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In what ways does the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act improve school performance and well-being for students served under Title I?

Rationale:

Poverty and homelessness are problems that plague not only Albuquerque, but the country as a whole. Homelessness is a troublesome problem in the field of education. It has been a problem for decades, so during the 1980s, the federal government addressed this problem through legislation. Individual school districts try to combat this problem at high poverty schools through supplemental programs. Students who are burdened with homelessness are at a greater disadvantage than their classmates. The public school system can oftentimes be the most stable safety net in homeless students' lives. A quality and understanding education can be especially beneficial in homeless students' lives. In my research, I wish to investigate the problems, performance, challenges and accomplishments of students who fall under this category. In addition, I also want to discover the effectiveness of school and district programs that are aimed to help students who live under these conditions. Educators must be aware of this problem so they can understand and accommodate appropriately.

Literature Review

Within the past several years, "families with children have joined the ranks of the homeless in significant numbers. These families now constitute a third of the homeless population and are rapidly growing." (Bassuk, 2010). As a result of this epidemic, the

public school system has taken on a larger role in helping combat this problem. Many programs across the country have emerged to try and tackle this ever-growing situation. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, passed in 1987, overwhelmingly sailed through Congress to try and help homeless students achieve more in school. The act provides federal money to states and school districts, which have large populations of homeless students. Students are considered homeless if they meet any of the following criteria:

1. Children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship, living in emergency or transitional shelters, abandoned in hospitals, or awaiting foster care placement;
2. Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
3. Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
4. Migratory children who qualify as homeless due to living circumstances described (McKinney Vento, 1987).

Within Albuquerque Public Schools, a district with 81,000 students, there are three middle schools where such a program exists from money provided from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The APS Title I Homeless Project provides services to hundreds of students within the school district. The middle school program, known as Lunch Bunch, is designed to positively impact students' academic and social skills.

There are many serious obstacles for homeless students to overcome which affects their ability to succeed and help their future well-being. Concerns “include health problems, hunger, poor nutrition, developmental delays, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and educational underachievement.” (Rafferty, 1991). For many homeless students, there is a lower level of stability compared to students who live in a traditional household setting. Homeless students may move schools often, and as a result be academically behind their peers. It is “plausible for a student who moves schools at least once a year, to have 10% deficiency as opposed to their peers.” (Kerbow, et al. 1996) 2003). Students who change schools numerous times during the school year, do not have that consistency that is needed to perform well in the classroom and miss out on important skills in all areas of study.

A positive school climate can make a tremendous difference in the overall achievement for homeless students. According to Seattle University, nationwide “only 51% of children who are homeless meet their respective state’s standards in reading” (Firth, 2014). The low achievement of some homeless students are discouraging because problems arise quite early in their formative years at school. Homeless students arrive into the academic setting already at a disadvantage which is difficult, but not impossible to overcome. Students many begin school career without access to books and educational materials. This deficiency limits their developing language skills. Students with no stable or permanent home, are far greater to be placed in special education classes. Perhaps the biggest factor for homeless students and their academic success is the stress they are subjected to on a daily basis.

Extreme stress hurts learning and memory. Homeless youth may experience anxiety and depression at a higher rate than their classmates, which is a difficult barrier to overcome. This means that school and its climate must be the stabilizing element in the student's life. For this to transpire, a greater investment is needed from the federal government, state, school district, and schools to provide various types of health services. Student resilience is also a crucial piece of the puzzle.

Background: My Title I dual language middle school in downtown Albuquerque has slightly fewer than 500 students. Of those nearly 500 students, close to 15% are considered homeless according to the federal government. The homeless population at Washington MS is higher than both district and state-levels. Within APS, there is a Title I homeless project program titled, Lunch Bunch (now referred to as LB). The APS Title I Homeless Project is a district-wide program at the elementary, middle and high school levels. At Washington MS, LB meets once a week and provides lunch for students away from the cafeteria. LB members also have the opportunity to take field trips, listen to guest speakers and attend camps during the summer. This type of support is considered supplemental due to the time spent away the classroom and duty day. It is the mission of LB to “provide the means, motivation, and encouragement needed for homeless students to reach their potential...in an educational environment...” (APS Title I Homeless Project). During LB, guest speakers talk to the students about a “variety of topics, careers, and events at school” (Briggs, 2017). Throughout the school year, I attended almost every LB and observed students interact with each other and with adults, including myself. I saw an improvement in

behavior, discovered their interests and was able to see students in a new light.

