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Using What We Know: Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Patricia Julianelle[1]

INTRODUCTION

> *I haven't met a single runaway youth yet who didn't leave home for a good reason.*
>
> Sue Kanthak, Homeless Program Coordinator
> Rockford Public Schools, Illinois

In this report, the term *unaccompanied youth* refers to teenagers and young adults who lack safe, stable housing and who are not in the care of a parent or guardian. They may have run away from home or have been forced to leave by their parents. Unaccompanied youth live in a variety of temporary situations, including sharing the housing of friends or relatives (sometimes known as couch surfing); living in an emergency shelter or transitional living program; living in a car or campground; and staying in a park, abandoned building, train or bus station, under a bridge, or in another public place.

Between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away from their homes each year.[2] Generally, youth leave home due to severe dysfunction in their families, including circumstances that put their safety and well-being at risk. Unfortunately, physical and sexual abuse in the home is common; studies of unaccompanied youth have found that 20 to 50 percent were sexually abused in their homes, while 40 to 60 percent were physically abused.[3] Parental drug use or alcoholism and conflicts with stepparents or partners also provoke youth to run away from home.[4] In a survey of unaccompanied

youth in California, over half felt that being homeless was as safe as, or safer than, being at home.[5]

Many young people are forced out of their homes by parents who disapprove of their sexual orientation or pregnancy. For example, 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth in one study identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender, compared to only 3 to 5 percent of the overall population.[6] Over 50 percent of youth in shelters and on the streets have reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving but did not care.[7] As a result, less than half of unaccompanied youth are considered to have a realistic prospect of family reunification.[8] Finally, many unaccompanied youth should be receiving foster care services; several studies have shown that between 20 and 55 percent of homeless youth are under the care of the child welfare system.[9]

Tragically, homelessness places youth at extreme risk of victimization and violence. Youth living in public places are often victims of physical assaults, sexual assaults, and robberies. Crowded living situations and exposure to the elements lead to higher rates of illness. Some youth are forced to engage in survival sex in exchange for shelter, food, or money. The mental and emotional stress of homelessness leads to increased risks of substance abuse, depression, and even suicide.[10]

In that context, school can be an oasis for unaccompanied youth, a place where they can find security and support and obtain the skills they need to survive safely on their own.

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) is a federal law designed to increase the school enrollment, attendance, and success of children and youth experiencing homelessness.[11] The McKinney-Vento Act was passed in 1987 and was reauthorized as part of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001.[12] Basically, the McKinney-Vento Act requires that state and local educational agencies provide students experiencing homelessness with school access and support

their attendance and success. Key provisions of the act include the following:

- Students who are homeless can remain in one school, even if their temporary living situation is located in another school district or attendance area, if that is in their best interest. Schools must provide transportation.[13]
- Children and youth who are homeless can enroll in school and begin attending immediately, even if they cannot produce normally required documents, such as birth certificates, proof of guardianship, immunization records, or proof of residency.[14]
- Every school district and county office of education must designate a homeless liaison to ensure the McKinney-Vento Act is implemented in the district or county. Homeless liaisons must do outreach to identify unaccompanied youth, assist them with school enrollment, and refer them to health and other community services.[15]
- Every state must designate a state coordinator to ensure the McKinney-Vento Act is implemented.[16]
- Both state coordinators and homeless liaisons must collaborate with other agencies serving homeless youth and families to enhance educational attendance and success.[17]
- State departments of education, county offices of education, and school districts must review and revise their policies and practices to eliminate barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth.[18]

The McKinney-Vento Act contains many other provisions designed to support the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. It is a critical tool in any effort to help unaccompanied youth meet their educational goals.

Studies, the experience of educators and service providers, and most importantly, interviews with unaccompanied youth show that the vast majority of youth want to go to school and think their education is very

important.[19] In fact, in many cases unaccompanied youth value school more than their housed peers, recognizing all too well that school is their only hope for a brighter future. Sadly, research also shows that as many as three-quarters of older homeless youth do not finish high school.[20] Being disconnected from school robs youth of a critical resource for meeting immediate needs and building a stable future. In one study, formerly homeless youth reported that leaving school was a turning point in their lives and that their situations worsened afterward.[21]

If unaccompanied youth value education so much, why are so many out of school? The most significant barrier to unaccompanied youth's educational success is the fact that they must struggle daily to provide for their basic needs while managing the extreme physical and emotional stress of homelessness.[22] While some youth are able to succeed in school despite their homelessness, they do so only with extraordinary effort, extensive assistance from educators and other caring adults, and numerous supportive services. Even those youth who are able to find safe housing and positive adult support face constant uncertainty regarding how long those arrangements will last.

The implication is clear: to confront the educational challenges of unaccompanied young people, policymakers must confront homelessness. When unaccompanied young people receive the physical and emotional resources they need to meet their educational goals, they can be successful. For example, at least one study has demonstrated that most unaccompanied youth who are in school are working at their grade level.[23] Many unaccompanied youth graduate high school and continue on to stable jobs or higher education.[24]

Interviews with youth corroborate this approach. When asked what support they need to attend school, unaccompanied youth generally focus on their basic needs, such as housing, employment, family support, financial stability, personal hygiene, mental health, and emotional well-being.[25] Perhaps most importantly, "the vast majority of those who answer

questions about education said they would want to go back to school if they could."[26]

This article presents seven principles to provide young people with the physical and emotional resources they need to meet their educational goals. These principles include action steps for national policymakers, state legislatures and agencies, local policymakers, school district staff and administrators, and service providers. The seven principles are as follows:

1. Young people's basic needs must be met if they are to achieve their educational goals. Meeting basic needs includes revising housing and shelter polices, improving youth's access to social services and medical care, and making creative use of existing resources.
2. If young people feel that school is a safe and supportive place for them, they will be much more likely to enroll, attend, and succeed. Schools can support unaccompanied youth by providing consistent mentorship, instituting programs to welcome young people, and working to revise child welfare reporting requirements.
3. More consistent implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act will facilitate the educational attendance and success of youth. Strategies to improve McKinney-Vento implementation include ensuring that state and local staff have adequate authority and the capacity to perform their duties and also to implement procedures for school enrollment and the full participation of unaccompanied youth.
4. When schools adopt flexible policies and programs to accommodate the demands of homelessness and independence, they offer unaccompanied youth an environment where they can be more engaged and successful. Some policies that facilitate youth's success are waiving enrollment deadlines and fees, awarding partial credits, offering creative credit recovery programs, and establishing flexible school hours.
5. Many unaccompanied youth have become disengaged from school and must be drawn back in by caring, persistent adults. A greater

investment in dropout recovery programs specifically focused on unaccompanied youth is essential.

6. Improvements in child welfare policies and practices to reduce the number of youth in the child welfare system who are homeless, and accessibility of supportive services for unaccompanied youth, are essential for youth to achieve their educational goals. To support unaccompanied youth, child welfare policies should focus on rapid-response family crisis services, transition planning for foster youth, and mechanisms to ensure child welfare agencies take the youth's wishes into account.
7. Any effort to support unaccompanied youth's educational success will be more effective if all youth-serving agencies coordinate their efforts, accept joint responsibility for outcomes, and involve young people as active partners. With 339 federal programs in twelve different departments serving disadvantaged youth, collaboration and youth involvement are necessary.

These seven principles are based on what we know as educators and advocates dedicated to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Each strategy endeavors to recognize the individuality of every unaccompanied young person. The implementation of these seven principles would help meet youth's basic physical and emotional needs, empower them to meet their educational goals, and give them the tools to lead productive, fulfilling lives.

I. USING WHAT WE KNOW TO SUPPORT THE EDUCATION OF UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH

The following principles and the continuum of strategies they encompass should guide the efforts of state policymakers, local policymakers, educators, and service providers to support unaccompanied youth in meeting their educational and professional goals. They were developed through interviews with over one hundred National Association for the

Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) members from across the country. The author interviewed NAEHCY members in person or on the telephone between April and June of 2007. Interviewees included local homeless education liaisons, McKinney-Vento State Coordinators, attorneys, school nurses, and other advocates. Appendix A contains a list of those interviewees whose contributions were the most significant. Additional information was obtained from a 2006–2007 survey of over three hundred unaccompanied youth in California.[27]

II. YOUNG PEOPLE'S BASIC NEEDS MUST BE MET

> *It's very difficult to talk to a youth about education when he doesn't have a place to stay. We need to provide the whole package for these kids.*
>
> Karen Fessler, Education Advocate
> Project Connect, Cincinnati Public Schools, Ohio

The most significant barrier to unaccompanied youth's educational success is the fact that they must struggle daily to provide for their basic needs, while managing the extreme physical and emotional stress of homelessness.[28] Interviews of unaccompanied youth reveal that the young people's reasons for leaving school are entangled with their trajectories into homelessness and with the realities of homelessness itself.[29]

To help unaccompanied youth meet their basic needs, states and communities should create more emergency and transitional shelters, independent living programs, and affordable permanent housing programs for unaccompanied youth. Additionally, they shuold work to ensure access to existing programs; ensure that unaccompanied youth are not denied public benefits or social services—including medical and mental health care—due to the lack of parental consent; and ensure that unaccompanied

youth have access to school-based resources to assist them in meeting their basic needs.

