

**The ABCs to Improve Homeless Education: An Extended Program
to Support Homeless Children into Adulthood, Better Funding, and
Community Involvement**

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Abstract

Today, over 21.9 percent of children in the United States live in poverty leaving many experiencing homelessness. In Los Angeles County alone, 35,000 homeless youth are enrolled in school. Though currently enrolled, these students struggle on a daily basis and experience barriers to education because of their homeless situation that restricts their educational achievement. Sometimes, these barriers even result in many dropping out of school before graduating high school. Homeless youth are more likely to become homeless adults compared to their non-homeless peers. Thus, to decrease this incidence, barriers and inequitable experiences in homeless education undoubtedly must be addressed in order to help students reach their full educational potential. By doing so, a means to end the cycle of homelessness will result in the long run, benefiting society at large.

Through extensive research, interviews, and analysis of named “best practices” of homeless education programs in the United States, it was found through this study that Los Angeles United School District’s own Homeless Education Program, along with the L.A. Family Housing Program, are two of the better practices that holistically tackle the issue of homeless education. These programs are leaders in understanding the scope of the issues of homeless education and are most comprehensive through their actions in mitigating barriers.

The study of the programs at large however all contributes to recommendations for a better homeless program in Los Angeles County. These include:

- Increase survey distribution that identifies homeless students (currently, LAUSD only does this annually)
- Creation of an official evaluation of the LAUSD Homeless Education Program
- Like San Bernardino County, extend program to support homeless children into adulthood by continuing guidance through job career
- Increase of private funding to L.A. Family Housing, with special considerations made to expand the HomeAgain Program
- Increase involvement of youth taking action to improve homeless education

This report provides a comprehensive study of the issue of homeless education, barriers homeless students face, the increased trends of homelessness due to our current economy, best practices, and recommendations to improve the situation of homelessness in Los Angeles County.

Chapter 1: Introduction

She does not shower for days. She uses soap from a public restroom as shampoo for her hair. She often times sleeps on a couch in the basement of the Student Activities Center. She moves from dorm to dorm other nights, asking her friends to let her sleep on the floor of their rooms. Sometimes there are moments she cannot even imagine where she will be the next day. She says, “This is not a situation that I want to be in. This is a situation that I am forced to be in.”ⁱ She is Sabrina Tinsey, a homeless student at the University of California: Los Angeles.

Today, over 21.9 percent of children in the United States are in poverty leaving many experiencing homelessness.ⁱⁱ Among rich countries, the United States has the highest incidence of youth poverty besides that of Mexico.ⁱⁱⁱ In Los Angeles, over 35,000 homeless youth attend schools in LA County--12,500 are enrolled in LAUSD alone.^{iv} While more and more people experience homelessness each day, it is the children whose assistance needs to be targeted in order to cease homelessness in the future generations. The government considers a family of four being impoverished if they take in less than \$22,000 per year. Based on this standard and government projections of unemployment, it is estimated that children in poverty will soon hit 25 percent making those children the largest generation of Americans being raised in hard times since the Great Depression.^v One of the most important ways to assist homeless youth is through providing resources to combat the numerous and fierce educational barriers they experience on a daily basis.

Sabrina gives a face to the high population of not only homeless college students, but sadly, also homeless students that have not yet graduated high school. With the numerous barriers that homelessness creates to education, statistically, a homeless student has an increased probability of dropping out of high school, being discouraged even before reaching higher

education like Sabrina. In order to decrease the incidence of homeless students, collaborative programs need to be heavily supported to ensure their reach extends to all homeless students and housing insecure. A community effort from the grassroots level also must be broadened to increase dialogue, awareness, and support, while decreasing stigmatization.

Sabrina moved to Chicago from the Philippines on her eleventh birthday with her mother and siblings. Her mother, who at the time was in her late 20s, found it very difficult to find an affordable place to live with her young children. Although she was not a believer or practiced any religion in the Philippines, in desperation for help, Sabrina's mother befriended individuals who recommended she find resources and support at a local Black Christian Church. Even as outsiders, Sabrina's family was embraced by the church with open arms, making them believe that there is a god and there is a purpose for them to be here. From this, Sabrina explains her childhood as "mystical" and has instilled in her a passion for life and love of people. She takes this drive to pursue her dreams of education.^{vi}

Throughout Sabrina's childhood, she found her housing situation to be anything but stable. Sabrina and her family were always moving during her high school years because of her mother's low-income salary. They lived in many places, from garages to motels. Because of their frequent transience, Sabrina went to four different high schools. As a young girl, Sabrina remembers being the "slowest" girl in her elementary years. Because she experienced how difficult it was to be behind all of her classmates due to her dyslexia and other challenges she faced, Sabrina was motivated to improve herself through her passion to learn. As she moved from school to school, Sabrina was eager to keep up her grades, knowing that she would do more in education. She hoped to one day be a professor at a college or university. As a result of her passion for learning and her driven nature, Sabrina maintained her position in honors programs

in high school, and eventually college. However, as Sabrina approached college, other challenges awaited her.^{vii}

Sabrina went on to a community college during the spring of 2008 and transferred to UCLA in the fall of that same year. To afford her education, Sabrina had no choice but to be a part time student to free up time for a job. Everything was going smoothly, until Sabrina ran into financial trouble in the 2009 Winter Semester. At this time, rent in Los Angeles was increasing and she could no longer support herself on the money she received from financial aid. Her status only allowed for financial aid to be received as a one-time scholarship and was not renewable. Sabrina continued to apply for scholarships but only received two of the fifteen she sought after, which were not enough to keep her in school. Sabrina was determined to stay in school to reach her goal of becoming a professor. When she could no longer pay for rent, Sabrina had to sell everything she owned. She stayed with a few friends at times but did not want to stay long enough at one place knowing her friends were also paying their own expenses. As a result, Sabrina found herself moving from couch to couch.^{viii}

Sabrina's mother, friends, and counselors encouraged her to drop out of school temporarily to work and save money. The idea of not going to school deeply hurt Sabrina's self esteem. Drawing upon her childhood and remembering her mother turning to peers for help, Sabrina decided to share her story with the UCLA campus, something that she was embarrassed to do as a young girl. Sabrina had no other choice but to tell anyone she could find to share her story. From this, many people were astounded by her situation and she was able to get scholarship money and eventually graduate without any loans.^{ix}

Looking back, Sabrina remembers her experience at UCLA being very difficult. There were many people who did not like what she did because she fought against the odds. At her

time at UCLA, not many people were aware that a homeless population on campus existed. When her story came out, fifteen other students also revealed their homeless situation. At the time, there were no programs for homeless and/or any programs that catered to Sabrina's need. When Sabrina was finally desperate and brave enough to tell her story, the Student Center was motivated to make a difference. From this, a food bank for homeless students was created, one of the first programs to be initiated after Sabrina's story was told. Next, BruinTent, a UCLA organization was instilled to spread awareness about homelessness and specifically homelessness on the UCLA campus. As the movement gained more momentum, the URC Housing Program was developed. The URC Housing Program is a non-profit association and an affiliate of UCLA. The organization provides housing for homeless and 8540 students who do not have financial backing. In exchange for administrative rights to housing, students are required to help maintain the building and pay approximately \$150 per month. These programs and increased awareness has created a tremendously supportive and non-judgmental environment, breaking down barriers and stigmatization of education. Sabrina's story started a revolution for students to come out and spread more awareness about homeless students.^x

From her experience as a homeless student in higher education, Sabrina recalls the most important thing for a student with very little financial ground is to tell his or her story to the community like she did—to explain why education is so important to them, what he or she has to offer, and most importantly, not to give up.^{xi} Sabrina's success can be attributed to her motivation. While everyone around her was telling her to drop out of school, including counselors who encouraged her to save money and then return once she had saved up enough, her drive and only one year left until graduation, motivated her to do whatever it took to get her diploma.^{xii} Unfortunately, Sabrina's story and her passion for education are unique. Homeless

youth are faced with extremely pressing barriers from such a young age instilling a guided path to hardship by society. Dropping out of school and entering the labor force is an appealing option to those who struggle to find a warm place to sleep. Though Sabrina found success, she expresses her extreme hardship as a homeless student in college, something that no other student should experience and must be prevented for homeless youth in elementary, junior, and high schools today.

Chapter 2: Why is Education Crucial to Reduce Homelessness?

It is obvious that education is a highly valued aspect of social capital in our society today. The “education premium,” which economists refer to as the economic and social enhancement associated with increased education, illustrates the importance of ensuring that homeless students do not suffer academically because of their situation.^{xiii} In the long run, education is especially important to break free from the cyclical nature of poverty and homelessness. According to a report in 2006 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, since 1979, in real terms, only college grads experienced an increase in median weekly earnings.^{xiv} On the other hand, those who did not graduate college experienced a 22 percent decline in their median weekly earnings (real terms).^{xv} Not only is it beneficial for the individual to receive the best educational opportunity that he or she can, but as a society, education and job training are crucial to create the most productive society possible—this all starts with education.

Education and the classroom provide essential resources for children to learn and grow. The school building and educational community may show the most stability for a homeless student.^{xvi} Stability of education is extremely important in order for a student to continuously improve upon skills and knowledge that are learned. Without stability, lifestyles can become complicated and incompatible to building a successful life. Education teaches life skills, such as stability and routine, as well as general social skills. These critical life skills that education offers and how they are received is a “strong predictor of the ability to overcome poverty and become independent.”^{xvii} However, because of the many barriers that homeless students face, they often fail to receive the stability that the classroom has to offer and thus have a more difficult time succeeding in school. Breaking down barriers to education, the “great equalizer,” is one of the most important feats to overcome in order to alleviate the cycle of homelessness and poverty.^{xviii}

The lack of numerous social services leaves many people without resources when they find themselves homeless. As the National Child Traumatic Street Network Homelessness and Extreme Poverty Working Group explains, “homelessness results from the combined effects of extreme poverty, lack of affordable housing, decreasing government supports, the challenge of raising children alone, domestic violence, and fractured social supports.”^{xxix} Though many may find themselves in a homeless situation from a variety of different paths in life, many homeless families share similar characteristics when homeless. For example, homeless families are often led by a young (late 20s) single mother raising two children, with at least one under the age of six. These families, like Sabrina’s, are also typically minorities or belong to some ethnic group.^{xx} In addition to lack of economic capital, many homeless mothers have little social capital, in terms of education and employment.^{xxi} A study in 2009 reports that 35-61% of mothers in homeless families have a high school diploma or GED compared to 75 percents of all adults who possess the same credentials.^{xxii} Often times, this lack in social capital only exacerbates the hardship that homeless families face. In order to deal with their situation, homeless mothers may turn to substance abuse—reports show that incidents with drugs are higher for mothers who are homeless compared to those who are not homeless.^{xxiii} A mother’s substance abuse is not only detrimental to her child or children, but also, intensifies the cycle of poverty.

