

Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) in SDP Program Implementation and Outcomes, 2015-2016 SY

This brief summarizes the findings of an evaluation conducted by the Office of Research & Evaluation (ORE) that looked at the services provided as part of the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program and outcomes for students identified as homeless during the 2015-2016 SY. The full report is available upon request.

Study Overview

ORE conducts an annual study of the ECYEH program as part of receiving funding for the initiative from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In 2015-2016, research questions focused on both program implementation (e.g., amount and kind of services provided) and outcomes for students identified as homeless (e.g., attendance rates compared to housed peers).

The following research questions are highlighted in this brief:

- Are ECYEH approaches resulting in the identification of homeless students?
- To what extent did the ECYEH office provide the following services?
 - a. Enrollment assistance, vouchers for uniforms, transportation passes, additional funding for schools supplies, and tutoring
 - b. Disseminate information on educational rights of students identified as homeless through professional development opportunities and workshops
 - c. The TEEN program
- Are there differences between homeless students and their housed peers in the following areas?
 - a. Absences/truancy
 - b. Positive climate responses on the District-wide survey
 - c. PSSA and Keystone exam performance
 - d. The percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade

Why is this study important to SDP?

- The ECYEH office conducts outreach to schools via counselors, secretaries, and principals in an effort to raise awareness about homelessness and working with homeless students and families.
- There is a high risk of students moving from school to school for those who are experiencing homelessness. Even after accounting for this, homeless students have significantly lower reading and math achievement scores as compared to housed peers (Fantuzzo et al, 2012). As such, it is critical that homeless students be allowed to remain in their school of origin. The ECYEH office educates families about these rights and assists with the paperwork required for students to stay enrolled at their original school.

What is the ECYEH program?

The ECYEH office in SDP has three priorities:

1. Utilize information-sharing to track and assist homeless students in collaboration with other agencies.
2. Provide support to homeless students upon entering emergency housing.
3. Increase awareness of educational rights/issues with homelessness among school/agency staff and families.

Sample Snapshot

Time Period: 2015-2016 SY
Total Identified Homeless Youth: 4,532

SDP students: 2,643
Charter students: 686
Not yet school-aged (0-5 year olds): 1,079
Other students: 138

Living Arrangements of K-12 Students

Shelter: 57%
Doubled Up: 41%
Transitional: 1%
Other/Hotel: 1%

Findings

- **ECYEH approaches are resulting in greater identification of homeless students.** ECYEH was able to identify 100 more charter school students in 2015-2016 than in the 2014-2015 SY by having a liaison from the ECYEH office working with the charter schools to assist in the identification of these students. ECYEH continues to identify a similar percentage of students in the 2015-16 SY as in the 2014-15 SY.
- **ECYEH continues to provide services to families and disseminate information on the educational rights of homeless students through professional development opportunities and workshops.** ECYEH continues to service students by providing enrollment assistance, uniform vouchers, transportation passes, additional funding for school supplies, as well as tutoring and the TEEN program. Thirty-six workshops were offered for providers (such as those who work at shelters), school staff, parents, and students during the 2015-2016 school year with nearly 300 attendees.
- **While there are gaps between students identified as homeless and other District students with truancy, engagement, and achievement, less of a gap exists when examining school climate.** Students identified as homeless experienced higher truancy rates and lower scores on standardized tests such as the PSSAs and Keystones, as well as lower rates of promotion to the next grade in high school. However, climate scores from the District-wide survey indicated a smaller gap between these students and other District students in terms of their self-reported safety and sense of belonging. This may indicate that although students identified as homeless experience more struggles in certain areas than their housed peers, school may provide a certain stabilizing environment for these students.

What are the education rights of homeless students?

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homelessness as a lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

The Act requires schools to enroll homeless children and youth immediately, even if they lack normally required documents, such as immunization records or proof of residence.

The Act also requires schools to provide transportation to and from the child's school of origin if it is in the child's or youth's best interest.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the 2015-2016 evaluation, ORE provides the following recommendations for future implementation of the ECYEH program:

- Membership for the TEEN program has been declining over the last three years. For the 2015-2016 SY, fewer activities and events took place than in the prior school year. Finding ways to bolster membership in addition to the development of more activities such as college visits may be a focus for the 2016-2017 SY.
- Services that are provided could benefit from better documentation. For example, providing sign-in sheets to ORE for workshops and PDs, tracking coat donations for students that come into the office, and tracking tutoring (which students receive services on which days and in which subjects).