A. Create More Temporary and Permanent Housing Solutions and Ensure Access to Existing Programs

It is extremely difficult for a young person to concentrate on school when she is sleeping on the street. Not surprisingly, the last evaluation of the federally funded youth shelter program found that shelters and transitional living programs produced positive outcomes in the area of education: school participation among youth in shelter doubled after services commenced, compared to the participation rate thirty days prior to accessing the shelter. Additionally, the proportion of youth in transitional living projects attending college was three times that of homeless youth who were not in a transitional living program.[30] Another study found that shelter use increased self-esteem while also decreasing school expulsions, suspensions, and detentions.[31]

Although shelter programs for unaccompanied youth, such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, do exist, these initiatives barely scratch the surface of the need for emergency shelter, transitional housing, and independent living programs for unaccompanied youth. For example, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Basic Center Shelter Program turned away 2,887 youth during 2006, and 2,253 in the first three quarters of 2007.[32] The Transitional Living Program turned away 2,232 in 2006, and 1,511 in the first three quarters of 2007.[33] It is important to note that these figures do not account for the well-documented fact that most homeless youth do not come into contact with shelters at all.[34] In fact, studies have found that as few as one in twelve homeless youth ever come into contact with the shelter system.[35]

An increase in funding for existing shelter and housing programs and the establishment of significant additional programs would have a direct impact on the number of young people forced to sleep in parks, abandoned

buildings, and on the street. The funding would help reduce assaults, robberies, and illnesses among unaccompanied youth.[36] In short, increasing federal and state funding for such programs would significantly impact the physical and emotional well-being of unaccompanied youth. With greater physical and emotional stability, unaccompanied youth will have greater capacity to attend and succeed in school.[37]

At the same time, policies to ensure unaccompanied youth can access existing shelter and housing resources would also increase their access to safe housing. Many shelters and housing programs refuse to serve youth based on their age, gender, or lack of a guardian.[38] Other shelters do not accept homeless families intact, for example, many separate teenage boys from their families and force them to fend for themselves.[39] Eliminating these barriers would increase youth's access to safe living situations. Further, many emergency shelters limit youth's stay to two or three weeks, forcing them into a pattern of almost constant mobility.[40] Increasing the maximum length of stay at emergency shelters would increase the likelihood that youth who are in school can continue to attend the same school and focus on their education and mental health needs.

An example of efforts to combat age discrimination in shelter programs is a recent amendment of California state law to extend access to shelter and housing programs to unemancipated youth under the age of eighteen who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or who have run away from home.[41]

Finally, it is important that youth's access to services, shelter, or housing is not limited based on the youth's particular living situation. Homeless service programs funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are unable to serve youth who are staying temporarily with friends, relatives, or in motels.[42] This is because HUD defines the term "homeless" to exclude individuals staying temporarily in others' homes or in motels.[43] However, due to the shortage of shelter space and exclusionary shelter rules and to avoid sleeping outside, many

unaccompanied youth stay in such temporary accommodations. Public schools, which are required by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act to serve youth staying temporarily in others' homes or in motels, have documented that a full 63 percent of homeless children and youth nationally live in such situations.[44] None of those youth are eligible for HUD-funded services for homeless individuals.[45]

Since current federal law limits HUD's services to hundreds of thousands of homeless youth who find temporary shelter in motels or with friends or relatives, other federal programs and state programs are even more critical resources for these young people. Therefore, state-funded shelter and housing programs must be available to all homeless youth and not limited based on their particular living situation.

B. Ensure that Unaccompanied Youth Receive Public Benefits and Social Services, Despite the Lack of Parental Consent

Access to public benefits and social services, including medical and mental health care, is a critical step in ensuring that youth can attend and succeed in school. Unaccompanied youth are at an elevated risk for illnesses and mental health problems.[46] Without access to health care, these difficulties will severely limit a young person's ability to attend school consistently and to concentrate on his or her educational goals. Despite this reality, most unaccompanied youth are legally unable to access even the most basic health care without the consent of a parent.[47]

Many states have statutes that permit access to certain kinds of medical and mental health care for unaccompanied youth.[48] Commonly, youth are able to consent to treatment related to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Some statutes allow youth to access a limited amount of mental health and substance abuse treatment.[49] Most allow youth with children to consent to their children's health care (though ironically, not their own).[50] Despite these policies, most unaccompanied youth seeking general medical care and dental care will be refused treatment, because their state laws

require the consent of a parent or legal guardian.[51] Similarly, youth also struggle to obtain medical insurance without the signature and advocacy of a parent.[52] Policies to address these barriers and ensure that unaccompanied youth are not denied health care will make a significant difference in their physical and mental health.

The Alaska state legislature has recognized the reality that many young people are living independently and need to be able to access medical care without parental consent. Alaska state law provides that "a minor who is living apart from the minor's parents or legal guardian and who is managing the minor's own financial affairs, regardless of the source or extent of income, may give consent to medical and dental services for the minor."[53] Similar laws in other states would ensure that unaccompanied youth do not have to live without medical care.

Since they are not in the care of parents or guardians, homeless youth must meet their own basic needs. Public benefits such as food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) offer youth access to nutrition and income that can help them meet their basic needs. However, homeless youth face many barriers to accessing public benefits. For example, TANF programs have housing requirements that homeless youth may not be able to meet.[54] Although a parental signature is generally not required, youth on their own are often refused benefits without their parent's signature.

Homeless youth may also lack information about the services for which they are eligible, transportation to benefits offices, and the capacity to advocate on their own behalf or obtain representation to ensure they receive the services to which they are entitled. Sue Kanthak, the McKinney-Vento liaison from Rockford, Illinois, noted, "Minors are eligible for food stamps, a medical card, and a cash grant. But the public aid workers usually won't give them the benefits. They just tell the youth to go home. Now, if a caseworker or I go with them, then they get the benefits." Service providers need to know about current law and receive instructions regarding how to

eliminate barriers for unaccompanied youth, to ensure they are not denied access. Barriers that prevent homeless youth from accessing public benefits and social services are barriers to their educational success.

C. Ensure that Unaccompanied Youth have Access to School-based Resources

The public school system offers a wealth of resources that can help unaccompanied youth meet their basic needs, including school meals (unaccompanied youth are automatically eligible for federal free breakfast and lunch programs and are not required to complete an application);[55] resources of home economics classes, such as laundry and cooking facilities; showers; lockers; clothing banks; personal hygiene supplies; bus passes; school counselors and social workers; school nurses and on-campus health clinics; and parenting classes, daycare, and other resources for teen parents.

These resources are already in existence on thousands of school campuses. Making them accessible to unaccompanied youth does not require additional funding. It merely requires creativity and a willingness to think outside the box to support unaccompanied youth. Many schools have adopted policies and practices to provide young people with access to these resources. States should support such policies and practices, which protect the dignity and privacy of unaccompanied youth by ensuring that youth can take advantage of services discretely, often before or after school.

Some examples of schools opening up their preexisting resources to homeless youth include the following:

- A high school in Bethel, Washington, provides homeless youth with access to the school nurse, school showers, and locker rooms before school, study space in the school library after school, and a supply of socks, underwear, toiletries, and school supplies in all the counseling centers, which youth may access as needed.

- A high school in Cincinnati, Ohio, lets homeless youth use school showers and do their laundry in the home economics class laundry facility before school.
- Alameda Unified School District, California, partnered with its County Public Health Department to open a full-service health clinic on every high school campus in the district. The clinics were funded by a grant from the California Department of Public Health to support such collaborations between county public health departments and public schools. They are open to anyone in the community, which allows them to help engage young people who are not attending school, as well as to serve those who are enrolled. Each clinic contains information on school enrollment and at least one staff member who has received training on the McKinney-Vento Act, the needs of unaccompanied youth, and strategies to attract youth to school.[56]

IV. If Young People Feel Safe and Supported in School, They Will Enroll, Attend, and Succeed

> *Your reputation precedes you. Students start to bring friends in. If you help them, they will come.*
>
> Jonathan Zook, Teacher/Homeless Liaison
> Project Return, Portland Public Schools, Oregon

Unaccompanied youth are forced to become experts at protecting themselves and fighting for their daily survival because of the risks that are inherent in being homeless and on their own. Despite their desire to pursue their education, they are very unlikely to engage in school if they perceive school as a dangerous place for them. In fact, many studies have found that homeless youth tend to distrust adults and rarely initiate contact with service providers.[57] Thus, unaccompanied youth will be attracted to school

and nurture their academic success by the implementation of strategies to make schools safe and supportive environments.

School safety is a broad and important issue largely beyond the scope of this document. The purpose of this section is to suggest policy initiatives specific to the needs and experiences of unaccompanied youth. As such, it focuses on three basic tactics that have been proven to be successful:[58]

- Assigning each unaccompanied youth a consistent educational advocate or mentor in the school;
- Offering programs to make schools safe and welcoming for groups of young people who tend to be overrepresented among unaccompanied youth, including young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, pregnant or parenting, older than traditional high school age, recovering from trauma, or recently returned to school after an extended period of nonattendance; and
- Clarifying state child welfare reporting requirements to ensure that youth do not hesitate to enroll in school due to fears that they will be referred to police or child welfare or taken into custody.

Each of these strategies is based on the same basic tenet, which educators and service providers working with unaccompanied youth highlight as the key to establishing partnerships with youth for their educational and personal success: schools must build trust with youth.[59]

A. Assign Each Unaccompanied Youth an Educational Advocate in the School

> *Personal contact right from the outset is key. Youth who have every reason not to trust anyone find out they can trust people here. We are cheerleaders, advocates, and nags, depending on what the youth needs. And they find out we are on their side and want to work with them.*
>
> Diane Demoski, School Nurse
> Burchell High School, Matanuska-Susitna School District, Alaska

"Research shows that when at-risk youth are linked with a well-matched, screened, and trained mentor, they are likely to improve their academic achievement while decreasing their involvement with the juvenile justice system."[60] Educators who have worked successfully with unaccompanied youth advise that assigning a consistent adult, educational advocate, or mentor to partner with each student from the moment she arrives at school until she graduates is key to engaging youth and making school a safe and supportive place for them.[61] Many school districts have implemented mentorship programs for unaccompanied youth. The experience in these districts shows that mentoring significantly increases youth's attendance, engagement in school, and success.[62] State policies to encourage mentoring/educational advocates and state funding to expand existing programs for unaccompanied youth would advance this proven strategy.

Mentorship and educational advocacy programs for unaccompanied youth take various forms. For example, the following school district based programs require little or no extra funding and have proven highly successful in supporting youth.

Table 1

Location	Primary staff	Structure
Portland Public Schools, OR	McKinney-Vento homeless liaison	The liaison acts as an educational advocate for unaccompanied youth. The liaison is a certified teacher, with his office in the high school with the highest concentration of homeless youth. He keeps updated records on youth's attendance and grades and checks students' progress regularly. If a student's attendance level or grades fall, the liaison intervenes to help the student get back on track.[63]
Rockford School District, IL	Full-time tutor (funded through Title I, Part A)	The tutor works exclusively with homeless seniors, spending one day a week at each of the district's five high schools. Like Portland's liaison, the tutor reviews each student's attendance records and grades and sets individual goals with the students. They meet weekly, so the students are constantly monitored and kept on track for graduation.[64]
Burchell High School, Mat-Su School District, AK	Every adult at the high school	Each unaccompanied youth is assigned a mentor from among high school staff. No mentor works with more than fifteen students. The mentor follows the student's attendance, progress, and needs on a daily basis.[65]

Private, nonprofit organizations have also partnered with school districts to create successful, consistent mentor programs. One example of such a program is Youth On Their Own in Tucson, Arizona.