Though there are many characteristics of homeless families, the increasing number of working and middle class families in Los Angeles who are experiencing housing insecurity is extremely alarming. According to the 2010 report by the United Way titled “L.A. County 10 Years Later A Tale of Two Cities Once Future,” in the last decade, income levels have not kept up with rental housing and mortgage rates resulting in the poor, working poor, and now even the middle class “also experienc[ing] a housing burden from which they have been relatively

immune for generations.”^{xxiv} The report also tells that “the gap between median hourly wages and hourly wages needed to afford an apartment began to rapidly widen beginning in 2003.”^{xxv} Though there was movement in the creation of more housing (14,000 new units) 90% of these were only affordable to those with annual incomes of \$135,000 and higher.^{xxvi} By the year 2008, issues of affordable housing officially became an issue for people of all different income levels, with an increase of “2 to 3 times greater for middle income households.”^{xxvii} From 2000 to 2008, the percentage of people spending 1/3 of their income on housing rose from 50% to 58%.^{xxviii} The reality of the growing number of housing insecure and gap between income and housing affordability in Los Angeles makes homelessness a more tangible actuality for not only the poor and uneducated, but now, for the greater population at large. These indicators make the issue extremely pressing and illustrate the need for change and to bring homelessness to the forefront. Though the number of homeless are decreasing, Los Angeles still remains the “homeless capital of the nation with 48,000 people homeless every night, [...] 40% of the homeless [being] women and children [and] 25% hav[ing] some college education.”^{xxix} An increased number of families experiencing housing insecurity and trouble finding affordable housing in Los Angeles translate to an increasing number of students facing homelessness, and thus, a disruption in education. In order to cease this vicious cycle of homelessness and poverty that is now expanding itself as a middle class issue, affordable housing needs to be adjusted to income levels. In addition, an official body that combines education, housing, and social services needs to be established in a collaborative effort to improve the education experience of homeless students.

Chapter 3: Lack of Affordable Housing Increasing the Incidence of Homelessness

The increasing income gap in the United States has exacerbated the housing crisis, with an “affordable” home a term only applicable to top-earning residents. Even those who are considered middle class in the United States struggle to make ends meet. Today, the lack of affordable housing directly contributes to the adverse effects of homeless education by creating an increasing population of homeless and housing insecure.

The demographic group that public housing was created to serve (that is, those who otherwise could not afford to rent or own a home) has grown to extend to people beyond the poor and the working poor, making the already large target population even greater, and thus, more difficult to efficiently serve. In the 1930s, the housing market suffered from extreme failure as a result of the Great Depression. In response, the government created the first public housing initiative to address that failure. The public housing efforts were originally only intended to serve the poor and the working poor. However, because not enough units were built, it became a service that could only help the worst off and a last resort for the extremely poor.^{xxx}

In the 1960s, the government changed its practice to involve the private housing market. The government built incentivized relationships with the private housing market by “providing direct mortgages or mortgage guarantees to private developers and landlords to build and manage low-income housing.”^{xxxii} By doing so, the government gained resources to extend the housing support to a wider income range beyond only the poor and working poor. Even so, the number of those in need of help proved to be too large. As a result, the program again only served those most in need, those facing the most extreme levels of poverty that led to more criticism. In addition, by involving the private market in the public housing plan, problems such as “graft and corruption” resulted.^{xxxiii}

Next, the government moved away from direct involvement in construction of affordable housing and instead towards a program of vouchers—Section 8 Vouchers. Section 8 Vouchers, also called “portable” housing assistance, were created to provide families with stability based on two measures—choice in housing with the guarantee that rent was no higher than 30% of their income. Like the other initiatives the government tried to enact, only a small percentage of those in need of the vouchers were helped due to the extremely high demand for the service that was far beyond what the government was willing to supply. In many cities, the average wait to receive Section 8 vouchers was at least five years. In addition, the program faced other difficulties. Those who received vouchers had a difficult time finding apartments because “the stock of units meeting federal rental standards is too small, and the ability to obtain high rents on the open market leads too many landlords to opt-out of the federal programs.”^{xxxiii}

The nature of the resources of public housing leads to a limited amount of housing it can provide to the large community that needs the support. Though public housing is well managed and provides homes for hundreds of thousands of people in need, because the government can only serve a limited population, opposition, criticism, and shortcomings are inevitable.^{xxxiv} Today, public housing seems to be limited to helping only a small percentage of the growing population of those who need help because of the growing income gap. More commonly, it is now not only the poor and working poor who struggle with housing issues and affordability, but also even the middle class.

According to the most recent Census conducted in 2009, there are 43.6 million people living in poverty in the United States.^{xxxv} The Census also reveals that the poverty rate has reached 14.3 percent.^{xxxvi} These alarming statistics reveal the worst incidence of poverty in 15 years, establishing poverty to be an extremely pressing issue for the United States today.^{xxxvii} The

increase of poverty coupled with limited resources for housing assistance makes the issue of homeless education an extremely vital concern that the United States must address to mitigate such negative effects of homelessness on learning. Ultimately, if something is not done to improve the situation at hand, the future of America will be threatened.

Though many Americans earn far more than the official poverty level, many still struggle financially. Families whose income is well over the poverty line, even doubling and tripling their income, are still having a difficult time making ends meet.^{xxxviii} The definition of poverty has become too limited, while being “poor” or “rich” has become a relative idea making it difficult to understand what these labels actually mean. The term “middle class” also proves to be arbitrary and has no single acknowledged definition. One could be struggling to make payments as a middle class resident or could find oneself to be more financially comfortable.^{xxxix} The shifting definitions of poverty and the middle class need to be revised in order to adjust benefits to facilitate the poverty issue in the United States. Government programs to address the housing crisis, aimed at serving the poor and working poor, not only fail to provide enough resources to assist the entire population it targets, but does not even consider the affordability to be an issue of the middle class as well.

In addition to increasing the number of those who require housing assistance, the income gap also creates a change in property values. As the rich get richer, the housing crisis is also worsened as the wealthiest households “bid up the price of both homeownership and rental housing. The net consequence is that housing costs have risen more quickly and to a greater extent than the average household income.”^{xl} As a result of the housing crisis, many families are forced to live in “overcrowded and/or substandard conditions.”^{xli} Many children, when living in such situations have limited space for quiet study time, which among other consequences,

directly hinders their success in education. This educational hindrance thus affects education by undermining the work of the public school and ultimately, provides for an unpromising future for the economy at large.^{xlii}

Overall, access to permanent housing is crucial in a child's learning experience. The benefits of affordable housing are tremendous. In a stable home, a child can spend more time with his or her parents, and can increase involvement and their educational success. He or she can have access to environments that are conducive to studying. Instead of being distracted in an overcrowded area (for example, a homeless shelter); one can have (and needs) access to adequate lighting and heat in the winter months; a generally safer environment, free from crime, leading to less stress and anxiety and more security; and improved health among other factors.^{xliii}

The affordable housing crisis and increasing income gap directly affects the success of homeless students in their educational endeavors. Because the income gap is only widening and thus creating a greater population that is not being served by public housing assistance, strategies must be initiated to alleviate the barriers to education that a homeless student is subject. With a growing population likely to face housing insecurity, this is an issue that needs to be addressed with a more effective strategy. Programs that specifically address this population and are equipped to provide assistance on a one-time basis (or with the goal of moving the homeless rapidly into permanent housing) should be more heavily invested.

Chapter 4: Barriers to Education Homeless Students Face

Many homeless children's life disadvantages pose an extra burden that affects their success in education through the barriers they face due to being homeless. A homeless child's situation impacts nearly all aspects of one's daily life: "all of these problems are caused, exacerbated and impacted in myriad ways by their troubled environments."^{xliv} Studies show that many of the effects of homelessness cause a rapid impact on children's mental and physical health and thus, school performance, are affected almost immediately. However, when these children find more permanent homes, such negative effects gradually diminish.^{xlv} Thus, such hardships of homelessness can be directly related to affect the homeless child's under-performance and success in school. Barriers that homeless children face related to their education include less educational continuity, unstable home lives, difficulties in enrolling in school, behavioral issues, societal stigmas, transportation, adverse health effects, and lack of money to provide for school supplies.^{xlvi} Overall,

The experience of homelessness results in a loss of community, routines, possessions, privacy, and security. Children, mothers, and families who live in shelters need to make significant adjustments to shelter living and are confronted by other problems, such as the need to reestablish a home, interpersonal difficulties, mental and physical problems, and child-related difficulties such as illness.^{xlvii}

The tremendous burden these barriers pose on homeless students make for an extremely disadvantaged population clearly illustrating the need for extra attention these children require in order to keep up with their educational progression.

A Transient Lifestyle

First and foremost, homeless students' transient nature causes a disruption in schedule and normalcy that hinders smooth progress in academics. Logistically, residency requirements for enrolling in school and the poor transfer of school records when homeless children relocate

make it difficult for the student from the start.^{xlviii} Not only do they face turbulent circumstances when trying to find shelter, but because of residency requirements, this turbulence is also felt in the academic setting. Although the McKinney-Vento Act allows homeless students to enroll in schools without a permanent address, many parents are unaware of this right and how to use it to their advantage. Not only are the parents uneducated about the equal rights that the McKinney-Vento act mandates but schools are also ignorant about such rights.^{xlix} Even if a parent attempts to enroll his or her child in school without a permanent address, the school may obviously and wrongly deny them.

Frequent transience not only poses an extra burden to even attend school but also has a grave consequence on academic advancement. Nationwide statistics have found children are academically set back four to six months with every school transfer.¹ Studies have also found that “forty-one percent of homeless children will attend two different schools in a normal year, and 29 percent will attend three or more different schools.”^{li} Because of the poor attendance record of homeless children due to their frequent transfers and other barriers such as transportation and health, homeless students are “four times more likely to drop out of school and two times more likely to score lower on standardized tests” since “one in ten homeless students will miss at least one month of school each year.”^{lii} Having unstable living conditions are detrimental to a student’s academic progression when a sense of normalcy and schedule is unattainable.

Living in a Shared Home

The limited private space in many shelters, where most homeless children live, make it difficult to build conducive academic and study environments. The space and community in shelters can be anything but private. Some families are forced to share rooms and common spaces in order to accommodate for as many people as possible. This set up makes it hard for

children to do their homework where they share space with many people. The noise and actions make studying almost impossible for children with numerous distractions. In effect, a barrier for practicing and comprehending what is learned in the school day on their own is yet another additional hardship for homeless students to overcome due to the inconsistent nature of their residency.

