

**EDUCATIONAL AWARENESS OF HOMELESS STUDENTS IN THE
PUBLIC-SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

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Abstract

The number of homeless children and youth enrolled in public-schools has doubled over the past 20+ years (Sparks, 2019). This attributed to lack of affordable housing, unemployment, domestic violence, economic instability, medical/mental health issues and natural disasters (Sparks, 2019). Therefore, generating many educational barriers due to the disruption and trauma of not having a fixed, regular, and adequate place to reside (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Research and literature on interventions for homeless students are limited and/or outdated. There does not appear to be a universal model or framework that could be implemented across all public-school districts and/or all grade levels in the U.S. The project focuses on the significance of public-schools offering a place of stability, safety, and supportive services for students experiencing homelessness. The project looks beyond the social and physical barriers that potentially suppress motivation to achieve educational-related change of those students experiencing homeless. The project was guided by the McKinney Vento Homeless Model and the ecological system framework, using a pre and post-test survey design. The project was conducted virtually over 3-consecutive days, utilizing the same participants that serve as homeless liaisons in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District. Participants consisted of 24 district employees, female/male, of various ethnicity/race who self-identified as school administrators, school social workers, or district registration staff members. The content during the educational workshops raised awareness of homelessness, the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and effective supportive services/resources for students experiencing homeless. The findings indicated that participants were cognizant on the definition of homeless, had limited understanding of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act and lacked knowledge of supportive services and resources for students experiencing homelessness.

Participants acknowledged limited training as a factor on their perception of homeless students, well as the lack of knowledge pertaining to services/resources. Contributing recommendations at the district level included revising GLCSD Student Handbook to include policies relating to homeless students/families, incorporating a District Homeless Resource Team, designing a District Resource Manual/Website Accessibility, providing ongoing educational workshops for all district employees, and creating “Safe Space” sites customized for homeless students in all 12 school locations in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated District. Implications for practitioners and educators include incorporating district policies and program interventions using a holistic approach to call attention to homelessness and promote student wellness in the public-school community (academically, emotionally, and socially).

Keywords: *Homelessness, McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, public-schools, homeless students, homeless liaisons*

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Introduction of Issue

Homelessness in the United States of America is a social crisis that can be invisible to most people. A homeless individual is, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2020), those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate residence. The definition of homeless is based on an individual's sleeping arrangement, as well as being politically motivated (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2020). The exactness of the definition, however, prevents society from recognizing the full extent of the manifestation of homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2020).

Historical Contexts of the Issue

The Great Depression was the worst economic crisis in the history of the United States of America (Lambdin et al., 2020). During this era, over 2 million Americans were homeless, creating a continuous gateway of homelessness that has matriculated into the 21st century (Lambdin et al., 2020). During the 1980's, the U.S. saw an increase in homelessness, resulting primarily from a deterioration in federal housing subsidies, rising housing costs, economic restrictions, the decline in family supports, the deinstitutionalization of people with psychological or developmental disabilities, and the inadequate response to the needs of veterans (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013). After several decades of shambolic efforts to address the crisis of homelessness in the U.S., it remains a significant problem (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013).

In the late 2000s, the economic recession led to a housing crisis, leaving people who were previously financially secure, homeless or at risk of being homeless (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2018). As reported in the annual assessment report, an estimated 3 to 4 million

people are homeless in the U.S: and on any given night, over 580,466 people (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020). It is less important that the exact numbers are known regarding homelessness, than it is that society recognize that it exists. The issue of homelessness is complex, and people experiencing homelessness make up an array of diverse populations. The only common factor among people in homeless situations is that they do not have a safe, decent, and affordable place to live.

Presently, the post-recession homeless crisis now affects more families with children (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2020). In January 2020, over 171,575 people experienced homelessness as part of a family with at least one child under the age of 18, the fastest growing group of homeless persons in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020). As this traumatic experience of family homelessness accelerates, it alters the family life, impacting each family member. Homelessness can expose families to physical, mental, and developmental risks (Mago et al., 2013). Families that experience homeless, typically must reside with friends or relatives. The arrangements usually are not stable or permanent. Often, these provisions put families at-risk of being splitting up and children experiencing educational, emotional, physical, and/or social instability (Mago et al., 2013).

Literature Review

Homeless Youth/Children

Families with at least one child under the age of 18, make up 30 percent of the homeless population in the U.S. (Coalition for the Homeless, 2020). Homeless children/youth can be defined as individuals under the age of 18 (Coalition for the Homeless, 2020). The Coalition for the Homeless annual report (2020) indicated that 1.2 million American children (1 in 45) are

homeless in a year, equaling 30,000 children each week, and more than 4,400 each day.