Youth On Their Own (YOTO) is a community-based project, which has spread to over thirty schools in Pima County and has assisted over eight thousand six hundred young people. YOTO works with unaccompanied youth, ages thirteen to twenty-one, who are referred by school counselors, teachers, social service agencies, or their peers. Each youth partners with a mentor who remains with the youth until high school graduation. Working together, the mentor and youth identify a safe, long-term place to stay and concentrate on educational goals. YOTO provides clothing, hygiene items, funds for emergency assistance with basic needs or school fees, bus passes, health care, tutoring, job placement, college scholarships, and a monthly stipend dependent on grades and school attendance. The program has a 90 percent graduation rate, in a county with a dropout rate of 57 percent.[66]

State education agencies also sponsor mentor programs, often as part of their efforts in dropout prevention and recovery. California's Pupil Motivation and Maintenance Program is an example of a highly successful state-sponsored mentoring program.[67]

The defining feature of California's Pupil Motivation and Maintenance (M&M) Program is a dedicated dropout prevention specialist, or Outreach Consultant. Outreach Consultants create "success plans" for students, which set individual student goals and courses of instruction based on educational strengths and interests. They provide the kind of individual attention, consistency, and accountability youth need to focus on their educational goals despite the demands of their living situation. Outreach Consultants can also be a resource to draw out unaccompanied youth who have been hesitant to identify themselves as homeless.

The California Department of Education has collected data demonstrating the success of Outreach Consultants. The employment of an outreach consultant has proven to be a remarkable support for some of the most

challenged schools in California. Dropout rates in the high schools are down. . . . Although the M&M program is focused on preventing school dropouts, it also has a significant impact on school-wide student achievement. . . . In 2002, 65 percent of M&M schools in California met or exceeded their API [Academic Performance Index] target compared to 52 percent of California schools.[68]

McKinney-Vento liaisons have attested to its particular benefits for unaccompanied youth. Meagan Meloy, program coordinator for the Butte County Office of Education in California, says that

> [m]ost Butte County high schools employ Outreach Consultants who provide outreach, referral, and support to any students in need on their campuses. They are not specifically hired to outreach to homeless or unaccompanied youth, but they are great resources for this population. Our County Office McKinney-Vento program works closely with all of the outreach consultants at the school sites.

The educational and professional success of unaccompanied youth would be greatly enhanced by a significant increase in funding for programs, such as those described, which provide unaccompanied youth with consistent, intensive mentoring/educational advocacy.

B. Develop Programs and Procedures to Make Schools Safe and Welcoming for Groups That Tend to Be Overrepresented Among Unaccompanied Youth

It is never easy to feel different from one's peers. This is particularly true during adolescence. If young people feel unwelcome, marginalized, or uncomfortable in school, they are less likely to attend.[69] Therefore, programs and procedures to welcome and support students who may feel isolated are important elements in enhancing their engagement and success in school.

Several subgroups of young people, who stand out from their peers, tend to be overrepresented among unaccompanied youth. For example, in one

study, 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender, compared to only 3–5 percent of the overall population.[70] Unaccompanied youth are also more likely than other youth to become pregnant, to have large gaps in school attendance, and to have experienced trauma both at home and while homeless.[71]

Mentors and educational advocates can play a key role in welcoming students and assisting them to find their niche in the school community. Other helpful programs and procedures might include the following:

- Designating a safe, drop-in space where youth can go any time they feel overwhelmed or stressed, such as the school nurse's office;
- Offering ongoing orientation activities throughout the school year so youth entering after the start of the year can tour the school, meet key staff, be informed of school rules and expectations, and learn about academic and non-academic activities;
- Assigning new students a compatible peer mentor to orient them to school customs and activities;
- Establishing clubs and support groups for groups who tend to be marginalized in school; and
- Conducting campus-wide sensitivity and awareness activities.

These and other measures to make schools safe and welcoming for unaccompanied youth will enhance their educational success.

C. Clarify State Child Welfare Reporting Requirements to Quell Youth's Fear That They Will Be Referred to Police or Child Welfare

Every state has laws that require school personnel to contact law enforcement or child welfare services in certain circumstances, to protect students' health and safety.[72] Without reasonable limitations, these reporting requirements erect significant barriers to the enrollment of unaccompanied youth. If a young person believes that enrolling in school will result in her being taken into custody by the police or the child welfare system, there is little chance she will enroll in school. To eliminate this barrier, state

reporting requirements must be clarified to ensure that unaccompanied youth are able to enroll in school without being referred to law enforcement or child welfare, unless there is an immediate danger to their health or safety.

In many cases, school personnel could reasonably suspect that an unaccompanied youth has been neglected.[73] However, such reporting often hurts, rather than helps, youth. It is hard to imagine a youth desiring to be taken into police custody or returned by police to a home the youth has fled. Although one may assume that child welfare involvement would be less chilling than law enforcement, it is also important to recognize that a very high percentage of unaccompanied youth are or have been under the care of child welfare and feel the system has failed them.[74] In that context, requiring schools to report unaccompanied youth to law enforcement or child welfare creates a nearly insurmountable barrier to school enrollment for many young people.

There are less hostile ways to provide protection and services to unaccompanied youth and preserve the rights of parents who truly desire to care for their children. One option would be to revise reporting requirements to clarify that school personnel should not refer unaccompanied youth to law enforcement or child welfare in the absence of an immediate danger to their health or safety. This would help eliminate young people's uneasiness about enrolling in school. At the same time, parents who fear their children have been abducted or want their children to come home can report the youth as missing. School personnel can check the missing children's database to see if a youth has been reported and, if so, report the youth to child welfare. That agency can then investigate the situation and protect the safety of the youth.

It is important to clarify that unaccompanied youth should not be presumed to be missing. If school staff suspects that a young person may have been reported missing, it can immediately investigate that suspicion by contacting the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at

www.missingkids.com or 1-800-THE-LOST. Some states have streamlined this process by requiring law enforcement and schools to work together to mark the school records of students reporting missing.

Whatever the policy, school staff should inform youth of reporting requirements up front, so youth can choose what to disclose.

V. CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT, THROUGH INCREASED PERSONNEL AND UNIFORM PROCEDURES, WILL ASSIST THE EDUCATIONAL ATTENDANCE AND SUCCESS OF YOUTH

The sole purpose of subtitle VII-B of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is to improve educational access and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness.[75] As such, the McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to enroll homeless youth immediately, even if they cannot produce documents typically required for enrollment, such as school records, proof of guardianship, immunizations, and proof of residency.[76] The act gives youth the right to remain in one school the entire time they are homeless, with transportation provided, as long as it is in their best interest.[77] Even if their living situation forces them to move frequently, they do not have to change schools. To ensure these rights are implemented, the act requires every state to establish an Office of the State Coordinator and every school district and county office of education to designate a homeless liaison.[78]

Many provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act are designed to support school attendance and success of unaccompanied youth specifically. For example, states are required to create professional development and awareness programs for school personnel about runaway and homeless youth.[79] States and homeless liaisons are required to identify youth who are homeless, with particular emphasis on those who are not in school, and provide them access to appropriate secondary education and support services.[80]

To address systemic barriers to educational success for homeless students, the McKinney-Vento Act requires both state and local educational agencies to revise their policies to eliminate barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless young people in school.[81] Thus, state departments of education, county offices of education, and school districts throughout the state ensure that unaccompanied youth can enroll in school and become positively engaged so that they remain.

While states and school districts have made great strides in implementing the McKinney-Vento Act over the last five years, noncompliance continues.[82] There is more work to be done to ensure that law becomes practice and unaccompanied youth are enrolled, attending, and succeeding in school. Policies to advance that goal include increasing state and local McKinney-Vento staff, increasing states' technical assistance to and monitoring of local school districts, and enacting state policies for educational decision making for unaccompanied youth.

A. Increase Dedicated McKinney-Vento Staff at the State Level

The Office of State Coordinator has many mandated duties, including providing technical assistance to all local educational agencies, and ensuring they comply with the McKinney-Vento Act.[83] In many states, the state coordinator is responsible for other federal programs and does not have sufficient time or capacity to accomplish these duties. Depending on the size of the state and the number of school districts, it is difficult to imagine how one part-time employee could fulfill the statutory duties of the state coordinator.

B. Increase Dedicated McKinney-Vento Staff in Local Educational Agencies

The McKinney-Vento Act requires every local educational agency in the country to designate a homeless liaison.[84] The law does not require that the position be full-time. However, it enumerates a long list of legal responsibilities for the liaison, including ensuring that

> (i) homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel and through coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
>
> (ii) homeless children and youths enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, schools of that local educational agency; [and]
>
> (iii) homeless . . . youths receive educational services for which such . . . youths are eligible . . . and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services. [85]

While many homeless liaisons have developed model programs and have been recognized as leaders in their field, others struggle to comply with their basic duties due to lack of time, training, or capacity.[86] Particularly in areas with a higher concentration of homeless children and youth, full-time homeless liaisons would be able to do more outreach, reach more youth, ensure enrollment, connect youth with appropriate services, serve as mentors or educational advocates, and increase community collaborations.

Further, with more time to dedicate to the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless liaisons would be able to provide more technical assistance and training on school campuses. As McKinney-Vento liaison Karen Fessler has noted,

> [i]n the traditional high school, the most important thing is that the staff has been trained and understand the challenges the youth are facing, and they don't set up barriers to these kids every day. The principals, attendance officers, teachers and front office staff need to "get it" and come at it from the right perspective.

Increasing dedicated McKinney-Vento staff would require additional funding in many school districts. The state may encourage the use of funds reserved for homeless students under Title I, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act to increase the capacity of homeless liaisons.[87] However, an infusion of additional federal and state funding, at least to those school districts and county offices of education that are heavily impacted by

homelessness, would allow more homeless liaisons to spend more time serving homeless youth.