In addition to the adverse influence of the spatial nature living in a shared home has on a homeless child's education, the quality of life in such living conditions also influences school performance. Pamela Hughes, former principal at Ninth Street Elementary School, the only elementary school on Skid Row, has reported that "Sleepy students are also a problem [...] for many [...] are unable to get enough rest as a result of the turbulence and loudness that frequently characterize their home situations, whether they are living in dormitory settings, doubled up at an apartment, or have a disruptive family situation."^{liii} Undoubtedly, shelter-based living situation that is not ideal for a young child. With many additional distractions that are coupled with a shared living condition, along with the anxiety of not having a permanent home, make it difficult for a homeless student to get a good night's rest. "Sleepy students," as Hughes has identified them, are then not performing up to potential in school.

Health

The environment of shared living conditions not only exposes children to nightly interruptions of sleep patterns but with this lack of sleep, also weakens their health, such as their immune system, causing them to miss more days of school due to sick absences. Already, because of their high level of transiency, homeless students often fall victim to missing more school days than their peers who are not homeless. It has been found that "homeless children are sick at twice the rate of other children, they suffer twice as many ear infections, have four times

the rate of asthma, and have five times more diarrhea and stomach problems.”^{liv} With poor health, homeless children again have an unfair disadvantage and are likely to fall behind in their studies and have to work extra hard to keep up. The health detriments that are related to homelessness create enormous barriers for homeless students when catching up on schoolwork after missing class from sickness.

A homeless child’s shifting lifestyle inevitably creates substantial food insecurity. Often in tight money situations, having three meals a day, everyday, can be complicated for some homeless families. It has been found that “homeless children go hungry two times as often as non-homeless children.”^{lv} Without proper nutrition, homeless students lack the fuel their bodies require in order to function, including crucial cognitive abilities needed for learning. Hunger induces fatigue to a homeless child who already may experience sleep deprivation. A deficient diet can make the child more prone to becoming sick, and thus causes the child to miss time in school.

In many schools, missing too many academic days often results in repeating a grade, making progress and advancement for homeless students even more difficult when they are more likely to be absent because of their health. A study in 2008 reports that 35 percent of homeless students have repeated a grade.^{lvi} Comparatively, a different study from 2005 translates a rate that more specifically shows this to be influenced by homelessness, revealing that homeless students are twice as likely as non-homeless students to repeat a grade.^{lvii} Being held back in school and without proper support from the school system, many homeless students feel discouraged and forgotten about, leading to a detachment from education. This detachment may become dangerous to create idle behavior and a higher likeliness for the student to drop out of school.

Transportation

The frequent change of location a homeless child experiences directly affects their school attendance and tardiness record. By mandates of the McKinney-Vento act, a student may stay enrolled in their original school despite moving to another district.^{lviii} While this is beneficial for the student in terms of consistency in their education, it also poses another barrier of extended transportation a homeless student faces that they would not be burdened with if they were not homeless. With the extended geography of Los Angeles and nature of the city's traffic, students experience extended commute time, making it very difficult for children to make it to school on time. Even when they do have continuity with the school they attend, there are still many other barriers to overcome.^{lix} Increased travel time children must devote in order to be at school on time takes away from even more hours of sleep many homeless children receive that again hinders the learning experience because of their living situation. The barrier of long-distance transportation to school sets homeless children back in education compared with their non-homeless counterparts, affecting health and attendance. This is yet another disadvantage homeless children must tackle when dealing with educational issues.

Family Issues

Many homeless children face turbulent family lives that serves as a catalyst for trauma and stress. These forms of trauma associated with the vulnerability of homelessness include “physical and sexual assault, witnessing violence, or abrupt separation.”^{lx} Due to frequent transience, it is not uncommon for families to be separated “both before and after the homelessness episode” when scrambling to make ends meet.^{lxi} It has been found that forty-four percent of homeless children experience separation from their family compared to only eighteen percent of non-homeless but low-income families.^{lxii} Reunification of homeless children with

their families is often complicated.^{lxiii} A study done in 2002 reported that only twenty-three percent of homeless children who were separated from their family five years prior were subsequently reunited.^{lxiv} This lack of guidance and support from a family creates an increased level of angst for a child and pressure to become more independent at an early age. Life difficulties make it hard to make education an immediate priority for some children who worry first and foremost whether or not they will be reunited with their family. Thus, education may be affected in an indirect manner.

The separation of family is not however the only family concern that creates additional barriers for a homeless child. Homeless families experience high rates of domestic and community violence that especially affect the homeless mothers and children.^{lxv} These added stressors create an environment that only “impedes recovery due to ongoing traumatic reminders and challenges.”^{lxvi} High instances of violence may normalize the negative behavior to a child. Thus, children may be more likely to mimic the violent behavior they are exposed to, creating many behavioral issues that further challenge and create stress for the child.

Behavioral

The environment of the homeless world on the streets of urine, shopping carts, abuse of drugs, and shouting often leads to homeless children becoming accustomed to low-standards and unworthy behavior, thus having discipline issues in school—more fighting and aggravation as well as a different sense of security compared to their non-homeless peers. This tense lifestyle also has been found to result in shorter temperaments in homeless children.^{lxvii}

Many homeless children, due to their environment and circumstance, have been found more likely to have behavioral issues compared to children who are not homeless. In one study, “sheltered homeless children [...] were four times more likely [than non-homeless children] to

test positive for a behavioral disorder.”^{lxviii} More specifically, an alarming fifty percent of homeless students experience anxiety, depression, or withdrawal while only eighteen percent of non-homeless students suffer these same mental disabilities.^{lix} Behavioral issues create a barrier to learning as it defers attention away from classroom and learning time and instead to correct behavior.

Battling diseases such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal can make it more challenging for a student to focus on academics. Not only are homeless students burdened with the likeliness to develop behavioral issues, but this contribution to developmental delays is also often times untreated.^{lxx} Studies have found that “more than one-fifth of homeless preschoolers have emotional problems serious enough to require professional care, but less than one-third receive any treatment.”^{lxxi} Not only are homeless students more likely to be set back from behavioral issues, but are also further faced with the challenge of having to live with these issues. Without treatment, homeless children must juggle another obstacle in addition to the many they already face and are still expected to stay on top of their academics. Behavioral issues, such as acting out in the classroom, without being diagnosed, may easily be confused with bad temperament—troubled behavior that is easily blamed on the child. However, the deep roots of such behavior, such as anxiety, depression, or withdrawal resulting from the circumstance of homelessness, are often to blame. Yet these behaviors are often untreated, forcing the child to battle through the disease while facing the adverse consequences. In these situations, an obvious need for special attention to the child is needed in order for it to not affect their education, however, help often fails to reach the child.

Special Education

In addition to behavioral issues that affect the education of a homeless child, many homeless students also are likely to require special education needs that are again often unmet. Compared to children who identify as having permanent residency, homeless children are “three times more likely to have signs of a learning disability, and eight times more likely to screen positive for mental retardation.”^{lxxii}

The standard of eligibility to receiving special education is defined in terms of falling within a disability category. These include serious emotional disturbance, learning disability, mental retardation, or physical handicap. In a study done in 1991, forty-five percent of homeless students were defined as falling within the disability category and thus meriting the eligibility standards to receive special education. However, of these children who should have obtained special educational attention, only twenty-three percent were tested and/or treated in special classes for their need.^{lxxiii} Just as homeless children face untreated behavioral issues where behavior negatively affects their schoolwork, mental or learning disabilities that directly affects academics even further, also fall short of being addressed and acted upon. The extreme level of unmet needs shown by these statistics not only illustrate shortcomings of the public education system but more specifically, how homeless children bear most of the burden of such inadequacies. Without equal access and additional help in education, the cycle of homelessness is perpetuated, as these children are more likely to drop out of school and thus have disadvantages in the job market. A homeless student’s inconsistent lifestyle may contribute to the delay in assessment for special education.

Again, transiency places a negative effect on the attention, specialization, and personalization a homeless child receives. If a homeless child does not have a permanent home

and thus school, “determination of eligibility for special education, the first step to accessing programs may be especially problematic [...] because of lengthy Individualized Education Program timelines for evaluation and placement.”^{lxxiv} Building a relationship with the child becomes a difficult barrier to make progress in any educational setting. Without knowing the child on a more personal level, teaching, mentoring, or tutoring becomes more difficult to cater effective teaching strategies to the student. Thus, especially for these children who require extra attention, it may be difficult to provide meaningful instruction or assess for disability if the child does not have a home base and is constantly on the move. The idea of transience once again interrupts a homeless student’s learning progress as it serves as a block that impedes the student’s learning and progression.

Social

In addition to the heavy anxiety a homeless child experiences rooted in the lack of stability of their situation, societal stigmas of being homeless also contribute greatly to further stress. The label of homelessness creates a hierarchy within students at school. A sense of fitting in is heightened for the homeless child who not only is concerned with surviving the normal social feats of adolescence but also has the label of “homeless” attached to them. Principal Hughes at Ninth Street Elementary explains this social system and the affect on a child’s self esteem: “We have children who are here because their parents work in the area, and they’re considered to be the highest echelon [while others] in the hotels are in the middle because they’re not getting free stuff, and the kids in the shelters are at the bottom. It’s a caste system.”^{lxxv} Further societal barriers homeless students must face create more stress in the school environment. Because the students are placed into a devalued social category, discomfort at school can influence their academic behavior with their focus elsewhere on social problems they

encounter. This social stress “associated with homelessness can exacerbate other trauma-related difficulties and interfere with recovery due to ongoing traumatic reminders and challenges.”^{lxxvi}

A homeless child’s circumstance creates greater barriers to overcome in the school environment, shifting focus from learning to stress about the unfair social judgment that is attached to being homeless.

The barriers to education that homeless students face creates disadvantages that do not allow the student to reach his or her full potential in school. Homelessness generates a transient lifestyle that brings about negative barriers to education. Basic needs such as food and sleep, critical for a student to focus, are not adequately met. Shared homes, family, and behavioral issues create distractions that are not conducive to learning. Finally, societal stigmas take away confidence of homeless students at school and may even deter him or her away from the educational institution where peers may be judgmental and create insecurity. The many barriers that a homeless child faces in the educational setting are extremely imposing and yield a great disservice to the quality of education a homeless student receives. These alarming trends indicate the strong need for policy and attention to be turned towards homeless education.