Homeless Students

The number of homeless students enrolled in public school districts across America has doubled over the past 20+ years. The U.S. Department of Education began collecting the information in 2004 to assist with alleviate the rising epidemic (Sparks, 2019). During the 2018-2019 school year, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 1,387,573 public school students experienced homelessness (Sparks, 2019). The U.S. Department of Education (2020) stated that these numbers are likely miscalculated due to under reporting. The data focused on the number of students enrolled in each grade, the type of primary nighttime residence used by students, and subgroups of students experiencing homelessness (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Additionally, the experience of homelessness is nearly evenly split across the grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). School districts identified 8 percent of homeless students in each grade from kindergarten through fifth grade, 7 percent grades six through nine and twelfth, and 6 percent in grades ten through eleven; only 3 percent were identified in grades three to five (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Students experiencing homelessness may not consistently attend school. Homeless students face many educational barriers due to the disruption and trauma of not having a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Lastly, homeless students have higher incidences of illness, depression, and exposure to violence than their stably housed peers (Evangelist and Shaefer, 2020).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 requires that public school districts abide by policies and procedures to ensure that no barriers to academic engagement and success

exist for homeless students (Mizerek and Hinz, 2004). The Act entitles homeless students to free and appropriate educational experience (Mizerek and Hinz, 2004). Therefore, addressing the need of homeless students is required by law and should be enforced through the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 but due to lack of federal support, the Act was not enforced in all school districts across the U.S (Mizerek and Hinz, 2004).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized this Act to provide homeless students with the ability to stay in their original school or enroll in any public school and have transportation to that school (Mullins et al., 2016). But in 2015, this Act was reauthorized for a second time under Every Student Succeed Act to address the problems that students experiencing homelessness face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school (Mullins et al., 2016). This federal law obligated schools to appoint a liaison to work with homeless students and their families and serve as a resource for educators (Mullins et al., 2016).

Previous Research

A longitudinal study was conducted by Evangelist and Shaefer (2020) on homeless students enrolled in the public-school setting across the state of Michigan, over a 15-year timespan. The collected information was acquired from the state administrative database (Evangelist and Shaefer, 2020). The data was documented on the federally mandated McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act reports during the 2002-2017 academic school years, students varied from kindergarten to twelfth grade (Evangelist and Shaefer, 2020). The study disclosed that close to 1 in 10 students experienced homelessness or were doubled up with friends or family (Evangelist and Shaefer, 2020). Therefore, revealing that Michigan public schools had the sixth highest count of homeless students in the U.S. (Evangelist and Shaefer, 2020). The researchers used

three measures of homelessness (any homelessness, literal homelessness, and doubling up) to assist with guiding the evidence. The data allowed the researchers to distinguish students who were doubled-up from those considered unaccompanied youth, living in shelters, motels, transitional housing, or in unsheltered locations (Evangelist and Shaefer, 2020). This study was the first to use state administrative data to investigate the prevalence and causes of homelessness among school age children. According to Evangelist and Shaefer (2020), “homeless does not end at the loss of a home but carries on through other downstream consequences, which affect the life prospects of children attending school”.

Impact of homelessness on Learning

Homeless students are more likely to experience educational challenges more than their non-homeless peers (Friedman et al., 2013). Specific educational challenges faced by homeless students include but are not limited to (Kim, 2013):

- Not being identified for services;
- Difficulty enrolling without records;
- Difficulty attending school;
- Lack of stable transportation;
- Frequent school changes;
- Falling behind in school;
- Not accruing credits on time;
- Lack of basic needs (food, clothing, and adequate housing);
- Stress, depression, trauma; and

- Embarrassment and stigma related to their housing conditions.

Negative impacts of homelessness can begin to manifest themselves quickly and become worse over time (Kim, 2013)). For all these reasons, school can often be the one place of stability, safety, and support in the traumatic lives of these students. Therefore, it is essential that schools work as part of the mechanism that identifies homeless youth quickly and connect them to the services that can help stabilize their housing, keep them in their community, and get them back on the academic, emotional, and social track.

Perceptions of homelessness among educators

Schools are as much a social environment as they are a place for learning (Kim, 2013). Students and educational staff spend a large amount of time together, they often learn a good deal about each other (Kim, 2013). This kind of environment serves as an informal opportunity for educational staff to identify homeless students. Supporting the homeless student population requires a clear and deep understanding of the challenges they face, and the supports that will be the most effective (Uretsky and Stone, 2016). Henceforth, it is important to understand the perception of the educators in school in relation to homeless students (Uretsky and Stone, 2016).