C. Enhance State Educational Agencies' Professional Development and Technical Assistance on the McKinney-Vento Act and Unaccompanied Youth to Reach Every Local Agency in the State

The McKinney-Vento Act requires state coordinators to provide professional development and technical assistance to local educational agencies.[88] Further, the McKinney-Vento Act requires every state to enact "programs for school personnel (including principals, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and pupil services personnel) to heighten the awareness of such personnel of the specific needs of runaway and homeless youths."[89]

It may be unreasonable to expect a state coordinator to visit every local educational agency in the state every year or to provide personal professional development about unaccompanied youth to every school district. However, statewide training and technical assistance can occur. Some state initiatives to meet this mandate include:

- Adequately staffing the state coordinator's office.
- Adopting a state-level "train-the trainer" program, through which the state coordinator provides a modest grant and a variety of McKinney-Vento training tools, including a Power Point presentation, video, and toolkit to designated trainers. This is to be accompanied by a workshop on key issues in raising awareness about homelessness, unaccompanied youth, and providing training on the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Enacting a state policy requiring all homeless liaisons to participate in at least one McKinney-Vento training annually, which includes information about unaccompanied youth.
- Enacting a state policy mandating that basic information about the McKinney-Vento Act and unaccompanied youth is included at least once a year in the ongoing, mandatory trainings of principals, school

counselors, teachers, school security officers, child welfare and attendance officers, secretaries, school nurses, and other staff. The state coordinator could provide professional development tools to facilitate these trainings.

- Making good use of technology: for example, in Indiana, a full-time state coordinator supports the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in 335 school districts serving 7,547 identified homeless children and youth. To maximize the reach of her technical assistance efforts, the state coordinator has developed a web-based training program, which allows her to share key information, track who is attending the training session, and give participants a quiz at the end to see if they were paying attention.

The National Center for Homeless Education also offers web-based trainings on a variety of issues, at no cost.[90]

D. Increase States' Monitoring of McKinney-Vento Act Compliance

To increase statewide implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, more local educational agencies must be monitored for compliance. Such monitoring could include desk monitoring of school district compliance, in which the state coordinator reviews districts' policies to verify that they have eliminated barriers to the enrollment and retention of unaccompanied youth in school. It should also include site visits with the specific purpose of monitoring compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act. The National Center for Homeless Education has developed standards and indicators for quality programs that can assist with monitoring.

Further, to maximize the breadth of monitoring, McKinney-Vento performance measures should be included in the monitoring of other programs. If the state coordinator is allowed to train other members of the state's monitoring team, they could monitor compliance with basic McKinney-Vento requirements on a much larger number of monitoring visits. For example, McKinney-Vento monitoring could easily be

incorporated into Title I monitoring. Such increased monitoring would improve McKinney-Vento Act compliance statewide. Oregon includes some McKinney-Vento performance measures in special education monitoring.[91]

E. Adopt Statewide Procedures for Enrolling and Education Decision Making for Unaccompanied Youth

> *You can set up lots of programs, but if people don't have protocols and procedures in place to make sure unaccompanied youth can access them, it's not much good.*
>
> Cathy Requejo

Since unaccompanied youth, by definition, live apart from their parents and legal guardians, they generally attempt to enroll in school independently or with the assistance of a friend, relative, or mentor. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, schools cannot turn unaccompanied youth away from school based on the lack of a parent or guardian.[92] To facilitate statewide implementation of this requirement, the McKinney-Vento Act mandates that states address enrollment delays caused by guardianship issues.[93] The most effective way for states to eliminate such enrollment delays is to establish uniform procedures for the enrollment of unaccompanied youth.[94]

Several states have created caregiver's enrollment forms to allow nonguardian adults who are taking care of youth to enroll them in school.[95] While these laws have streamlined school enrollment for unaccompanied youth with caregivers, they do not assist the many unaccompanied youth who are not in an adult's care. The lack of state guidance regarding how schools should go about enrolling youth on their own leads to delays in enrollment and, tragically, to youth being turned away from school.[96] A state law clarifying the right of unaccompanied youth to enroll in school

and establishing uniform procedures for such enrollment would help ensure that young people are not denied entry into school.

For example, New York has passed an Education of Homeless Children statute, which establishes a designator to choose the school district and enroll the student in school. The definition of designator includes a parent, guardian, "the homeless child, if no parent or person in parental relation is available," or "the director of a residential program for runaway and homeless youth . . . in consultation with the homeless child, where such homeless child is living in such program."[97]

State laws establishing youth's rights to enroll in school would be even more powerful if they included a liability shield, such that schools would be protected from liability by reason of enrolling the youth without parent or guardian consent. Unfortunately, many school administrators have turned youth away for fear of being sued by parents.[98] A limited liability shield would help address this concern.

Once unaccompanied youth are in school, questions about educational decision making often erect barriers to their participation in school activities. Generally, school procedures are based upon the fundamental assumption that a parent, guardian, or adult caregiver is present. They do not adequately address educational decision making for youth on their own. State policies for educational decision making for unaccompanied youth would help ensure youth can participate fully in school services and activities that normally require parental notification, signature or consent, such as special academic programs, extracurricular activities, athletics, school-based health care, and field trips. In addition, states should enact procedures for appointing temporary surrogate parents for unaccompanied youth pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvements Act of 2004.[99]

VI. WHEN SCHOOLS ADOPT FLEXIBLE POLICIES TO ACCOMMODATE THE DEMANDS OF HOMELESSNESS, YOUTH CAN BE MORE ENGAGED AND SUCCESSFUL.

I work weird hours and I don't really have a place to do anything. It makes it kind of hard to do work and turn it in.

Unaccompanied youth in California

The key for us has been a huge variety of academic programs. There have to be many paths to success. Some youth do fine in a traditional high school program. Other kids need a change. The variety is fantastic.

Steve Brown
Director of Community Schools/Community Connections
Bethel School District, Washington

Unaccompanied youth share the characteristics of being homeless without their parents. However, beyond that status, they are as unique and varied as all young people. Their educational needs and interests also vary widely, from students who will experience success in traditional high schools and continue on to college, to those who prefer to pursue career and technical training and those who are returning to school after a long absence and need more flexible alternatives.[100] To permit unaccompanied youth to access the educational options that best meet their specific needs, schools must accommodate the realities and demands of homelessness and independence. Most importantly, such accommodations require flexibility.

For example, one immediate way for schools to accommodate the demands of homelessness is to ensure that unaccompanied youth do not face barriers to participating in the academic and nonacademic services that are available. This requires creating flexible exceptions to enrollment deadlines and fees that highly mobile homeless youth cannot meet. Second,

unaccompanied youth often struggle to earn credits in a traditional high school system.[101] Adopting state policies to ensure that partial credits are awarded and accepted and establishing credit recovery programs can help address this need. Finally, youth whose experiences or responsibilities make attending a traditional high school difficult must have access to appropriate alternative programs.

A. Create Exceptions to Enrollment and Application Deadlines and Fees for Unaccompanied Youth for School Activities

Many unaccompanied young people can benefit from special academic services such as supplemental education services, gifted and talented programs, and career and technical education. Nonacademic activities, such as sports and clubs, are often critical for engaging young people in school and guiding them toward graduation.[102] Therefore, it is important to ensure that unaccompanied youth can access all the academic and nonacademic school activities for which they are eligible.

Unaccompanied youth face many barriers to full participation in school, including many that result from school policies that are not designed with unaccompanied youth in mind. For example, Principle 3 addressed the need for a statewide policy on educational decision-making for unaccompanied youth. Many school activities require parental notification, signature or consent, including field trips, certain academic programs or classes, extracurricular activities, and athletics.[103] In the absence of policies to address the participation of unaccompanied youth in such activities, there is a risk that youth will be denied access.

Enrollment and application deadlines also present barriers to unaccompanied youth's participation in a wide variety of academic and nonacademic programs, such as charter schools and other alternative programs, supplemental education assistance, and athletics. Due to the instability of their living situations, many unaccompanied youth are highly mobile, changing communities and schools several times a year. Enrollment

and application deadlines can effectively bar these youth from activities simply because they were not in the school or the community when the deadline passed.

This barrier could be easily addressed by a policy mandating that enrollment and participation deadlines cannot prevent unaccompanied youth from participating in classes, programs, and activities for which they are eligible. Open enrollment policies are critical for unaccompanied young people, so they can begin attending school and participating fully in school activities whenever they attempt to enroll.

For example, Texas has enacted a policy for foster youth, which states, "a durational residence requirement may not be used to prohibit that child from fully participating in any activity sponsored by the school district."[104] A law applying this standard to homeless youth would help ensure that young people can participate fully in school.

Similarly, the high school athletic associations of Virginia, Delaware, and other states have revised their participation policies to eliminate barriers to homeless youth. Such policies greatly facilitate implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act's requirement that homeless youth be allowed to participate fully in school activities immediately.[105]

Fees to participate in certain classes or activities also pose barriers to homeless youth. As they struggle to meet their basic needs, homeless youth rarely have money for extra costs such as athletic uniforms, lab fees, or school trips. When fees prevent youth from participating in school activities, school districts have responded in a variety of ways, including waiving fees; using funds reserved for homeless students under Title I, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act; coordinating with community agencies to pay fees; and using donations.[106] Such flexible practices ensure that homeless youth are not denied access to school services and activities due to their dire financial circumstances.

B. Adopting State Policies for Partial Credit Awards and Establishing Credit Recovery Programs

> *Highly mobile youth are not served well by the semester system. A kid who loses stability for two weeks could fall so far behind that he loses the whole semester. Too many students are enrolled and told they have no chance at earning credits for a given semester because of late enrollment or lack of usable 'exit' grades from another school. This is setting kids up for failure and using the system as a bludgeon against the situations of these students.*
>
> *Increased flexibility will only help the students in these situations.*
>
> Jonathan Zook

Due to their inherent instability, it can be very challenging for unaccompanied youth to earn credits and advance toward graduation in the traditional semester system. A short absence from school can lead to losing credit for the entire semester.[107] A move from one school district to another can make it difficult for them to keep advancing toward graduation. Laws and policies to require school districts to award and accept partial credit are necessary to allow youth to piece together their educational experiences and graduate from high school.