Chapter 5: Provision of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and What it Means for Homeless Education

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act protects many rights of those experiencing homelessness. Specifically, the act has been a great advocate for homeless education issuing policy changes to make public education more conducive to a homeless student's success in school and to break down existing barriers he or she faces. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was passed in 1987 as a result of grassroots and community efforts. As the first and only federal legislative response to homelessness, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is a pioneer of its kind. In the early 1980s, the Reagan Administration dismissed the issue of homelessness as a federal concern and instead considered it an issue that could be addressed on the local level. In response, a federal task force on homelessness was created in 1983 with the goal to inform community members on how to obtain extra federal property to combat the problem and to be used as a source for housing. Though this task force did not look to policy to solve issues, it started a movement to push the issue of homelessness to the forefront on a national level and one that needed to be addressed by the federal government.^{lxxvii}

In 1986, progress was already initiated as the Homeless Persons' Survival Act, which called for emergency relief measures, preventive measures, and long-term solutions to homelessness, was presented to both houses of Congress. Some of these measures were passed as two different acts later that year—the Homeless Eligibility Clarification Act of 1986 and the Homeless Housing Act. Together, these acts “removed permanent address requirements and

other barriers to existing programs such as Supplemental Security Income, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Veterans Benefits, Food Stamps, and Medicaid” along with the creation of the “Emergency Shelter Grant program and a transitional housing demonstration program; both programs [that] were administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).”^{lxxviii}

Following the success of the Homeless Eligibility Clarification Act of 1986 and the Homeless Housing Act, momentum for more legislative action towards aiding the homeless only continued. Advocates continued to fight for legislation to address “Title I of the Homeless Persons’ Survival Act—emergency relief provisions for shelter, food, mobile health care, and transitional housing [and] was introduced as the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act.”^{lxxix} When the act was passed in 1987, it was named after the late Representative Stewart B. McKinney but later adjusted in 2000 to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to also honor Representative Bruce Vento, two leading supporters of the original act.^{lxxx}

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is a broad piece of legislation intended to aid in many facets of life that homeless individuals find challenging. These include a range of services addressing emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education, and permanent housing.^{lxxx} The act was amended in 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1994—the amendments of 1990 especially demanded greater assistance in homeless youth and education.^{lxxxii}

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act works to support homeless children in their educational success and break down barriers to education that they face because of their housing insecurity. The act defines a homeless person as one who lives in “temporary housing including motels, shelters, campgrounds, vehicles, on the street or doubled-up with family

members or friends.”^{lxxxiii} Under this act, all homeless children are protected and entitled to receive the same free public education services that are available to other non-homeless children. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act declares that homeless children have the right to immediate enrollment in a public school, even without possession of proper documentation of residency, immunization and medical records, birth certificates, and guardianship papers that are usually required.^{lxxxiv} Eventually however, these documents are required to be presented. To expedite this process, each school has a homeless education liaison to help assist homeless students in gathering such documents.

In addition, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act allows families to decide which school the student will attend.^{lxxxv} This right is especially crucial to avoid the disruptions of the child’s education. Even if the child experiences frequent housing transitions and housing insecurity, the right to choose his or her school provides some sense of stability in the homeless student’s life. Usually, in the public school system, students are enrolled in schools according to their place of residence or neighborhood. For a homeless student, this can be tricky when residency is in flux. School stability is extremely important to a student’s success in education—frequent school transfers result in educational set backs and even retains students from graduating to the next grade level. With the help of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, some of these barriers can be overcome.

If a child and his or her parents decide to keep the student enrolled in the school of origin, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act also mandates transportation assistance. Transportation is required to be provided even if “(1) the student and parent(s) decide to keep [the] child in his/her school of origin; (2) if a dispute arises over which school the child will be attending; and (3) if the school does not normally provide transportation to students.”^{lxxxvi} By

providing free transportation to school, the act protects the importance of school stability in a student's academic success, working to break down the barriers a homeless student may face.

In addition to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provisions, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) provides even further services to support homeless students. The Homeless Education Department within LAUSD outlines responsibilities beyond what the act enforces. These include providing schools with school supplies, ensure families are aware of and are receiving all services and rights for which are applicable to them, “provide in-service training and technical assistance to schools and community agencies, provide referrals to health, mental health, dental and other school and community services,” encourage parents participation in their child's educational career, and “mediating enrollment disputes.”^{lxxxvii} In addition to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, LAUSD school site responsibilities include designating a School Site Homeless Liaison, assisting in identifying homeless students and families attending the schools, provide advocacy and support for homeless students, provide referrals to support services, “review the Student Residency Questionnaire and needs assessment form with the family to determine needed services” and submit them to the Homeless Education Program Office, train school staff to respond to homeless students and the Homeless Education Program and “establish and maintain a CONFIDENTIAL in-school file of identified homeless students.”^{lxxxviii}

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has proven over the years to be an important asset, helping those facing homelessness, and particularly, *students* facing homelessness. In 1995, an evaluation of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program was conducted, finding that access to school since the McKinney-Vento Act was initiated has become easier for homeless students. In addition, the evaluation reported, “state

coordinators and local school district administrators have worked hard, with limited resources, to ensure homeless children's and youth's access to a free, appropriate education."^{lxxxix} Despite its progress, lack of funding, including some of the largest cuts in the most recent years, leads to fewer students being served and ultimately impedes the success of the program.^{xc}

Chapter 6: LAUSD Current Practices

Currently, the Los Angeles Unified School District has designated a specific unit to serve the homeless population in their school system, known as the Homeless Education Program. The Homeless Education Program guides homeless students and families to overcome educational barriers they face due to their homeless status. They provide many resources for students and families, along with educating the public and school professionals on the issue. Specifically, the Homeless Education Program provides educational advocacy for homeless youth including help with school enrollment, school record retrieval, guidance for educational options and alternative school placements, advocacy at school meetings and help with enrollment issues, referrals to available community resources such as tutoring and health care, provides school supplies including backpacks and school clothing, and coordinates school transportation assistance when needed to name a few.^{xci} In 1988, the school liaison position was established and was later reauthorized in 2002 to strengthen the program.^{xcii} To do so, aides were added in schools to help liaison with providing support for homeless students.^{xciii} Though there was knowledge about the homeless situation in the LAUSD school system, it was not until 2005 when the community began to raise more serious concerns and awareness about homeless students and the barriers they face in regards to the quality of their education.^{xciv} This led to a more focused approach and evaluation of what was already being done and what could be improved upon in terms of educational advocacy for homeless students. Thus, the spotlight on homeless education and youth led to the board of education requesting more people to be involved in the Homeless Education Program. Melissa Schoonmaker, Pupil Services and Attendance Coordinator from the

Homeless Education Program, started her position as one of three or four staff people in 2005 and now reports to a team of thirteen department staff members. The growth of the Homeless Education Program, in terms of staff people, reflects the current and growing need for more help for the increase of students who qualify for the homeless education services.

The Homeless Education Program coordinates the macro work of providing resources to the youth who need assistance. The program trains each individual school to provide assistance on a micro level to help homeless families and students.^{xcv} In order to identify homeless students, each school sends out a Student Urgency Questionnaire in new student packets.^{xcvi} This questionnaire is also distributed to every student in the LAUSD school system at least once per year, even if they do not or have never shown signals of homelessness.^{xcvii} The questions on the survey are intended to identify if students are unaccompanied by an adult or has an insecure housing situation.^{xcviii} By distributing these questionnaires on a regular basis to each and every student enrolled in the LAUSD system, identification of homeless students is checked frequently and efficiently. LAUSD's distribution of the questionnaire to every student helps ensure that no child slips between the cracks of the system and leads to better evaluations of identifying homeless students. Because families can experience homelessness very rapidly, whether it be from a job loss or sudden illness that requires heavy medical expenses, LAUSD should distribute questionnaires semi-annually. By doing so, the school system may catch those in need before situations of homelessness reach a long-term interval, preventing many educational barriers.

The Homeless Education Program has created a position completely devoted to aiding the population of students that are identified as homeless. The program assigns a liaison for each school to help identify and connect with homeless students to ensure that they are being helped by the program in attempts to see that no child is left behind. The principal of each school selects

a person on staff to be the point person or liaison for homeless students.^{xcix} Teachers are trained on homeless education policy and what resources are offered both through the Homeless Education Program and also general education policies.^c If teachers notice any students indicating signs of homelessness, they report the concern to the liaison that then follows through with the situation to see that the student receives any and all services they need if they do in fact face homelessness. Teachers are both trained how to respond to a homeless student's needs and to provide additional references; for example, the Homeless Education Program provides literature that identifies what to look for in students that signal a homeless situation.^{ci} If the school identifies a student that possibly faces homelessness, the teacher and liaison may talk to the parent to find further information of their situation, offer solutions, and connect them with resources to accommodate to their needs.^{cii} For example, if the student is experiencing trouble staying awake and alert in class, the teacher may find as simple a solution as allowing time to rest for that student during the day.^{ciii} Or, if the student reveals restlessness, outdoor play in a safe setting, something that may be difficult to find outside of the school setting, may be allotted.^{civ} Teachers, liaisons, and the school staff provide the one-on-one help to students they may discover are homeless and can offer help personally or by recommendations to resources identified by the institution that trained them—the Homeless Education Program.

In addition to the services they provide in school, the Homeless Education Program has many community connections that are crucial in maintaining up-to-date information about resources available to homeless students and, also, finding homeless students who need assistance in their education. The program maintains relations with shelters across the school district to provide outreach and training, hoping to connect with as many people as possible to spread awareness about the Homeless Education Program and the services that it provides.^{cv} The

Homeless Education Program specifically has a close rapport with the Los Angeles Housing Support Authority and often makes many referrals to this organization.^{cv} This is one organization that the Homeless Education Program uses to connect families to all of the resources they are aware of in the city and an example of how the program bridges the gaps for homeless families to reduce any barriers they have that may affect their children's educational fluidity.

Outside of providing direct services to homeless children and families, the Homeless Education Program is becoming more visible in the community. This year, the program hosted its first Resource Fair to connect to vendors, agencies, school staff, and families with numerous resources at the California Endowment.^{cvii} There were sixty-five vendors present with the main goal to involve agencies and the community to be aware of the resources around them and to create community awareness and a collaborative effort to combat the issue of homeless education.^{cviii} By hosting the Resource Fair, the Homeless Education Program poses the issue of homelessness and its ramifications on education as a public matter, a necessity considering the increase in people experiencing trouble with housing affordability in Los Angeles in the past decade. By being proactive, the Homeless Education Program does a great job of spreading awareness and connecting to the community on a grassroots level.

The Homeless Education Program is proactive in learning best practices around the country by attending annual conferences held by the National Association for Education Homeless Children and Youth.^{cix} The conference allows cities to come together to share best practices and become informed about new laws created around homeless education. This year, representatives from Chicago, New York, and Oakland, among others, attended the conference.^{cx} By attending these conferences, not only does LAUSD learn how its Homeless Education

Program can be improved upon, but also, represent themselves as one of the nation's model programs.

