodology*, 49-60.

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<sup>120</sup> Groves, Flod Fowler, Mick Couper, James Lepkowski, Eleanor Singe, and Roger Touangeau, *Survey Methodology*, 2nd ed., 53

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