In 2004, the state of California responded to this reality by enacting a novel law that requires schools to accept partial credit for coursework satisfactorily completed in another school.[108] Where it has been implemented, this law benefited homeless and other highly mobile students significantly.[109]

For example, Fresno Unified School District uses a computer database called Power School, which calculates and awards partial credits automatically.[110] Teachers put student grades into Power School, and the database awards one credit when the student completes fifteen hours of

work.[111] Currently, every middle and high school in Fresno is on-line and elementary schools are in the process of adopting the database.[112] Fresno has also developed detailed policies for awarding partial credits upon enrollment and withdrawal of highly mobile students, and a simple credit verification form to facilitate the process.[113]

Such laws can greatly benefit unaccompanied youth whose mobility and daily struggle to meet basic needs make it challenging to earn a full semester's credit in one school. Unfortunately, implementation of partial credit laws may be inconsistent across a state.[114] Interdistrict issues appear to be a significant barrier to homeless students receiving their credits. One school district does not have the authority to hold another school district accountable; yet, without interdistrict collaboration and accountability, the partial credit system cannot function.

> *There needs to be someone that has more jurisdiction to hold stakeholders accountable. With youth assigned from out of county, we have trouble finding the units or documentation proving they should have some units. Worse yet, sometimes we don't find them in enough time to stop the student from repeating a course. Once the student is gone, we can't hold an out of county agency accountable. Often, we post credits, but don't even know where to send the records, and no one asks.*
>
> Ann-Maura Cervantes
> Assistant Director of Student Services and School Attendance
> Clovis Unified School District, California

State educational agencies could help ensure that unaccompanied youth and other highly mobile students receive partial credits by issuing statewide policies regarding how to calculate and accept partial credits, with specific protocols for inter-district records, transfers, and awards. To enhance its effect, the policy should make schools accountable for compliance.

Credit recovery programs are the logical companion to the award of partial credits. These programs allow youth to fill in the gaps left by partial credits to obtain a full semester or year's worth of credit. Further, by allowing youth to work at their own pace and outside typical school hours, credit recovery programs can greatly accelerate students' graduation. Particularly for older unaccompanied youth, this flexibility can be the key to their success.

Commonly, credit recovery programs use accredited computer-based courses or written packets to award youth credits in the context of supervised independent study programs.[115] They tend to be offered before or after normal school hours or during study hall periods, so students can participate simultaneously in a regular education program, a job, or other responsibilities.[116] Importantly, the youth are enrolled in high school and can access all school activities and services, including regular classes, meals, mentors, counselors, nurses, tutoring, clubs, and sports.[117] A teacher provides support and structure, and youth complete the work at school. Those two elements are critical for many unaccompanied youth who lack adult guidance and a quiet place to study.[118]

Credit recovery programs are self-paced. Youth experiencing a time of great instability in their lives might work more slowly, while youth who are able to focus intensely on school can earn credits in a matter of weeks. Credit recovery programs are most successful if the computer courses and packets are adapted to match the student's interests.[119]

C. Ensure Unaccompanied Youth Have Access to Alternative Programs

> *We have an alternative high school that works really well for many of our kids. They can go to school in three-hour chunks, either in the morning or afternoon. They attend a classroom with a teacher there to help them, but they work at their own pace, with packets or on the computer. They have a celebration every time a youth gets a credit. As soon as they get their credits, they graduate, but they still participate in our big, regular graduation ceremony in June.*
>
> Sue Kanthak

Most unaccompanied youth have many more responsibilities than their housed peers, as they struggle to meet basic needs and make decisions without parental guidance. In some cases, these responsibilities may make attending a traditional high school difficult. In particular, young people who are working full-time, pregnant or parenting, or older than typical high school students may prefer alternative education programs. For them to meet their educational goals they must have access to alternative programs that meet their needs.

Of course, since unaccompanied youth's educational strengths and needs vary greatly, it would be highly inappropriate for educators or service providers to presume that an unaccompanied youth cannot succeed in a traditional high school or would prefer an alternative program. For this reason the McKinney-Vento Act prohibits segregated schools for homeless youth or policies that place youth into education programs based on their housing status, rather than their specific educational needs.[120] Unaccompanied youth should be informed of all available options and assisted in accessing the program that can best meet their preferences, needs, goals, and interests.

Ensuring access requires adopting flexible exceptions to enrollment and application deadlines and fees for unaccompanied youth, as described above. However, it also requires ensuring that alternative programs have sufficient capacity to serve all the unaccompanied youth who need them. It also requires adequate monitoring to ensure high quality among alternative programs.

Some of the alternative programs that have successfully served unaccompanied youth include the following:

- *Evening High Schools*: provide high school curriculum after normal school hours.
- *Alternative High Schools:* provide high school curriculum to youth at risk of not graduating from high school and offer flexible school hours, career orientation, work-study, and other specialized services.
- *Career Technical Education*: teach youth skills that can help them find stable employment.
- *Work Experience programs*: provide paid or unpaid on-the-job experiences for secondary school students through training agreements with employers.
- *Workforce Development*: partner with the Workforce Investment Act and other programs to provide high school credit for work experiences.
- *Middle College High Schools*: allow students to attend classes at flexible hours and earn high school and community college credits simultaneously, in a personalized environment, generally located on college campuses.
- *Portable Assisted Study Sequence (PASS) program*: provide self-contained, semi-independent study courses, which enable students to earn high credits while accommodating challenges of scheduling and mobility.

Most of these programs share certain key features, including a high degree of individualized support, flexible scheduling, an emphasis on career education and employment, rolling enrollment, and the freedom for students

to work at their own pace.[121] Further investment in these and other alternative programs would provide many unaccompanied youth the opportunity to meet their educational and professional goals.

VII. UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH DISENGAGED FROM SCHOOL MUST BE DRAWN IN BY CARING, PERSISTENT ADULTS

As many as three-quarters of unaccompanied youth leave school without graduating;[122] it is clear that more efforts are desperately needed to help unaccompanied youth remain in school and to reengage those who have been forced to leave. Such efforts are also required by federal law.[123]

Many states have developed dropout prevention and recovery programs.[124] However, more focus on unaccompanied youth is clearly needed. States could generate that focus by funding more full-time homeless liaisons, as suggested in Principle 3, whose duties include identifying and enrolling unaccompanied youth in school. States could also require existing dropout recovery programs to receive specific training on homelessness and conduct specific outreach to unaccompanied youth. Finally, states could establish a new dropout recovery program targeted to unaccompanied youth.

To engage unaccompanied youth in school, any dropout recovery program must include hands-on outreach in the community by adults who are trained in effective communication with homeless youth, the needs of unaccompanied youth, and the services and activities schools can provide. These "engagement specialists" must be prepared to meet young people where they are and must be equipped to respond to their most urgent needs immediately, either through resources at school or collaborations with the community. Engagement specialists who provide tangible, immediate benefits to meet the needs the youth express are more likely to build the trust necessary to reengage youth in their education.[125]

Most importantly, as Cathy Requejo points out, engagement specialists must listen to youth:

> Well-intentioned people sometimes come with their perspective of what the needs are, or ought to be. They put their energies into working toward what they believe the youth needs, instead of asking the youth and putting their energies into working with the youth as a team to meet what the youth identifies as his or her needs.

Many school districts have found success partnering with Peer Outreach Workers, who go to skate parks, campgrounds, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, parks, and other areas where youth on their own can be found. If these Peer Outreach Workers feel comfortable and successful in their school program, they will recommend it to other young people. This word-of-mouth publicity has been one of the most effective strategies to reengage youth in school.

As soon as a young person is ready to return to school, the engagement specialist must have the ability to immediately connect the student with the educational environment that is appropriate for her preference, needs, and interests. If youth must wait to reenter school, they may lose faith or redirect their energies back to basic survival. Therefore, unaccompanied youth must be exempt from waiting lists or enrollment deadlines. The student should also immediately be involved in programs to provide support for reentry and ongoing guidance, such as mentors and education advocates.

McKinney-Vento Act homeless liaisons, who have experience drawing unaccompanied youth back into school, offer the following tips for engagement specialists:

You have to build trust. It takes time. The youth are not used to having people stand by them, so they will challenge you and wait for you to abandon them, too. So be as unconditional as you can with your support and commitment. You may not agree at all with the decisions they are making, but try not to judge them. Be honest and talk to them like real people.

Ask simple questions, like, how are you? Did you do your homework today? Carry bus tokens and referral information in your purse, so you can always provide something tangible for the kids. Value their natural abilities—take the time to find out what they are, and then find outlets for them. Show them they have something to contribute back to society, by organizing service projects and advocacy activities for them.

See yourself as their teammate, not the boss.

Karen Fessler

When choosing a school program, talk with youth about their needs, strengths, experiences, and goals. Then make sure they have immediate access. Be consistent, tangible and reliable, and word will travel. Kids will come.

Jonathan Zook

First, listen. Then, let them know the services that are available related to what they've told you about their situation. Name three specific services you will provide them or things you will do for them immediately, and tell them you will continue to be engaged together to help them meet their goals. Then say, "I know it's difficult engaging with adults, so if you hear something from an adult that doesn't sound or feel right to you, or conflicts with what I'm telling you or what you believe or know to be right or true, call me, and we'll work through it together."

And then, follow through.

Cathy Requejo

VIII. IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILD WELFARE POLICIES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF YOUTH IN THE SYSTEM WHO ARE HOMELESS, AND TO MAKE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES ACCESSIBLE TO UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH, ARE ESSENTIAL FOR YOUTH TO ACHIEVE THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

They need the freedom to make the mistakes that typical adolescents make, without homelessness being the consequence.

Deanne Pearn, Director of Community Relations
First Place, Oakland, California

Don't just place us, help us! And follow up on us!

Homeless youth in Chicago

Parental abuse and neglect is a primary cause of homelessness among unaccompanied youth.[126] Therefore, a very significant number of unaccompanied youth should have received, are receiving, or have received services from the child welfare system.

First, unaccompanied youth who should have received services are those who ran away from abusive homes or were forced out of their homes by neglectful parents and never received assistance from the child welfare system. Although the child welfare system's mandate is to care for children and youth who are victims of parental abuse or neglect, many homeless youth are never served.