Though the Homeless Education Program provides many services for homeless students in both identifying and mitigating any barriers these students face, there are still many issues that they do not address. Although there are numerous ways in which the Homeless Education Program provides help for homeless students and families to decrease adversaries they face in education, there is no official report that evaluates how effective their services and outreach are.^{cxix} The program has unofficially taken note of numbers, including how many students receive assistance in transportation, how students test scores are changing, who receives school supplies, backpacks, and other resources, but has yet to collect and create an official document to track the progress and comments from players participating in the program.^{cxii} Distributing evaluations to parents of homeless students about the Homeless Education Program have been discussed; however, action in creating and issuing such surveys has yet to be made. With much daily supervision that needs to be accomplished, an extensive evaluation that would require much work is currently not a priority for the program.^{cxiii}

The missing evaluation of the program is extremely detrimental to the progress being made for the assistance of homeless education. Without evaluation of the program as it stands, progress is difficult to measure and improvement is difficult to achieve. Input from each of the other players—the administration, teacher, student, families, and peers are crucial to make improvements in the program. Without an official report of the outcomes of the program, not only is progress difficult to quantify, qualify, and identify, but also the reputation of the strategy is at stake. The reputation of the program is extremely important in terms of funding. Typically,

the more progress and positive reputation a program has, the more likely it is to receive any funding for its purpose.

The Homeless Education Program should incorporate a progress report that references the Key Strategies of the *Home for Good Action Plan to End Chronic and Veteran Homelessness by 2016* to better serve the homeless student population. The *Home for Good Action Plan* is a strategy created by the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles aimed at fighting homelessness in Los Angeles through providing permanent supportive housing. The first key strategy of the plan is to “Align Goals to Integrate Our System.”^{cxiv} Instead of simply aiding the homeless student population, the Homeless Education Program should work towards preventative measures. Similar to how the report criticizes the way Los Angeles deals with the homeless situation, the homeless program also “manages homeless [students], rather than end” the problem.^{cxv} By targeting preventative measures, much funding and work to assist homeless students can be redirected and resources can be used more successfully and efficiently for a better program. In order to do so, however, the first step is to create benchmarks in order to be able to later quantify and evaluate the program—goals need to be instituted in order to track for accountability.^{cxvi}

To redirect these strategies and evaluate progress, data must be collected and shared, just as is outlined by the *Home for Good Action Plan*. In order to understand the real issues at hand and to plan and implement solutions to improve homeless education, data must be collected to help guide the most efficient plans of action. Through this data, individual and collective perspectives should be addressed. Next, the *Home for Good* strategies are designed to “Target and Reallocate Existing Resources to Maximize Impact.”^{cxvii} By focusing on existing resources and simply reallocating them, “investing in fragmented systems that have no alignment around

goals” are avoided, keeping the objective on track in the most efficient manner.^{cxviii} Lastly, the action plan strategizes to “Coordinate Resources to Streamline Funding” for a successful outcome.^{cxix} When numerous sources of funding collaborate, such as public, private, local, and national funding, “everyone’s return on investment is maximized and best practices that improve our communities can be brought to scale sooner.”^{cxx} With a collective effort by many agencies, improvement of the Homeless Education Program will see improvements in a fast manner. By working together, different agencies will decrease overlap with more communication and accurate knowledge of what each is acting upon to help homeless students close gaps to education. The *Home for Good* Action Plan is a key model to ending homelessness that LAUSD’s Homeless Education Program would benefit from by using it to improve its existing program.

Another shortcoming of the program is its failure to serve another vulnerable population related to housing issues—the housing insecure. Similar to the concept of food security, those who are housing insecure live in or fear living without stable housing conditions. Although the program labels itself as identifying and strictly serving homeless students, considering students who face housing insecurity is also important—prevention of students facing any of the harmful effects of homelessness on education in the first place is the best service an agency can provide, making students who are housing insecure an important population to consider. If students are not identified as homeless, many are ineligible to receive any benefits from the program but are instead referred to legal council or referred to other social services but are not allowed to be served if they are not officially labeled as homeless.^{cxxi} This criteria for service is not uncommon, A non-profit organization, School On Wheels, provides tutors and additional resources such as backpacks and an after school program to help homeless students succeed in school. However,

like the Homeless Education Program, it also only serves children who are homeless. Even if they are experiencing housing insecurity, the organization does not provide any services. Not providing the housing insecure population similar services to the already homeless does little to contribute to the long-term battle of homeless students and education. Just as the *Home for Good* Action Plan critiques the current homeless services of Los Angeles County for only offering services to the homeless population, the program simply manages the crisis, but does not necessarily make substantial moves to end it.^{cxiii} Just as a homeless child experiences hunger that affects his or her success in the classroom, a student experiencing housing insecurity may also face similar issues when his or her family must choose between skipping a meal or being able to pay next month's rent. Though not officially labeled as homeless, the housing insecure also face similar barriers to education and thus should be provided similar if not equal services to address such barriers. By providing services to housing insecure students, the quality of education can be preserved, even before it begins to deteriorate as a result of homelessness.

Chapter 7: Innovative Programs

Physically, the home plays a critical role in the family life. It is a place of comfort, gathering, solidarity, tradition, safety, identity, and stabilization. For parents, the home determines access to employment, while for children, it establishes access to education.^{cxiii} By combining school efforts with other agencies that help serve homelessness and social services to families in need, success in homeless education can ultimately lead to a decreased incidence of homelessness for future generations. Lack of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness.^{cxiv} By combining efforts of the school district and housing agencies, a more stable situation can be reached. If a student is able to gain stability in the home, stability in the classroom is also promising. Many programs in the United States today have already begun to utilize collaborative measures to combat issues of homeless education and have seen positive results.

L.A. Family Housing

L.A. Family Housing is a leading program facilitating help to homeless families and individuals to regain control in their lives. It was founded in 1983 with the goal of providing support to families who are homeless or experiencing housing insecurity by providing housing and resources for a more stable environment. It is a collaborative group made up of community members, non-profit organizations, and private sector institutions. Throughout Los Angeles, L.A. Family Housing has twenty-one properties including eighteen apartment buildings for low-income families and three shelters. Two of the three shelters are recognized as family shelters. The family shelter located in North Hollywood houses sixty-five families, amounting to

approximately 180 children who are allowed to live there up to a period of two years. The second family shelter, located in Boyle Heights, houses about twenty-seven families, however, it is permissible to live there for only four months at a time. Together, within a year, L.A. Family Housing is able to support two hundred children. Last year, the organization was able to help 2,500 impoverished individuals and 100,000 people since it was created through its numerous supportive resources and housing assistance. Unlike the traditional shelter, L.A. Family Housing's family shelters specifically cater to the family unit, providing as similar a space as possible that replicates a familial home. Every family has their own room, similar to a motel room, unlike the traditional shelter that breaks up sleeping areas by gender and separating the family. In one of the shelters, as mentioned before, the family is allowed to live in that space for up to two years, promoting continuity. Within the shelter, there are different spaces to facilitate and cater to youth. L.A. Family housing receives a majority of its funding through private donations that allows them to furnish their family shelters with resources such as computer labs as well as hiring personnel. Children of the families living at L.A. Family Housing's shelters have access to books, computers, a homework room, and tutors. The shelters connect the students with tutors by working with a non-profit organization, School On Wheels, which recruits and trains volunteers to tutor youth in local shelters. From these resources, L.A. Family Housing demonstrates its attempt to push access to education and success for the kids making the shelter conducive to education. In attempts to mimic a "normal" family's refrigerator in their home, which often is a place of pride for children to display their success in school, the shelters have large corkboards in the homework rooms to act as this same place of achievement. L.A. Family Housing has created this space recognizing the connection of a child's success in education with rewards, encouragement, and incentives to do well in school.^{cxxv}

In addition to supporting families through the family shelters, L.A. Family Housing also assists families who are in risk of experiencing long-term homelessness. The organization assists the housing insecure through its HomeAgain Program aimed at providing homeless prevention services and rapid re-housing assistance “with the objective of helping families move from homelessness to permanent housing within 30 days.”^{cxvii} Most of the housing insecure population are recognized and identified through its close partnership with LAUSD schools. The HomeAgain Program is a key attribute to L.A. Family Housing’s organization--not only providing assistance to the homeless, but it actively works to prevent homelessness and thus, interfere with students before they become homeless and before they can experience a majority of the detriments of not having stability in the household.

One of the main goals of the family shelters is to facilitate success in education for the children. To keep up with the student’s progress and need in school, L.A. Family Housing works directly with LAUSD’s Homeless Education Program. L.A. Family Housing and LAUSD collaborate on an as-need basis that is catered to individual students’ needs. This usually translates to an average of two to five interactions between L.A. Family Housing and LAUSD’s Homeless Education Program per week. To keep communication consistent, L.A. Family Housing staff meets about four times a month for official meetings with LAUSD liaisons in addition to attending LAUSD’s District-Wide Homeless Collaborative quarterly meetings. In the first six months, families who live in L.A. Family Housing’s shelters experience the greatest progress through their child’s educational stability. Families find that the support of the shelter first helps their children to stay enrolled in the same school for those first six months, a feat for many who experience housing insecurity and homelessness. In addition to having the ability to

stay in one school, children also experience better academic achievement with help from tutors who come to the shelter.^{cxxvii}

While the school district possesses many resources for homeless students, such as providing transportation for students and free meals for homeless students, the barriers that students face are more a result that the mindset homelessness creates.^{cxxviii} For example, parents will be more concerned about where their family will sleep over how they will get their children to school the next day.^{cxxix} Parents must decide whether to spend money on feeding their family versus paying the electricity bill when money is scarce, leading to children doing homework by candlelight, flashlight, or even using the car's overhead light as a resource and thus, the car resulting in a homework area.^{cxxx} The stress of poverty and homelessness creates the fight for survival a more crucial and pressing issue than education. In order to bring education to the forefront for homeless youth, L.A. Family Housing works hard to help take housing stresses away so education can be more focused upon. By utilizing resources of the community and creating housing support catered to the family's needs, L.A. Family Housing is able to provide consistency and extra resources to homeless students that meet their needs and allow them to achieve high academic standards despite the barriers associated with homelessness.