Students who were in my class last year even seemed to open up to me about their lives. These were students who were quiet and hardly spoke to me the previous year.

Research Design:

I gave an anonymous survey of 31 out of the roughly 45 students in the program at Washington MS. There are other students who qualify for the program, but did not take the survey. Washington MS has a slightly less than 15% homeless student population. This is far greater than the state average. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, New Mexico's population of homeless students is below 5%. The LB survey asked students questions about their feelings toward the program, the friends made through the program, academic performance, attendance rates, and the most beneficial aspects of the program. LB students had the opportunity to write down their responses to these topics.

Findings:

***GPA** A number of 6th graders had a difficult time recalling their GPAs for the 1st and 2nd 9 weeks, while all 7th and 8th graders reported an improvement or steady grade maintenance of grades. The average self-reported GPA improved by nearly 0.4.

***Best part (According to the students):**

-66 percent of students in LB reported that the weekly non cafeteria food was the best part of the program.

-20% of LB students reported guest speakers to be the part they looked forward to the most.

-10% of participants felt the field trips were the best aspect of the Lunch Bunch.

-The remaining 4% claimed the hygiene/school supplies/uniforms/books were the best part of the program.

Attendance- Students were asked about the number of absences they had during the past month and almost all reported just a few absences. The most number of absences was 3 days. The other LB students averaged 1.5 absences during that month. The LB students had a fewer average of absences than the the school population as a whole. The general population's average number of absences is almost 4.

Lunch- There were several comments that stated the food at LB made a difference on whether or not they went to school even if they felt sick, and wanted to stay home from school.

"I like lunch so I have a good lunch even if I feel like staying home. The lunch is good."

"Lunch Bunch helps me at school by not thinking about how hungry I am."

What to do to improve the program-

-All students in LB want to have additional days of the LB program and additional food.

-77% of the students surveyed also want, additional field trips.

-Many students like inviting friends. 2/3 of LB students have invited a friend because

"LB is cool."

Excitement for school.

On a scale of 1-10, students were asked how they would rate their typical day at school and then a day at LB. All students claimed LB days were better by an average of 2.8 points.

This average does not include the 100 billion points response.

-After lunch, most students believe that the lunch provided and guest speakers are the most helpful aspects of LB, while school supplies round out the top 3.

-Every single student, if given the option, would like to participate in LB again. even those who said they were going to HS next year.

Friendship

-All students claimed to have made multiple friends through Lunch Bunch. The fewest being 2, while the greatest number of friends made was 21. (This must a super friendly student)

-According to student responses, on average, LB students made 5 additional friends through the program

- Once LB students discover each other's situation, they help support each other. The LB helps students bond and often times it lessens mobility.

Safe Space

-Unexpected response- "If someone wants to fight me, I go here."

How parents feel about LB-

-Parents like the guest speakers/career fair.

-Siblings are often in the LB together and bond more.

-Helps decrease students changing schools because students are provided with supplies that many not be provided at another school within APS.

I experienced firsthand the caring acts and improving social skills LB students acquired throughout the school year. Students often asked if I was going to eat with the group and offered me the fruit and school supplies they received from the program.

Federal Funding

<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>
\$70 million	\$77 million	\$70 million

From 2017 to 2018 there has been a 9% decrease in funding.

Recommendations:

- *Increase federal funding for the McKinney-Vento Act programs.
- *Increase state and district funding for Title I programs.
- *Invite additional guest speakers from various professions and careers.
- *Donate time, food, school supplies, clothes and money to the APS Title I Homeless Project.
- *Increase teacher involvement in LB so students feel supported by the entire staff.
- *More counseling for students involved in LB.

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Academic Risk and Resilience in the Context of Homelessness (Masten, et. al 2014)