Other unaccompanied youth received services and remain under the care of the state, but with dubious outcomes. Statistics reveal that many youth abscond from child welfare placements they perceive as inappropriate, choosing life on the street over the services child welfare offers. Studies show that of youth who are in foster care at age sixteen, one in five exit

foster care by running away.[127] That one in five older youth ran away from child welfare services indicates a failure of the system to serve such young people appropriately. A study in New York found that young people who ran away from child welfare are even more at risk for homelessness than those who age out when they turn eighteen.[128]

Finally, many studies have shown that being in the care of the child welfare system leads many youth into future homelessness. Nationally, 26 percent of homeless adults and 34 percent of homeless young people of ages twenty to twenty-four spent time in the care of the child welfare system. Among homeless teenagers of ages eighteen to nineteen, the figure jumps to 61 percent; six of every ten homeless eighteen and nineteen year olds have been in the care of the child welfare system.[129] This is grossly out of proportion with the 3 percent of people in the general population who have spent time in the child welfare system.[130]

These statistics demonstrate that the child welfare system, nationally, fails to combat youth homelessness successfully and to prepare many of its wards for independence. Even upon completing their eligibility for services, many do not have a place to live when they leave care.[131]

Strong state policies are essential to help sever the connection between child welfare services and subsequent, or simultaneous, homelessness. For example, more rapid response by family crisis services in abusive and neglectful home situations could prevent some youth from needing to run away or being forced out of their homes. These services should concentrate on populations known to be overrepresented among unaccompanied youth, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender youth, and pregnant teenagers. As poverty is a significant contributing factor to abuse and neglect, programs to support the economic well-being and stability of families would also alleviate pressure at home and allow more youth to remain with their families rather than become homeless.

Policies and procedures designed to reduce the number of youth who abscond from child welfare placements are critical. These should include

policies to create more appropriate placements for older youth, strengthen connections with supportive adults, and supervise placements more closely. However, the most important element of such policies is to require that young people's wishes be given significant consideration in selecting placements. Essentially, the youth must consider child welfare services the best option. Unfortunately, statistics indicate that one in every five youth chooses homelessness over child welfare.[132]

In addition, child welfare agencies must improve transition planning for youth, including discharge planning and independent living skills. Transition planning should begin early and provide intensive, concrete planning and services.

Finally, the child welfare system should also shoulder greater responsibility for the educational achievement of its wards. For example, when making out-of-home placements, child welfare agencies should strive actively to promote educational stability. The choice of placement always should be based in part on its proximity to the youth's school. Additional state policies to support those goals would help ensure that foster youth can continue to advance in their education.

Notably, many federal, state, and local programs exist to support the independence and education of foster youth. Given the significant overlap between foster care and homelessness, these programs offer services of great value to both groups. Opening these programs to all unaccompanied youth, those who have a history of child welfare involvement as well as those who do not, would increase the services available to youth on their own. Most unaccompanied youth who have not received child welfare services should have received them, as they either fled their homes to escape abuse or were kicked out of their homes by neglectful parents. Therefore, restricting important services to those who have been involved in the system is an artificial distinction that denies appropriate services to young people who need them.

IX. EFFORT TO SUPPORT UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH'S EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS IS MORE EFFECTIVE IF ALL YOUTH-SERVING AGENCIES COORDINATE THEIR EFFORTS, ACCEPT JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUTCOMES, AND INVOLVE YOUTH AS ACTIVE PARTNERS

> *Interagency collaboration is essential to developing effective services for homeless students. Issues such as education, health care, mental health, housing, and alcohol or other drug abuse can be addressed through a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach.*[133]
>
> Joane Heflin, Council for Exceptional Children

> *If we're talking only to the adults in their lives and not to [youth], we're failing.*
>
> Cathy Requejo

In their quest to meet their basic needs, unaccompanied youth may seek help from a wide variety of public and private agencies. For example, there are 339 federal programs serving disadvantaged youth in twelve different federal departments.[134] These services and target populations frequently overlap. This federal fragmentation translates into state and local fragmentation, as state and local governments receive the bulk of federal funding through a variety of different state and local agencies.[135] "The fragmentation of Federal youth policy is compounded by fragmented state spending which leaves local communities piecing together program dollars from a wide variety of funding streams, each with its own regulatory and reporting requirements."[136]

Unfortunately, few agencies other than schools design their procedures with youth's educational success in mind. To obtain services, youth are generally forced to travel to several different offices.[137] This may take time

away from work or school and entail significant transportation expenses. Since different agencies have different application processes, youth are forced to explain personal and often painful details to many different caseworkers and complete countless forms. Young people may feel the need to miss school to deal with bureaucratic demands so their basic needs can be met.

Collaborations enable agencies to work together to craft more comprehensive strategies to help homeless youth meet their basic needs and achieve long-term self-sufficiency. Broad-based collaborations can also help young people navigate the maze of agencies by supplying more integrated services, cutting down on paperwork, and reducing delays in service provision. In addition, collaborative efforts can increase efficiency and reduce duplication of services, which can translate into an expansion of services. For all these reasons, the U.S. Government Accountability Office recommends that programs with similar goals, target populations, and services be coordinated, consolidated, or streamlined as appropriate, to ensure that goals are consistent and that program efforts are mutually reinforcing.[138]

A. Collaboration Between the Education and Housing Systems

Among the most important collaborative partners for schools are emergency and transitional shelters, independent living programs, and affordable housing providers. The McKinney-Vento Act requires state and local educational agencies to collaborate with such programs.[139] However, such coordination frequently does not occur. This may be due in part to the lack of time, training, and capacity necessary to initiate collaboration among homeless liaisons. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act also requires its shelters and transitional living programs to coordinate with homeless liaisons.[140] However, other housing programs generally do have similar requirements.

Several simple policies could help ensure that shelter and housing providers support the educational success of youth in their care. For example, federal or state funding or licensing regulations could require shelters and housing to post notice of students' rights under the McKinney-Vento Act, to explain those rights to young people upon intake, and to assist students in exercising those rights. Funding and licensing procedures could also impose a degree of accountability on shelter and housing providers for the school enrollment and attendance of young people in their care, while ensuring that such policies do not restrict shelter access for young people who may be out of school, but are in need of shelter.

Shelters, independent living programs, and street outreach programs could also be required to engage in ongoing coordination with schools in their area.[141] Such coordination can facilitate school enrollment and attendance for young people.

For example, Eureka City Schools and local shelters in California jointly developed a procedure for assessing youth's educational needs and goals upon intake to the shelter. Shelter case managers complete an education referral form and immediately fax it to the homeless liaison. The liaison travels to shelters to conduct school enrollment on-site and to offer services and referrals.[142]

> *As soon as a youth checks into one of these shelters, the person doing the intake faxes me the education referral form. I then immediately contact the kid and go enroll and/or deliver services, like backpacks, school shoes, and connections to school and community services.*
>
> Maureen Chase, Director of the Homeless Education Project
> Eureka City Schools

In Anchorage, Alaska, a dynamic collaboration between one of the school district's homeless liaisons and shelter and housing providers led to a

protocol that actually increases homeless youth's access to housing. The homeless liaison and youth complete a form stating that the liaison identified the youth as homeless, the liaison forwards the form to the housing agency, and the youth receives priority housing.[143]

B. State-Level Collaborations

The McKinney-Vento Act contains specific coordination requirements for states, including coordinating and collaborating with providers of services to unaccompanied youth, such as domestic violence agencies, shelter operators, transitional housing facilities, runaway youth centers, and transitional living programs for youth.[144] As Principle 3 suggests above, it is important that the state coordinator's office have sufficient staff to accomplish the coordination required by law and necessary for unaccompanied youth to meet their educational goals.

State-level collaboration can streamline young people's access to a wide variety of critical services. "Coordination allows the state to reduce or avoid duplication, improve service delivery, and address service gaps by departments."[145] An increase in state-level coordination would facilitate service delivery to youth, would provide them with many of their basic needs, and would promote their educational success.

Many states have developed strong inter-agency collaborative structures to coordinate youth policy and service delivery to homeless and other disadvantaged youth.

In 2002, Colorado passed the Homeless Youth Services Act "to create a vehicle through which services to homeless youth statewide could be improved by coordinating current services and facilitating interagency collaboration to identify gaps, remove barriers, improve access, and share information."[146]

In Oregon, the governor created a twenty-four member Ending Homelessness Advisory Council with a specific mandate "to coordinate programs relating to homeless youth."[147] The Maine Children's Cabinet has

created a Homeless Children's Initiative, which led to passage of the Act to Help Homeless Young People Return to Home or Safe Living Situations in 1999.[148] The Act mandated the development of comprehensive community plans for youth who become homeless.

Private, nonprofit organizations can play an important role in supporting state-level collaboration and ensuring that the voices and wisdom of youth are part of the conversation. The Youth Empowerment Program of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio has developed a model state-level collaboration led by youth. The State Youth Board, the Youth Housing Committee (which includes all youth-serving state agencies), and the state coalition on homelessness and poverty have developed a list of common goals and are working together to meet the needs of youth from high school to age twenty-four.[149]

> *We've spent the last seven years developing this. Education is a key piece: any homeless agency that serves youth under eighteen and receives state money has to demonstrate that they partner with schools. Also, any agency receiving state money has to attend at least one annual youth issues training that covers educational rights and needs. Two hundred sixty people participated in our last training."*
>
> Angela Lariviere, Youth Advocacy Director
> Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)

C. Local-Level Collaborations

Broad, multi-agency coordination at the local level is also essential to ensure that unaccompanied youth can enroll in, attend, and succeed in school. These collaborations streamline service delivery for homeless youth. They can also support schools' efforts to identify homeless youth, conduct outreach, and support youth's enrollment, attendance, and success in school. The following are some of the myriad of agencies that must be

brought to the table: school districts and county offices of education; emergency and transitional shelters and independent living programs; street outreach programs; housing authorities and other providers of permanent, affordable housing; child welfare agencies; social service departments; county health and mental health departments; mayors and city governments; Continua of Care, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; family reunification services; legal services providers; juvenile justice and juvenile probation; faith-based organizations; food banks; Workforce Investment Act services; colleges and universities; community organizations; hotlines for youth and homeless individuals; businesses and the chamber of commerce; and community foundations.

Many local communities have developed highly successful collaborations to support homeless youth. Portland, Oregon, and Bangor, Maine, offer two examples.