L.A. Family Housing is a leading program that offers a well-rounded approach to mitigating barriers homeless children face to education. Through the family shelters, stability and normalcy are provided as the family is given a private room, best mimicking a household, to live up to two years without fathers, mothers, brothers, or sisters who live separately. Additional resources are provided for students to seek extra help to not fall behind due to the barriers that homeless students experience. Representatives are available for children to seek resources they may qualify for, helping homeless youth escape stigmatization. With these representatives or

liaisons, a homeless student does not have to personally state their homeless situation in school to receive resources. An example of this was experienced through the service of bus tokens. In order to receive bus tokens, homeless students were instructed to go to the administration office at their schools and identify themselves as qualified to receive bus tokens for free transport. L.A. Family Housing staff found that this process deterred the student from obtaining bus tokens. Now, a liaison from L.A. Family Housing eliminates this barrier by bringing a list of the homeless youth who reside in the shelters to the school to pick up their tokens and distribute them at the shelters.^{cxxxix} This is only one example of many of how the organization supports homeless children to mitigate barriers that they may face. Not only does L.A. Family Housing provide a stable living environment for families and children, but also its work for educational success and dedication to the family makes it a leading homeless education program today.

San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program

San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program is another innovative group that uses resources to support and give incentive to homeless students to stay focused and achieve high standards in school. The program was started in 2003 and works to identify homeless students and remove barriers to enrollment by providing basic needs such as emergency clothing and food. In addition to these basic needs, the program also provides tools to succeed in school—tutors to help with schoolwork and support to ensure that they have equal access to any programs or activities that any other non-homeless student would be involved with. Through this assistance, higher educational results are experienced when barriers such as poor health are removed through emergency clothing and food. Stigmatization is reduced through inclusion of activities and access to equal resources is ensured for homeless students.^{cxxxix}

Like many of the best practices in homeless education, San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program believes that collaboration with outside groups is the key to success. Brenda Dowdy, Homeless Education Program Specialist at San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, tries to attend as many community meetings, gatherings, and presentations in order to network within the county to spread knowledge of homeless education. Often times, many individuals may not fully understand what homelessness is and what resources are offered if in need. Parents and children may not recognize the barriers of homelessness to education. It is San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program's mission to educate the public about what exactly homelessness is and what the needs are in schools. In order to do so, the workers in the program try to promote its services as widely as possible, get on community agendas, and attend as many meetings as they can. Without the community, the organization could not successfully provide services to homeless youth to reduce barriers to their education.^{cxxxiii}

Because the county is so large, the program tries to collaborate specifically with countywide agencies to try and not duplicate services while casting the largest impact to meet the needs of the community. Dowdy believes that networking and collaborating is truly the key to success. In order to collaborate on a daily basis in such a large county, Dowdy and her colleagues spend a majority of their time communicating to the rest of the collaboration via e-mail. In order to find people who are in need of services and other partners that would be beneficial to the program, Dowdy makes sure to attend all events in the county, such as resources fairs where she can set up a table to educate people about the existence of the program and the issue of homelessness and its resources.^{cxxxiv}

San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program works with Outreach Engagement Group, a faith-based organization, and meets with them on a monthly basis to discuss the needs of children and their families. San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program recognizes that a collaboration with a faith-based organization is critical as many people turn to churches for help and support before they seek help at shelters. In the shelters, the homeless education program hangs posters of the resources it offers to raise awareness of help beyond the church. The church, or other faith-based group, also works with the homeless education program by communicating with the program about any families they come across that are experiencing or about to experience trouble of homelessness. By working with a faith-based group, San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program can extend its outreach to a population in need of its resources.

The program tries to target the poorest communities and those that need the most support to provide its resources with the goal of alleviating any burden for parents by figuring out how to get their children educational materials. San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program has many initiatives already established to provide such resources. For example, the program provides backpacks to overcome barriers before they arise. In order to keep up-to-date what homeless students need, quarterly countywide meetings with liaisons are held so the program can figure out what it needs to offer.

Another example of an initiative already established to meet the needs of homeless students is the Snack Pack Program. The Snack Pack Program is an innovative strategy that targets unaccompanied youth. Different from any of the other highlighted programs, the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program is interested in not only homeless youth and their families, but also interested in capturing data on homeless youth who are without their

parents, who are couch surfing, or sleeping in a garage. As always, the program is aware that there exists many more youth in need than are being served. By paying attention to homeless youth who may not be as easy to find, with fewer support and resources without a family, the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program is a leader in providing services to the non-traditional homeless student.

On their own, an unaccompanied homeless youth may need extra encouragement to stay in school. The San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program has worked to do so and has even found success—an improved attendance rate among both the unaccompanied and accompanied homeless youth has been achieved through a healthy snack pack program in collaboration with several agencies in the city. This program includes distributing health backpacks every Friday so the homeless student can take it with them every weekend providing a sense of food security and assurance that they will not go hungry. The healthy snack pack program serves homeless students on a mental and physical level. By providing nutritious snacks for homeless students, not only will they stay well fed, and thus be able to think more clearly in school without fatigue or hunger to distract them, but also, the security of having food leads to less stress for the child. Feedback from the students, parents, and schools have reported that the snack pack program has changed attitude, attendance, and behavior. In addition to these improvements in homeless education, the snack pack program also reduces barriers of hunger, poor health, and instability, all detriments that blockade success for a homeless student.^{CXXXV}

Currently, the program has many collaborative partners to provide resources for homeless children. One example is its partnership with Feed the Children, bringing almost 2,000 backpacks for the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program to provide its students. Lands End Clothing has bought almost \$70,000 worth in clothing to distribute. Churches and

other privately owned companies donate shoes, backpacks, and school supplies at crucial times during the school year such as back to school and holiday seasons.^{cxxxvi}

Since its creation, the numbers of those served by the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program has increased. When Brenda Dowdy first started the program was serving 12,000 homeless students compared to today's 23,000 served. While this increase in students served indicates an increase of identification, unfortunately, it also means an increased number of homelessness in the county. A leading program that, unlike other programs, even works to extend services to the housing insecure, the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program currently is working on even more innovative projects to broaden its reach. Currently, the program is collaborating with judges and district attorneys working on creating a safe house for unaccompanied youth to provide a safe place from them to be able to go rather than live on the streets. Unaccompanied homeless youth are rarely discussed in homeless education discussions, which are catered more to the assumption that they child has even more than some think—support from a family. In reality however, this may not be the case, but those children are still children that should not be left behind, and the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program is a program that will make sure they are not forgotten.^{cxxxvii}

Though there are many benefits to asking parents for feedback and official evaluation forms of the program to improve services, stigmatization barriers have prevented the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program from taking such actions. The homeless program does not want to increase stigmatization, one of the barriers of homeless education, and therefore does not ask families to fill out evaluations forms in fear of signaling them out. The homeless program also never tells a family that they are homeless, but instead, codes them confidentially in its system that identifies them as homeless. Beyond this, the family's homeless

status is kept private. By asking families to fill out an official evaluation form, the program fears that it will overtly identify the family as homeless, something that they try to avoid.^{cxxxviii}

While the program makes a valid point of sensitivity to stigmatization, the use of an evaluation directly from those being served is invaluable information to improve upon the success of the program. Instead of asking families directly and explicitly to complete an assessment, the feedback form can be disguised in a discrete manner. Similar to a complaint form that is voluntary and is completed when a customer is dissatisfied, an evaluation can be made available through the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program's website and location or office in the school building if parents and students feel passionate one way or the other to officially and anonymously provide feedback. By creating an anonymous and completely voluntary form that is simply made available but not mandated, invaluable and official, feedback can be collected to improve upon the program and better serve homeless youth.

Beyond the classroom and after high school the San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program maintains close ties to their homeless graduates. At Brenda Dowdy's office, homeless students are hired to work as student workers through their college years. They are required to be in school and maintain a grade point average of 2.0 to keep their employment at the educational office. Through employment at the educational office, the students learn skills and are trained as professionals with experience to ensure their success post-college. This relation of the homeless education program through college makes the program a holistic success in not only mitigating barriers, providing support and resources, but also provide life skills to reduce the number of homeless youth becoming homeless adults and ultimately, working to prevent the issue of homelessness for future generations.^{cxxxix}

Mesa County Next Step Housing Program

Another leading homeless education program in practice today is the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program in Grand Junction, Colorado. The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program functions through a collaborative initiative, combining efforts from the city, county, Catholic Outreach (a transitional housing program), school, and housing authorities as major players working together to improve homeless education.^{cxl} The agency can attribute its success to the collaborative model it has created that allows the program to provide efficient services to those in need.

The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program was created as a housing service with requirements directly relating to educational needs. The program was started as an alliance between housing partners and the school district in Mesa County as a “Reach Program” that specifically assigned individuals within the organization to identify homeless children in the school system and link them to homeless services.^{cxli} Specifically, the program is made of a joint force between the Grand Junction Housing Authority, The Mesa County School District, the Mesa County Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Mesa County Workforce Center (MCWC).^{cxlii} The alarming trend of increased incidence of homeless children carrying this status to adulthood sparked a connection for the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program to link housing assistance and homeless education as a preventative approach to the situation.^{cxliii} The program was started approximately five years ago when Kathy Haller, the director of the program, applied for the first grant to address the extremely high incidence of homeless students in the district.^{cxliv} At this time, there were approximately four hundred students who were classified as homeless.^{cxlv} The original grant was first received from the Home Fund from Colorado Housing.^{cxlvi} Different from the voucher model, the grant from the Home Fund allowed The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program to add restrictions and guidelines for the family to

follow in order to receive housing assistance.^{cxlvii} Their voucher program is called the Housing Choice Voucher Program.^{cxlviii} One criteria of the program mandated that children must be kept in school. As children stayed in school, their performance increased, directly linking housing and educational improvement.^{cxlix}

The key to the success of the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program is based around the goal of getting families into a stable housing situation with the idea that once they have that type of stability in their life, the next step to security would be employment. Each of the grants is valid over a span of two years for a total of \$846,000. With this, the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program is able to help well over 109 families, serving 218 children. Families who are helped by the program either pay 30% or \$100 a month for their rent, whichever is cheaper, and the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program pays the difference. With housing assistance along with other services such as computer training and resume writing from the workforce center within the program, families are able to find housing stability and are trained to provide for their own stability through job training from the program. Within this two-year period, families have experienced a 28% increase in income with help from caseworkers to help families to a stable track.^{cl}

The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program's particular interest in children within the families that it serves shows a significant characteristic that closely relates to a prevention-like initiative. The program is unique in that it tracks the children it works with as they get older and builds a lasting relationship with them with the goal of awareness and intervention to reduce the incidence that homeless children graduating to become homeless adults. By extending services directly supporting children instead of lumping the homeless family together, prevention of homelessness is addressed for the next generation. While targeting the housing insecure is

another measure that is recommended to prevent the unconstructive barriers associated with homeless education, identifying those housing insecure takes a much more involved approach that is undoubtedly extremely difficult. While this should still be a goal, by offering continued support to homeless children through adulthood, homelessness can be avoided from tarnishing their future families and ultimately, shrink the chances of homelessness for future generations, alleviating the homeless education issue. Through the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program, 79% of children increase grades, 80% increase attendance rates, and 58% improve on standardized testing scores. These facts of improvement not only demonstrate the success of the program on an immediate level, but also, signify indicators of success for homeless children into their adult lives through increased educational achievement.^{cli}

