

Qualitative Feedback on the Educating Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program Activities, 2016-2017¹

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Summary of Key Findings:

- Between March and June of 2017, the ECYEH office attended 14 events: one workshop, two parent/community meetings, seven school site visits, and four staff/provider trainings.
- The TEEN program offered diverse content for a core group of participants.
- The tutoring program benefitted a small number of students who came consistently, but tutors found it challenging to adapt sessions for students who only attended once or twice.
- Based on survey responses, most people who interacted with the ECYEH office were satisfied.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides support, in the form of grant funding, to school districts in Pennsylvania that have a significant homeless student population through the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program. Priorities of the grant include tracking homeless students in collaboration with other city agencies, distribution information to schools and families about student rights under the McKinney-Vento Act, providing support to students (such as assistance with continued enrollment in school, transportation passes, and school supplies/uniforms), and running programs for homeless students such as the TEEN program and tutoring.

Research Questions

1. To what extent was the ECYEH able to disseminate information on educational rights of students identified as homeless through professional development opportunities and workshops?
2. To what extent did the ECYEH implement the TEEN program?
3. To what extent did the ECYEH implement the tutoring program?
4. To what extent are students and families satisfied with the support provided?

¹ See also the SDP Research Brief entitled: "Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program Services and Student Outcomes, 2016-2017" for additional programmatic information.

Methods

The ECYEH office provided records of programming data to the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) for March-June 2017. ECYEH program staff conduct workshops at schools and local homeless shelters to increase awareness of policies regarding homeless students and programs offered by ECYEH. Staff distribute short surveys at these events to gauge participants' satisfaction. For the 2016-17 school year, ORE received workshop surveys from four workshops throughout the year (with 22 survey responses). ECYEH also has an electronic satisfaction survey linked in their email signatures, which received 36 responses (most of whom were school staff) in 2016-17. The survey assessed the level of satisfaction experienced by the respondent, what they liked best about the supports/services offered by the ECYEH office, and if there were any supports/services they would like to see offered. Lastly, ORE conducted interviews with the Coordinator of the TEEN program, two of the tutors, and the Coordinator for Programs and Community Outreach.

What We Found

One of the main functions of the ECYEH office is conducting community outreach to families experiencing homelessness to inform them of their options and available supports (e.g., transpasses, uniforms). ECYEH staff conduct workshops at shelters and often go to events hosted by the Family and Community Engagement Office or the School Advisory Councils. In addition to providing families with information, ECYEH also runs a TEEN program and a tutoring program. The TEEN program was offered to homeless high school students with an interest in learning about career readiness and post-secondary education options. Tutoring is offered after school two days a week to students of all ages.

The ECYEH staff considered starting a pre-teen program but felt there would not be enough participation because many parents would prefer that students that age babysit siblings. For many families experiencing homelessness, school-related activities may not be their first priority and ECYEH staff feel this contributes to parents not bringing students to programming. Another challenge is getting information out to families about the programming.

ECYEH staff attended 14 events between March and June 2017

Between March and June of 2017, the ECYEH office attended 14 events: one workshop, two parent/community meetings, seven school site visits, and four trainings for school staff or providers (those who work at homeless shelters). At events where parents are present, ECYEH staff discuss services available to parents of homeless children and rights of homeless students under the McKinney-Vento act (for example, a child can choose to remain enrolled at the same school despite having moved into a shelter that may be in a different catchment area). ECYEH provide professional development to school staff, central office staff, and providers around the McKinney-Vento Act, emphasize the prevalence of homelessness in Philadelphia, and outline the types of assistance available to homeless students. The number of attendees at each event ranged from one to 41 and included provider staff, school staff, and parents. The ECYEH office did not identify

challenges with workshops; ECYEH staff usually travel to places where parents/staff are already convening, and parents at workshops are usually receptive because this is new information to them.

The TEEN program was helpful for a small number of students

According to the Coordinator of the TEEN program, the program happened on Monday and Wednesday evenings from 4-6 at the school district central office for most of the school year (originally, programming only occurred on Wednesdays and then the coordinator added a second day). Monday programming focused on professional development for students, such as college prep or life/business skills. Examples of sessions are financial literacy workshops and an Inspire series that brings in local professionals to speak about what they do and obstacles they overcame so that students can see their goals are tangible. Wednesdays were geared towards using creativity as a way for students to channel their feelings (using photography, writing, acting, etc.). ECYEH staff have also taken students to volunteer in the community. Students complete an intake form at the beginning of the program that asks for their interests and their GPA, and the results from these forms help to inform programming.