Portland's Homeless Youth Continuum, a collaboration among three private agencies and Multnomah County, is considered to be a national model of excellence. In 1998, Multnomah County redesigned its homeless youth services because of a report citing a fragmented and uncoordinated service delivery system and a lack of accountability for youth outcomes. The new configuration resulted in the forming of a Continuum of services for homeless youth with coordinated services, a shared data collection system, and shared outcomes. The three agencies share a centralized triage process—one screening shared by all partners with youth agreeing to cooperate with all the agencies involved; a central database that applies to all agencies and is able to evaluate system outcomes; shared best practice philosophies about goals, methods, and outcomes; and a comprehensive continuum of support with partners providing treatment programs for addiction and mental health. [150]

Bangor, Maine, was the birthplace of another national model, the Rapid Response Program. Created with an initial $150,000 funding stream from the state legislature, Rapid Response brings together over twenty-five state

and local agencies, both public and private, to work as a team to provide intensive intervention within the first seventy-two hours of a youth's homelessness. The program focuses on providing stable housing, keeping the youth in the same community and school, and delivering family intervention, support, and mediation in a search for long-term solutions.

An independent evaluation of the program by the University of Maine School of Social Work found stunning results: the program resulted in significant decreases in drug and alcohol use, victimization, suicide, gang involvement, police involvement, pregnancy, and prostitution; overall health and well-being were significantly improved; and school attendance and success were so profoundly impacted that 100 percent of the youth served were enrolled in school or working and functioning well. The Rapid Response Program is now spreading across the state of Maine.[151]

Local level collaborations can streamline service delivery and lead to policies and practices to support the educational success of unaccompanied youth.

As part of a collaborative effort, or on their own, memoranda of understanding among agencies to address barriers to information-sharing can help all agencies work together to meet youth's needs and keep each other apprised on educational progress and warning signs. Information sharing is a strategy to ensure that all service providers, and particularly educators, have the information they need to support youth's educational success. Many agencies have created protocols to permit the sharing of information pertinent to education, while adopting strong policies to protect youth's privacy.[152]

For example, the Florida Legislature passed a law requiring that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and school districts establish information-sharing protocols.[153] As a result, thirty-three school districts have agreed to provide school reports and transcripts to DCF; twenty-seven counties agreed to increase efforts to gain consent from the natural parents, legal guardians, or the court to share school records; thirty-one counties

agreed to improve technology to facilitate the efficient sharing of information; in fifteen counties, DCF provides schools with a regularly updated electronic list of children in care; and school districts in twenty-three counties agreed to provide the DCF information about available school services.[154] To evaluate the impact of information-sharing Broward County is currently developing a comprehensive data collection and research protocol to assess the effectiveness of the interagency agreements.[155]

D. Youth as Partners

Young people should be active participants in all youth-serving efforts. Unaccompanied youth are the most experienced and well-informed experts available regarding their own strengths, challenges, needs, and goals.

Young people have a lot to contribute. They bring energy and fresh and unique perspectives; they may offer ideas and solutions that have not been considered, or offer a new approach to an old idea. Youth also bring a unique range of knowledge about youth issues.[156]

In addition to benefiting the collaborations, service providers, and youth receiving the services, youth involvement also contributes to the self-esteem and success of those who participate. For example, the homeless young people who participate in the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (explained above) tend to experience more educational success than their peers.[157] Two YEP youth have even received national awards for their individual contributions to the needs of homeless young people.[158]

Many states have established vehicles to involve youth directly in policy-making and youth-serving efforts.[159]

X. CONCLUSION

The seven principles described in this report encompass a continuum of strategies to meet youth's basic needs; increase enrollment, attendance, and success in school; and reengage young people who have left school. While each of the policies and practices suggested has proven successful in helping unaccompanied youth meet their educational and professional goals, they are most successful as a continuum. For unaccompanied youth truly to be able to achieve their educational and professional goals, states and local communities must make significant advances in each of the seven areas highlighted.

In implementing these or any strategies to support youth, policymakers and educators must keep in mind that each unaccompanied young person is a unique individual. No initiative implemented as a one-size-fits-all panacea is likely to be successful. Policymakers and educators must constantly listen to young people as they express their own needs, strengths, and goals, and implement strategies in that context.

If national, state, and local policymakers employ these strategies, they can make a stunning difference in the lives of unaccompanied youth and help break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. We know how to meet youth's needs and support their educational success. Now, we must resolve to use what we know.

APPENDIX A

The following individuals generously shared their time and expertise with the author of this report. The key findings and strategies contained herein are largely the fruit of their creativity and commitment.

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[1] Legal Counsel, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. The author wishes to thank the NAEHCY members and others who shared their expertise for this article and who work tirelessly each day to support young people. This publication is offered to honor the many thousands of young people living in parks, abandoned buildings, bus stations, streets, shelters, motels, garages, and living rooms, who fight to survive and succeed on their own every day. Their capacity to confront the challenges of adolescence and the transition to adulthood without caring parents, without economic support, and without stable housing is awe-inspiring. The author hopes government at all levels will commit to taking the actions necessary to alleviate their suffering. This report is based on the California Research Bureau's report, entitled "The Educational Success of Homeless Youth in California: Challenges and Solutions", by Patricia Julianelle (with permission). Available at http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/.

[2] National Runaway Switchboard, National Runaway Switchboard Statistics on Runaways from Peer-reviewed Journals and Federal Studies, http://www.1800runaway.org/news_events/third.html (last visited Mar. 11, 2009); Heather Hammer, David Finkelhor, & Andrea J. Sedlak, *Runaway/Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics*, *in* NAT'L INCIDENCE STUDIES OF MISSING, ABDUCTED, RUNAWAY, AND THROWNAWAY CHILDREN, at 1 (U.S. Dep't of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, NISMART Series No. NCJ 196469, 2002), *available at* http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/nismart/04/#ack.

[3] Marjorie Robertson & Paul Toro, *Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention, and Policy, in* PRACTICAL LESSONS: THE 1998 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH 3-1 (Ljinda B. Fosburg & Dkborah L. Dennis eds., 1999), *available at* http://aspe.hhs.gov/pic/reports/aspe/6817.pdf#page=75. *See also* Michael G. MacLean, Lara E. Embry, & Ana Mari Cauce, *Homeless Adolescents' Paths to Separation from Family: Comparison of Family Characteristics, Psychological Adjustment, and Victimization*, 27 J. OF CMTY. PSYCHOL. 179, 184.

[4] Robertson & Toro, *supra* note 3.

[5] Nell Bernstein & Lisa K. Foster, *Voices from the Street: A Survey of Homeless Youth by Their Peers,* CALIFORNIA RES. BUREAU (California State Library, Sacramento, Cal.), Mar. 2008, at 1, 23, *available at* http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/08/08-004.pdf.

[6] Nicholas Ray, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*, REP. FOR NAT'L GAY AND LESBIAN TASK FORCE POL'Y. INST. & NAT'L COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS, (Nat'l Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Washington, D.C.), Jan. 30, 2007, at 1, *available at* http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/homeless_youth.

[7] National Runaway Switchboard, *supra* note 2; BERNSTEIN, *supra* note 5, at 90–91.

[8] Robertson & Toro, *supra* note 3.

[9] *Id.*

[10] *Id.*

[11] 42 U.S.C. §§ 11431–35 (2002).

[12] H.R. 110, 107th Cong. (2002).

[13] 42 USC §§ 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii), 11432(g)(3)(A)–(B).
[14] *Id.* § 11432(g)(3)(C).
[15] *Id.* § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii).
[16] *Id.* §11432(f).
[17] *Id.* §§11432(f), (g)(6).
[18] *Id.* §11432(g)(1)(I).
[19] Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5, at 62; JAN MOORE, NAT'L CTR. FOR HOMELESS EDUC., UNACCOMPANIED AND HOMELESS YOUTH: REVIEW OF LITERATURE (1995–2005) 13–15 (2005), *available at* http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/uy_lit_review.pdf; Rebekah Levin et al., *Wherever I Can Lay My Head: Homeless Youth On Homelessness*, REP. FOR CTR. FOR IMPACT RES. (The Night Ministry, Chicago, Ill.), Mar. 2005, at 13, *available at* http://www.impactresearch.org/documents/homelessyouthreport.pdf.
[20] MOORE, *supra* note 19, at 13. *See also generally* Bob Reeg, *The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and Disconnected Youth, in* LEAVE NO YOUTH BEHIND: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONGRESS TO REACH DISCONNECTED YOUTH 58 (Jodie Levin-Epstein & Mark H. Greenberg eds., 2007), *available at* http://www.clasp.org/publications/Disconnected_Youth.pdf.
[21] MOORE, *supra* note 19, at 13.
[22] Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5, at 61–62; Reeg, *supra* note 20, at 56–59; *Understanding Homeless Youth: Numbers, Characteristics, Multisystem Involvement, and Intervention Options: Hearing on Disconnected and Disadvantaged Youth Before the Subcomm. on Income Security and Family Support of the H. Comm. on Ways & Means*, 110th Cong. 6 (2007) (statement of Martha R. Burt, Ph. D., Principal Research Associate and Director, Social Services Research Program Urban Institute).
[23] Levin et al., *supra* note 19, at 9–10.
[24] *See, e.g.,* Paul Toro, Amy Dworsky & Patrick Fowler, *Homeless Youth in the United States: Recent Research Finding and Intervention Approaches, in* TOWARD UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS: THE 2007 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH (Deborah Dennis, Gretchen Locke & Jill Khadduri eds., 2007).
[25] Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5, at 64–65.
[26] *Id.* at 62.
[27] *See generally* Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5.
[28] Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5, at 63–65; Reeg, *supra* note 20, at 56–59; *Understanding Homeless Youth*, *supra* note 22, at 6.
[29] Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5, at 61–62.
[30] *National Network for Youth on FY 2007 Labor-HHS-Education-Rleated Agencies Appropriations: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Labor, Health and Human Services of the H. Comm. on Appropriation,* 109th Cong. (2006) (statement for the record of A. Friedman).
[31] Sanna J. Thompson et al., *Short-Term Outcomes for Youth Receiving Runaway and Homeless Shelter Services*, 12 RES. ON SOC. WORK PRAC. 589, 599 (2002).