The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program's collaborative approach is responsible for the success it has had reaching out to the homeless population and offering services, including improvement in homeless education. The program recognizes that the school district can only do so much to help the many diverse students, including those in the homeless population. With limited resources, it is obvious that outside supporters need to take action to combat the hardships of homeless education. The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program leads through efficiency, recognizing that there is no excuse for overlapping services. Instead, each agency that is relevant to helping homeless education can be utilized to address some part of the issue. By bringing many organizations together, the program does not reinvent rules, does not apply for the same grants, and overall, tries not to be competitive with each other, and rather, works together. After all, in the end, each of the facets of the program is working to combat a common goal. Instead, alliances are created, grants are applied to through collaboration, and the program can

work efficiently to help the issue of homeless education, one that involves many social services beyond the school district's control.^{clii}

The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program appreciates the fact that there is no reason for the school to get involved with housing issues because there are already services that provide such assistance—instead, they do not recreate, but work together.^{cliii} When homeless families are identified through the school system and indicate that they are unaware of whom to talk to, the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program notifies their housing partners to make themselves known and get themselves invited to housing conferences, shelters, and other relating groups of the sort.^{cliv} By creating such a presence and strong relationships, awareness is increased and more people are able to be served.

In order to keep all the agencies that make up the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program informed and the collaborative environment maintained, a multi-layer organizational framework is established. Though the program is not located in one building, weekly meetings are held between teams. On a more official level, quarterly meetings are held with the entire program to discuss what is and what is not working. Each measure is created and decided upon through this collaborative model. For example, when the partnership was first initiated, the ease at which the housing, educational, and social service agencies could create a true joint venture surprised Lori Rosendahl, Director of Operations at the Grand Junction Authority. She explains that each of the agencies sat down and wrote the rules together, rather than one agency or individual writing the program and simply presenting it to the others for approval. Just as the program was started, everything is still enacted upon through a joint effort and is representative from each agency that is very conscious of each partners' needs. What has made the program so

successful has been the constant connection and communication the program has been able to keep avoiding inefficiencies as well as dedication of the individuals and groups of the program.^{clv}

One of the overarching goals of the collaboration is to catch and redirect homeless youth before they become homeless adults.^{clvi} However, the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program faces the issue of not being able to help those who are not yet officially labeled as “homeless.”^{clvii} This is an overarching barrier that many agencies that serve the homeless face. Because of the nature of the services, many agencies helping the homeless need to wait until a family or individual loses permanent housing before they can help rather than being able to help while people face housing insecurity or about to become homeless to prevent such a status and the hardships that come with homelessness. In order to overcome this problem, The Mesa County Next Step Housing Program tries its best to educate the community and families about the services they offer.^{clviii} By reaching out to the families and spreading awareness, many are able to access services provided by the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program and learn of the various ways the program can help through the many collaborations it has established.

One such partner, Catholic Outreach, a program that is best at identifying and working with families before they become homeless.^{clix} Many times, families or individuals simply need assistance for the short term, for example, a check for one month’s rent.^{clx} This one time support can prevent a family from a downward spiral into homelessness.^{clxi} If agencies can aim to provide readily available short term help, such as a check for a month or so to help regain stability before it is completely lost, many families can be saved from becoming homeless and in turn, preventing many children from facing adverse affects on homeless education. Through its collaborative approach, the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program is a leading organization

that not only works to remedy negative effects of homeless education, but also works to prevent such happenings in hopes of reducing the number of homeless youth in the future.

B.F. Day Elementary School

Up until 2000, The B.F. Day Elementary School located in Seattle, Washington was designated as a homeless education site. Though the B.F. Day Elementary School is no longer a designated homeless site, the administration has not had much of a turnover rate since it lost this title. Little in terms of educational leading and teaching has changed and the school continues to implement its effective strategies to assist homeless students.

The B.F. Day Elementary School is not considered a homeless site today, not because its practices were faulty or because it underperformed as a homeless site, but instead to satisfy the No Child Left Behind Act initiated in 2002. Just before the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 was passed, five out of sixty schools in Seattle, Washington were designated homeless sites. Students who were homeless were to pick which of the five schools they preferred to attend. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, however, schools could no longer be designated as homeless—in this change, homeless students' rights were enhanced since they now could choose between sixty rather than five schools.^{clxii}

Though it is no longer an official homeless school, not much has changed in response to homeless students at the B.F. Day Elementary School. In fact, according to the current Principal of the school, Susan McCloskey, who has been employed at B.F. Day for thirteen years, there still remains mostly the same staff from when she first started. When it was considered a homeless site, the elementary school tried to normalize a homeless student's situation as much as possible. They aimed to treat each student, homeless and non-homeless alike, exactly the same. This helped to close the gaps of homeless education by reducing stigmas and not creating an

identity of homeless for those students who were experiencing housing issues. The teachers and staff at B.F. Day Elementary School were leaders in homeless education because they were accustomed to having homeless students and thus, were not fazed by their students' housing situation. Since it was not an uncommon circumstance, the teachers were able to create an environment where the homeless students did not feel unusual compared to the rest of their classmates. In other schools, however, where teachers are uneasy about the topic and are among other students who have permanent homes, homeless children may have been less comfortable. The B.F. Day Elementary School tried very hard to give the same education to its homeless students as if did not even have the label. The belief was to not treat a homeless student any differently than a child who is homeless because it only reinforces the stigmatization.^{clxiii}

Currently, the B.F. Day Elementary School still enrolls homeless students and is able to provide educational excellence to them, along with non-homeless students, based on their commitment to keeping strong community relations. The B.F. Day Elementary School often refers itself to the B.F. Family School, illustrating their dedication to each and every child, no matter what their background or history. Homeless, handicapped, or child prodigy, the B.F. Day school considers every child their responsibility and that no child should be treated differently because of their situation. Today, the B.F. Day Elementary School has approximately thirteen to twenty homeless students (compared to the sixty when it was considered a homeless site). As a family-centric school, B.F. Day Elementary dedicates a room in the school building to store clothing and furniture for families in need. It strives to make ensure each parent feels welcome to these resources and encourages the parent to use the resources in anyway that can provide for better stability. In addition to the room with basic material needs, the school also provides a family support worker whose job is to help find housing for those families in need of assistance.

The B.F. Day Elementary School has taken advantage of being the only public school in Fremont (a neighborhood in Seattle) and using this status to create unique ties to the community that are constantly being built and upheld. Fremont businesses are often lending a hand to its town's only public elementary school—for example, a local baker frequently donates bread to those families in need of food while many businesses donate money for family dinners, books, and furniture donations. The local Office Max is also a huge supporter of B.F. Day as it holds an annual school supply drive every September to donate resources to enhance the students' educational experience.^{clxiv}

B.F. Day Elementary School works hard to maintain these close relationships with the community. The school is very conscious and makes sure to thank community members and groups each and every time they show support for the school. The school is aware that in order to preserve the strong community ties it holds, supporters must feel deeply appreciated for their continued generosity and show how the community's efforts really make an impact on the students lives.^{clxv} Without the community's commitment to the school, it is clear that B.F. Day would not be nearly as successful in helping its homeless population. The B.F. Day Elementary School is a great example of how schools can better assist its homeless students on a grassroots level. By leveraging the power of community support and a collaborative effort many resources can be provided by the community for free. Instead of simply waiting upon policy changes or more funding to improve the experience of homeless students, the school community can utilize the resources of the community and the support it can generate to gain the ability to help break down barriers for homeless students. The B.F. Day Elementary School is a leading homeless education program through collaboration and community building to mitigate barriers faced by a homeless student.

It's All About the Kids Program

The It's All About the Kids Program, located in Minneapolis, Minnesota is a leading program that exemplifies the benefits of education, housing, and other social service agencies to improve homeless education. The collaborative was created in 2001, combining forces of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA), City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department (CPED, and Lutheran Social Service (LSS). The school district has been a huge advocate for affordable housing within the region for a number of years, a leader in spreading awareness to the community of the importance of the relationship regardless a student's basic needs and the importance of stability in accordance to their academic achievement. By creating a relationship between the school district and housing authorities, housing assistance becomes more valuable and accessible to the children and families who bear the burden the most.^{clxvi}

The program's mission is specifically focused on improving educational access for homeless children and children living in concentrated areas of poverty.^{clxvii} The mission is based upon three major findings: 1) stability of the home directly correlates to a student's long-term academic achievement, 2) a collaborative measure is the most effective and efficient approach to integrate resources that both children and families need to achieve educational success and economic stability, and 3) supportive services are indispensable to families who struggle with stability and housing.^{clxviii} To fulfill its mission, the program helps children and families who experience long-term homelessness. The program defines this as being homeless for one-year or longer or having four incidents of homelessness in the past three years.^{clxix} During the 2006-07 school year, the program changed from a model that provided help for highly mobile students to

requiring that students must satisfy “long-term homelessness” to have access to any services the program provides.^{clxx} Through its numerous services assisting in education, housing, social services, and job stability, the It’s All About the Kids Program is able to provide help to families living in high concentrations of poverty to access affordable housing in more stable neighborhoods within their child’s school district.^{clxxi} Other successes include increased academic achievement, increased attendance, lower levels of suspension and increased compliance in discipline/behavioral issues (suspension decreased from 36% in the 2006-07 school year to 28% compared to an increase of non-homeless students from 15% to 26%), and lower incidence of school transfers (.02 fewer school moves for participating students). Serving as another homeless program, the It’s All About the Kids organization again illustrates the successes of alleviating barriers to education homeless student experience through collaborative measures of education, housing, and social service agencies.

Victoria Independent School District and Housing Authority Collaboration

The Victoria (TX) Independent School District and Housing Authority Collaboration is another program that has found tremendous success through collaboration of the school district and housing authorities, as well as other social services in the community. KidzConnection, the district’s McKinney-Vento program, is housed in a 3,000 square-foot building acquired through a relationship with the Victoria Independent School District (ISD) and the Victoria Homeless Coalition. The building has become a second home to many, housing homeless coalition meetings, community meetings, an after-school homework center, and a clothes closet, all that work together to embrace a community comfort and support zone. In addition, many supportive means take place at KidzConnection, such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to improve student’s individual success in school, including mental health interventions.^{clxxii}

KidzConnection (along with the It's All About the Kids Program, the Victoria Independent School District and Housing Authority Collaboration, and the Mesa County Next Step Housing Program), named a best practice by the National Center for Homeless Education in 2006, works together with the local housing authority to improve not only the success in education for students, but also a holistic program that affects the whole family. The program, from the housing authority's support system, provides the family with a safe and stable place to live while KidzConnection provides homework help, discipline, and etiquette—all tools they are expected to bring home to teach their family.^{clxxiii} As a result, the benefits of the program affect the entire family, providing lifelong resources and tools for stability.