In 2016-17, the TEEN program had consistent participation from 8-12 students between the ages of 14-18. The consistency of those students allowed the group to form a tight bond, something the coordinator highlighted as a success for the program. Another success that the coordinator mentioned was the amount and variety of programming ECYEH was able to offer. Another benefit of having a small amount of students was that the coordinator was able to build rapport with each of the students and offer additional supports, such as helping them apply for college, navigating financial aid, and going on college visits. While the logistics of coordinating schedules did not allow college visits to happen as a group trip, it was done with individual students. The Coordinator of the TEEN program also listed several challenges, including participation from schools, not being able to visit all schools to promote the program, students at that age being secretive about their homeless status, students having a job being a barrier to participation, and making sure to have programming that meets student interests.

Unpredictable attendance limited the benefits of the tutoring program

The 2016-17 school year was the third year for the ECYEH tutoring program, which happened on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 4-6 at the school district central office. Students were provided dinner at the beginning of each session. The tutors were SDP teachers who apply and interview for this additional role (only full-time SDP teachers are considered). Additionally, two coordinators from the Office of Specialized Services volunteered to assist with the program by providing 1:1 reading support to students. ECYEH had stopped having tutors at shelters because the process was not being monitored, but when sessions were only offered at central office, ECYEH lost participation from older students. Towards the end of the 2016-17 school year, EYCEH did place a tutor in a shelter in addition to sessions at central office. The shelter agreed to recruit students and make sure they attend sessions regularly. This arrangement will remain in the 2017-18 school year provided a sufficient number of students continue to attend.

The tutors we spoke to said their role was clear and the main goal of the program was to improve students' overall academic performance by providing extra support in areas where they are struggling. Both were recruited to work with students in certain grades/subjects but wound up having to adjust that based on which students showed up to sessions. There was no expectation about the number of sessions for students, and while tutors could occasionally work with up to 12 students in one session, the average was between three and five. Both tutors had a small group of students (three to five) who attended consistently, but sometimes students would only come for one or two sessions. Students who attended consistently worked with the same tutor, which allowed the tutor to prepare materials in advance for the students in areas where the students were having trouble. Tutors learned which areas needed remediation after getting to know the student, and sometimes learned from parents when they dropped students off for the sessions. Usually tutors did not do homework with students, unless there was a specific question. The intent was to have students stay for the full two hours of the session; while students sometimes came late, they did not usually leave early.

Both tutors said the success of the program was that the core group of students who came consistently were doing well and benefitting from the program. However, the challenge was that other students would come for a session or two here and there. This unpredictability made it hard for the tutors to plan lessons in advance and prepare enough materials, and they often had to adapt their plans during the sessions based on who attended. Transportation issues may have been one factor in why students did not attend consistently. Tutors also said it would be helpful to have more curriculum materials to use with the students.

Most people who interacted with the ECYEH Office were satisfied

At parent workshops, ECYEH staff discuss services available to parents of homeless children and rights of homeless students under the McKinney-Vento act (for example, a child can choose to remain enrolled at the same school despite having moved into a shelter that may be in a different catchment area). Respondents (n=22) were overall satisfied with workshops in the 2016-17 school year, rating the content as an average of 4.5 out of 5, participants' knowledge after the session as 4.6, and the practicality of the session at 4.5 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Workshop Survey Ratings Were High

Item	Average Rating (Out of 5)
Content: Was this session appropriate for you?	4.5
Knowledge: Do you understand student's rights under the McKinney-Vento Act?	4.6
Practicality: Can the information be used to support your school or student?	4.5

Participants who had previously interacted with the ECYEH office were asked about the timeliness of receiving services. Out of the seven people who requested transportation assistance and the 12 people who requested school supply/uniform assistance, all of them reported receiving services,

though the amount of time it took to receive services varied from 1-2 days to more than 14 days (Table 2).

Table 2: Everyone who Requested Services Received Assistance

Service	Never Received Assistance	1-2 Days	3-5 Days	6-10 Days	11-14 Days	More than 14 Days
Transportation assistance	0	1	3	1	0	2
School supply/uniform assistance	0	3	2	1	3	3

Most respondents to the office satisfaction survey (90%) said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the supports/services they received from the ECYEH office, though the other 10% said they were very dissatisfied. When asked what they liked best about the supports/services offered by the ECYEH office, responses fell into three common themes: about 63% of responses mentioned the timeliness of responses to requests, another 48% mentioned the helpfulness of the staff, and 11% said the informative nature of materials/response provided. Respondents' suggestions for future services or supports provided by the ECYEH office included gift cards for food, uniform assistance for schools where uniforms have to be bought from a specific place, a list of city resources for homeless families, services for undocumented students, transportation for tutoring, access to housing supports, and providing more services on site at shelters since transportation and childcare are barriers for families to come to the SDP offices.