[32] National Extranet Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System, https://extranet.acf.hhs.gov/rhymis/custom_reports.html (click on BCP Turnaway Report, enter 2006 or 2007 dates, respectively, to search the database).
[33] *Id.*
[34] *See* D. BOYER ET AL., CITY OF SEATTLE, STREET YOUTH TASK FORCE BARRIERS TO SHELTER STUDY, PILOT PROJECT NEEDS ASSESSMENT: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT (2002).
[35] *Id.* (citing a report by the Office of the Inspector General).
[36] *See generally* Robertson & Toro, *supra* note 3; Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, *supra* note 24.
[37] Bernstein & Foster, *supra* note 5, 64–64 (2008).
[38] Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, *supra* note 24.
[39] *Id.*
[40] *Id.*
[41] CAL. GOV'T CODE § 11139.3 (2007).
[42] 42 USC 11302(a); U.S. DEP'T OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEV., DEFINITION OF HOMELESS FOR PARTICIPANTS ENTERING PROGRAMS SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM, SECTION 8 SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY MOD. REHAB. OR SHELTER PLUS CARE NEW OR RENEWAL FUNDED GRANTS FUNDED SINCE FY 2005 (2005), http://www.hud.gov/local/mn/working/cpd/mn-2005funding.pdf.
[43] 42 U.S.C. § 11302(a) (2000).
[44] NAT'L CTR. FOR HOMELESS EDUC., DEP'T OF EDUC., EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAM: ANALYSIS OF DATA 8 (2008), *available at* http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/data_comp_03-06.pdf.
[45] 42 U.S.C. § 11302(a).
[46] Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, *supra* note 24.
[47] Cite to State Minor Consent Laws: A Summary, Second Edition. English A, Kenney KE. Chapel Hill, NC: Center for Adolescent Health & the Law, 2003.
[48] *Id.*
[49] *Id.*
[50] *Id.*
[51] *Id.*
[52] Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, *supra* note 24.
[53] ALASKA STAT. § 25.20.025(a)(1) (1975).
[54] 42 U.S.C. § 608(a)(5) (1997).
[55] Memorandum from Stanley C. Garnett, Director, Child Nutrition Division to Special Nutrition Programs and State Agencies (July 19, 2004) (available at http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/usda_memo_jul2004.pdf).
[56] For more information about the Alameda County School-Based Health Centers, see Alameda Family Services: School-Based Health Centers, http://www.alamedafs.org/index.php?id=7 (last visited Mar. 27, 2009) and California School Health Centers Assocation, http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/ (last visted Mar. 27, 2009).
[57] MOORE, *supra* note 19, at 15; BOYER, *supra* note 34.

[58] This article, including this premise, was developed in large part from phone interviews the author conducted between April and June of 2007. The interviewees who feature prominently in the article, including those quoted, are listed in Appendix A, *infra* pp. 50–52.
[59] *Id.*
[60] WHITE HOUSE TASK FORCE FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, FINAL REPORT 39 (2003), *available at* http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/docs/white_house_task_force.pdf.
[61] *Supra* note 58.
[62] *Id.*
[63] *Id.*
[64] *Id.*
[65] *Id.*
[66] For more information about Youth On Their Own, see Youth On Their Own, http://www.yoto.org/ (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).
[67] Calforinia Department of Education, SB 65 Program Summary, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/dp/sb65progsumm.asp (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).
[68] *Id.*
[69] *Id.*
[70] Ray, *supra* note 6, at 1.
[71] Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, *supra* note 24.
[72] Child Welfare Information Gateway, Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect, http:www.childwelfare.gov/systemwidelaws_policies/statutes/define.cfm (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).
[73] This is because most often, the unaccompanied youth's parent(s) has failed to provide for the youth's basic needs.
[74] WHITE HOUSE TASK FORCE FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, *supra* note 60.
[75] 42 U.S.C. §§ 11431–11435 (2002).
[76] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C).
[77] *Id.* §§ 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii), (g)(3).
[78] *Id.* §§ 11432(f), (g)(1)(J)(ii).
[79] *Id.* § 11432(g)(1)(D).
[80] *Id.* §§ 11432(g)(1)(F)(ii), 11432(g)(6).
[81] *Id.* § 11432(g)(1)(I).
[82] For example, various cases regarding noncompliance have been filed in Hawaii and New York, such as *Kaleuati v. Tonda*, No. 07-504 (D. Haw. filed Oct., 2007) and *National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, et al. v. New York State, et al.*, No. 04-0705 (D. N.Y. filed Feb. 20, 2004).
[83] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(6).
[84] *Id.* § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii).
[85] *Id.* § 11432(g)(6)(A).
[86] *Supra* note 58.
[87] 20 U.S.C. § 6313(c)(3) (2007).
[88] 42 U.S.C. §11432(f)(6).
[89] *Id.* §11432(g)(1)(D).

[90] For more information about the National Center for Homeless Education and its web-based trainings, see National Center for Homeless Education, www.serve.org/nche (last visted Mar. 28, 2009).
[91] *Supra* note 58.
[92] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(3)(C)(i).
[93] *Id.* § 11432(g)(1)(H)(iv).
[94] *Supra* note 58.
[95] CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48204(d) (West 2007); CAL. FAM. CODE §§ 6550, 6552 (West 2005).
[96] *Supra* note 58.
[97] N.Y. EDUC. LAW § 3209(1)(b)(2) (McKinney 2007). For more information about this statute, see NYS-Teach, Unaccompanied Youth, http://nysteachs.org/faqs/unaccompanied.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2009) or NYS-Teach, State Laws, http://nysteachs.org/info-forms/laws-policies/state.html (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).
[98] *Supra* note 58.
[99] 34 C.F.R. § 300.519 (2006); Wards of the State, 71 Fed. Reg. 46712 (Aug. 14, 2006).
[100] *Supra* note 58.
[101] *Id.*
[102] *Id.*
[103] *Id.*
[104] TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.001(f) (2005).
[105] VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL LEAGUE, INC., 2008-2009 HANDBOOK AND POLICY MANUAL § 28-6-2(15) (2008), *available at* http://www.vhsl.org/files/pub-handbook-2008-09.PDF; DELAWARE INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC ASS'N, OFFICIAL HANDBOOK §§ 1008:2.2.1.6, 1009:2.2.1.8, 1009:2.2.4.4. (2008), *available at* http://www.doe.state.de.us/files/pdf/diaa_handbook200607.pdf.
[106] 20 U.S.C. § 6313(c)(3) (2002).
[107] *Id.*
[108] CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48645.5 (2009).
[109] *Supra* note 58.
[110] CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48645.5. For more information about this law, see Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, AB 490 Overview, http://www.abanet.org/child/rclji/education/ab490overview.pdf (last visited Mar. 29, 2009). For information about Fresno, California's policies, see Memorandum from Fresno Unified School District (Mar. 24, 2004) (available at http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdept/stafed/nd/AB490machadomemo.pdf).
[111] *Id.*
[112] *Id.*
[113] *Id.*
[114] Letter from Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, California Department of Education (June 6, 2007) (available at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/partialcredit.asp).
[115] *Supra* note 58.
[116] *Id.*

[117] *Id.*
[118] *Id.*
[119] *Id.*
[120] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(e)(3)(A) (2001).
[121] *Supra* note 58.
[122] *Understanding Homeless Youth, supra* note 22.
[123] The McKinney-Vento Act requires states to adopt procedures to ensure that "homeless youths and youths separated from the public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services." 42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(F)(ii).
[124] For an example see OSPI State of Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction, Building Bridges, http://www.k12.wa.us/BuildingBridges/default.aspx (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).
[125] *Supra* note 58.
[126] Toro, Dworsky & Fowler, *supra* note 24.
[127] *Understanding Homeless Youth, supra* note 22, at 8 n.3.
[128] *Id.* at 6.
[129] Jean-Marie Firdion, *Homelessness, Poverty and Foster Care, in* ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOMELESSNESS 3 (David Levinson ed., 2004), *available at* http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Sociology/faculty/silver/sirs/papers/firdion.pdf.
[130] WHITE HOUSE TASK FORCE FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, *supra* note 60.
[131] *Id.*
[132] *Id.*
[133] JUANE L. HEFLIN, DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO ARE HOMELESS (1991), http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-5/homeless.htm.
[134] WHITE HOUSE TASK FORCE FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, *supra* note 60, at 30.
[135] *Id.* at 41.
[136] *Id.*
[137] *Id.*
[138] Id. at 31.
[139] 42 U.S.C. §§11432(f)(4)&(5), 11432(g)(5)&(6) (2001).
[140] Memorandum from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau to FYSB Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Grantees (Jan. 9, 2006) (available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/aboutfysb/McKinney-Vento_IM.pdf).
[141] Federal law already requires state and local educational agencies to collaborate with such programs. 42 U.S.C. §§ 11432(f)(4)&(5), 11432(g)(5)&(6).
[142] *Supra* note 58.
[143] For more information about the homeless priority, see Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, http://www.ahfc.state.ak.us/rental/application_instructions.cfm (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).
[144] 42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(5)(b).
[145] Lisa K. Foster et al., *Involving Youth in Policymaking and Coordinating Youth Policy: State-Level Structures in California and Other States,* CALIFORNIA RES. BUREAU

(California State Library, Sacramento, Cal.), Oct. 2005, at 1, 16, *available at* http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/05/05/05-005.pdf.

[146] COLO. DEP'T OF HUMAN SERVICES, OFFICE OF HOMELESS YOUTH SERVICES, 2004 ANNUAL REPORT (2005), *available at* http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/Documents/2004_Annual_Report_OHYS_final.doc.

[147] Or. Exec. Order No. 06-05 (2006), *available at* http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/pdf/eo0605.pdf.

[148] Maine.gov, State Homeless Youth Initiative, http://maine.gov/cabinet/03StateHomeless.htm (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).

[149] *Supra* note 58.

[150] For more information about the Homeless Youth Continuum, see League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund, Oregon's Homeless Youth (2006), *available at* http://www.lwvrv.org/pdf_docs/homeless-youth%202006.pdf.

[151] For more information about Rapid Response, see Maine.gov, Regional Homeless Youth Initiatives, http://maine.gov/cabinet/03RegionalHomeless.htm (last visited Mar. 28, 2009).

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[153] FLA. STAT. § 39.0016 (2008).

[154] For more information about information-sharing between DCF and Florida school districts, see ANDREA MOORE & KELE S. WILLIAMS, INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS: IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR FLORIDA'S CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE, *available at* http://www.law.miami.edu/images/728images/728.pdf.

[155] *Id.*

[156] Foster, *supra* note 145, at 6.

[157] *Supra* note 58.

[158] *Id.*

[159] For a survey of each state's activities to ensure the active participation of young people in youth policymaking is available in the publication, see Foster, *supra* note 145, at 21–36.