Chapter 8: Recommendations

- Increase survey distribution that identifies homeless students (currently, LAUSD only does this annually)
- Creation of an official evaluation of the LAUSD Homeless Education Program
- Like San Bernardino County, extend program to support homeless children into adulthood by continuing guidance through job career
- Increase of private funding to L.A. Family Housing, with special considerations made to expand the HomeAgain Program
- Increase in involvement of youth taking action against homeless education

Though directly these recommendations do not address explicitly each and every one of the barriers to education that homeless children experience, by acting upon these recommendations first, barriers are at least indirectly addressed and if not, address the most pressing issues of homeless education. These recommendations, if enacted upon in a successful manner, will allow for future attention to address other minor barriers. Though LAUSD does identify homeless students through an annual survey distributed to every student at the beginning of each school year, the incidence of homelessness, especially in today's economy, can emerge at any moment. In order to catch those students who may suddenly find themselves in a housing insecure situation, surveys that indicate a student's housing situation should be distributed on an increased basis, perhaps semi-annually, in place of the currently annual dispensation. This will further ensure that students who are qualified for homeless educational assistance will receive proper resources in order to mitigate any hindrances in the student's education. By distributing surveys on a more frequent basis, a potential problem of homelessness may be identified, and in the long run, resources saved if those are helped early enough in their situation before negative outcomes are felt in extreme conditions. Essentially, the increase in frequency of distribution of surveys will work towards addressing more explicitly the housing insecure and a means of

prevention of barriers that these children will eventually experience if they go on to become homeless.

Another shortcoming of LAUSD's Homeless Education Program is the lack of evaluation of its current practices. While stigmatization must be avoided, there are other ways to obtain anonymous feedback from those who receive assistance from the program. An opt-in and anonymous evaluation can be made accessible through school offices, homeless shelters, or even online to receive feedback from students and parents of their experience in the program. From the data collected, highlights and shortcomings can be identified and acted upon accordingly to improve the current operation of the homeless education strategy. Data collection can be professionally analyzed and used to benefit homeless education through quantifiable measures. These voices are crucial in the further success of the program to cater to the needs of homeless students. In addition, if quantitative data can be collected, analyzed, and shared evidence of success can be used to obtain more funding for the program that will broaden the impact of the practices.

Similar to San Bernardino County's Homeless Education Program, holistic approaches should be incorporated that serve homeless children through adulthood. By offering job training programs, as simple as hiring student workers once they enroll in college, incentives are created for homeless students to not drop out of school at an early age. Support through adulthood not only provides for skilled workers, but also encourages steady life habits and security that will provide confidence and decrease incidence of homeless youth becoming homeless adults. In this way, the fight to end homelessness will be addressed.

In respect to addressing the homeless education issue in Los Angeles, there are many leading programs, such as L.A. Family Housing, that exemplify a best practice program. With

the holistic services that the organization provides and its collaboration with other agencies and the community, L.A. Family Housing provides a program that best serves the homeless students of Los Angeles, mitigating barriers such as transiency, creating a shelter that is more like a traditional family home than a traditional shelter, providing support for behavior and family issues as well as, special education, and working to decrease social stigmas.

The organization also extends its services to the housing insecure since, by their definition, the housing insecure can be also categorized as homeless. In addition, the HomeAgain Program within the organization is dedicated exclusively to rapidly re-house families who experience housing insecurity and aim to redirect them to a situation of permanent housing within thirty days. This program is the best practice in terms of prevention of homeless education so that barriers may either be experienced in limited ways or not experienced at all. Programs preventing homelessness for students should receive more funding. Through a recommended official report, services of the Homeless Education Program that are least effective can be identified. With this knowledge, reallocation of funding can be taken from the least effective programs and given to best practices, such as programs working to prevent homelessness.

Because L.A. Family Housing is a leading program that has proven success in its mission of helping homeless families and children find stability in their life and specifically, making success in education for children one of its major focuses, it is clear that programs like L.A. Family Housing should be replicated. In addition, programs as such should also be provided with more resources to increase the scale of its reach and create more opportunity to those homeless students in Los Angeles who are not being served. The reduction in funds for these kinds of services can also ultimately backfire by reducing the capacity of schools to meet their mission of educating everyone.

Last year, L.A. Family Housing served 200 of the 12,500 homeless students enrolled in the LAUSD system. To increase scope, since it already receives a majority of its funding from private donations, major foundations and grants should be allocated to the program to broaden its reach. This will call for increased infrastructure to house the need. In addition to its private donations, L.A. Family Housing also relies heavily on its volunteers. By calling upon the community for additional help, and not only for resources such as tutors, other barriers such as stigmatization and lack of community can be overcome. In particular, non-homeless youth's community should be targeted to take action in the homeless education movement.

From the innovative practices highlighted in this report, one of the contributors to success for homeless education programs is collaboration, while a major barrier remains stigmatization. To increase collaboration while decreasing stigmatization, a grassroots approach to improving homeless education holds great value. In order to alleviate stigmatization, conversations regarding homelessness should be encouraged in school and among peers. All students should be educated about homelessness, among other societal issues in school, to become knowledgeable about the harsh realities of the situation and to become aware that this can affect even their best friends and peers whom they attend school with. By personalizing the situation and giving homelessness a face, rather than a topic that is stigmatized and associated with negative connotations, youth will undoubtedly be upset by the issue, especially if it affects people they know, and will want to become involved to produce change to help those who suffer from homelessness. By encouraging youth to get involved in the homeless movement, all teens will become empowered to create change and help in their community. Again, by doing so, teens will be engaged and passionate about helping other teens and awareness will be spread about homelessness, which in turn will mitigate stigmatization. In addition, the community

involvement will be increased, which was shown to produce success through the collaborative practices previously analyzed.

One such example of how teens have gotten involved with homelessness is DoSomething.org's annual Teens for Jeans Campaign. DoSomething.org is the leading not-for-profit organization in the United States for teens and social change. Every year, the organization collaborates with the popular youth clothing company, Aeropostale, and runs a campaign called Teens for Jeans. The campaign asks young people (25 and under) to donate gently used jeans to any Aeropostale store. The campaign then drops each pair of jeans donated to local homeless shelters for young people. Since the launch of the first annual Teens for Jeans campaign four years ago, over a million jeans have been donated, showing the power of teens to make change when encouraged to do so.^{clxxiv}

DoSomething.org interviewed numerous homeless youth in the United States and found that the number one thing homeless kids wanted was a pair of blue jeans. To them, blue jeans made them feel like they fit in at school. It made them more confident in the way they dressed. Blue jeans, for them, minimized stigmatization and made them feel just like any other kid, instead of a homeless outsider. By creating this campaign, homeless shelters were stocked with jeans and used them as a tool to lure homeless youth off the streets and into the shelters, Homeless youth were happy with their new pair of jeans, and non-homeless youth were excited that they could help another out (plus a 25% discount off their next pair of jeans at Aeropostale as a thank you). The campaign in the end represents a collaborative measure for teens to help other teens, become aware and educated about homelessness, and directly take action to make meaningful change. Everyone was happy and the campaign gives an opportunity for the community to come together to battle homelessness.^{clxxv}

Just as DoSomething.org and Aeropostale teamed up to create a campaign for young people to defeat homelessness. Along those lines, grassroots efforts should be established in every community to cater to homeless education in their district. By creating such efforts, programs can be adopted to what that community specifically needs in order to decrease barriers for homeless education in that community. As the middle class is increasingly experiencing the possibility of housing insecurity, especially in Los Angeles, homelessness is sure to affect a larger population beyond the poor and working poor, increasingly making it an even broader community issue at large if nothing is done to prevent it.

In order for the grassroots community involvement program to be successful however, homeless children and non-homeless children should be absolutely viewed as equal to avoid the homeless youth being even further stigmatized and feel like they are charity cases. Whatever the programs entail, encouragement of collaboration from homeless and non-homeless youth should be instilled.

As Sabrina's story has proven, the power of awareness of homeless education can encourage great movements on the grassroots level. Just as Sabrina's story brought knowledge to and inspired her peers and her educational institution to create programs to further assist homeless students, this story can be replicated to bring about community change while waiting for a lengthy policy process or financial support that has become increasingly difficult to secure. By spreading awareness of her story, Sabrina initiated a movement to create programs to assist homeless students while inspiring others to also reveal their homeless situation and decrease stigmatization around the issue. The community's effort, when brought together, can amount to extraordinary movements for change.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Through extensive research and analysis of “best practices” in the United States, the LAUSD Homeless Education Program and L.A. Family Housing have proven to be leading practices addressing homeless education. These programs should not only serve as guidance for other homeless education practices but should be better funded to broaden the scope of its resources. Through such holistic programs, barriers to education are mitigated for youth, ultimately acting to end the cycle of homelessness. With better educational opportunities and assistance available, homeless youth are less likely to become homeless adults. Therefore, investing in the education of homeless youth serves society at large in mitigating such implications of increased long-term homelessness. As Sabrina’s story illustrates the typical incidence of homelessness in youth (as a minority and immigrant, living with her young mother and multiple siblings and going on to find herself homeless in college due to lack of affordable housing in Los Angeles) by bringing homeless education to the forefront and a main focus in society, many homeless children will be fortunate enough to relate to Sabrina on a level not based on her college experience of homelessness, but relate to her success. Homeless education is an extremely pressing issue today. It is a matter that needs to be brought to the forefront in educational policy. In doing so, society as a whole will benefit.

ⁱ *BruinTent Promo Video*. BruinTent, 01 Sept. 2009. Web. 01 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15RqcVKKdRs>>.

ⁱⁱ "Twenty Facts About U.S. Inequality That Everyone Should Know." Stanford University. Web. 05 Apr. 2011. <<http://stanford.edu/group/scspi/cgi-bin/fact9.php>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*.

^{iv} "The Need For School on Wheels." School On Wheels. 2008. Web. 12 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.schoolonwheels.org/pages/3085/>>.

^v "Hard times Generation: Homeless Kids." 60 Minutes. CBS. 06 Mar. 2011.

<http://www.cbsnews.com>. 06 Mar. 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7358670n>>.

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