According to Wright et al. (2018) “educators often are unaware of the challenges that homeless students face. The authors conducted a qualitative study with teachers working with students experiencing homelessness (Wright et al., 2018). The study was intended to understand how teachers perceive and understand homelessness, and the students with whom they teach (Wright et al., 2018). Prior to participation in the study, the participants reported that “they had misconceptions about homelessness in general, children in particular” (Wright et al., 2018). The participants initially reported that they lacked an understanding of the social issue, portrayed

homeless individuals as males that lived on the streets or shelters, only occur in large cities, a choice, and did not consider families with children as part of the homeless population (Wright et al., 2018). In addition to those misconceptions, some of the participants revealed that they associated homeless individuals with negative qualities such as being dirty, unkempt, lazy, or irresponsible (Wright et al., 2018).

Homeless students sometimes are at a disadvantage in the educational arena. At times, these students are under identified and not provided an equal, high-quality education. Homeless students may feel overlooked or uncared for due to the misconception of their issue on the surface. Educators may only look at the frequent absences, lack of personal resources, and/or educational limitations. These external perceptions are not a valid reflection of the homeless students' academic competence. It is paramount for educators to respond appropriately and ensure that homeless students educational rights are not violated.

Recently, Lafavor et al. (2019) conducted a study on the perceptions among parents and Teachers regarding the academic success of homeless students. The study "examined the relationship between parents and teachers concerning the perceived behavioral regulation, engagement, and academic competence in understanding the academic achievement of students ages 9-11, experiencing homelessness (Lafavor et al., 2019). The students and families were displayed and living in emergency shelters. The study revealed that teachers focused more behavioral performance of the students, in comparison to parents focusing on the emotional state of the students (Lafavor et al., 2019). The results disclosed that the teachers and parents were subjective and had a great deal of bias, highlighting the need for education, training, and support for all parties (Lafavor et al., 2019).

Gaps in Literature

Research and literature on interventions for homeless students are limited and/or outdated. There did not appear to be a universal model or framework that could be implemented across all public-school districts and/or all grade levels in the U.S. There are numerous amounts of literature on the rising nature of homeless students, the trauma surrounding students experiencing homelessness, and data submission from educational institutions (local, state, and governmental). Even though research supports the need for educators to be aware of the rise in homeless students, there is not much literature on school supports or professional development.

Project Rationale & Aim

The aim of the capstone project was to increase the knowledge-level of the homeless liaisons in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District (GLCSD). Educational awareness workshops focused on all aspects of homelessness and the McKinney Vento Homeless Model with the goal of assisting the GLCSD homeless liaison to effectively serve students that are experiencing and/or at risk of homelessness. The outcome of the project was to bridge the gap in knowledge of homeless and/or services for students experiencing homelessness by taking a holistic approach and incorporating all aspects of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. In the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District (located in the heart of the MS Delta), the appointed liaisons primary responsibility is to identify the homeless students during the registration process. After the registration process, support services or resources for homeless students are not offered. The lack of attention after the registration process has created a gap in support services and resources for the identified homeless students.

According to the district's Federal Program Director, it is difficult to follow through with the

obligations outlined in the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, due to the appointed liaisons working in other official capacities and the liaisons' lack of knowledge regarding community resources. The capstone project aimed to assist the district with building a Homeless Resource Team/District Homeless Resource Manual and linking students to effective services/resources. First by identifying appropriate liaisons, facilitating educational awareness workshops for the liaisons. And secondly, by assisting the liaisons with establishing support services/resources that meet the basic needs of homeless students.

Theoretical Framework

Humanistic Theory

The humanistic theory of teaching and learning is an educational theory that believes in teaching the whole child” (Hanley et al., 2020). This holistic approach emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the student (cognitive, emotional, social, and environmental) (Hanley et al., 2020). The theory argues that it is extremely important to help the student achieve their personal best, by allowing them to be free in creativity, self-growth, and self-actualization (Hanley et al., 2020). But how can students explore those freedoms if they are experiencing homelessness? Therefore, addressing the needs of students experiencing homelessness goes far and beyond the classroom setting.

Ecological System Theory

The ecological system theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs (Ozaki et al., 2020). The theory is one of the most accepted explanations regarding the influence of social environments on human

development (Ozaki et al., 2020). In addition, the theory argues that the environment one grows up in affects every facet of one's life (Ozaki et al., 2020). Therefore, social factors determine one's way of thinking, the emotions that one feel, and if one change their environment, they will change as well (Ozaki et al., 2020).

The theory is divided into five levels: microsystem, mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Ozaki et al., 2020). The microsystem is the most influential level of the ecological systems theory (Ozaki et al., 2020). This is the most immediate environmental settings containing the developing student, such as family and school (Blandin, 2017). The experience of homelessness can pervade multiple levels and facets of a student and family's world (Blandin, 2017). In view of the historical risks in the lives of students who are experiencing homelessness (e.g., growing up under conditions of poverty, exposure to family violence), it is clear that interventions, services, and supports need to be equally comprehensive to have a positive influence on child functioning and development (Nation et al., 2020).

To strengthen the development between the ecological systems in educational practice according to the theory, school districts and parents should keep good communication with each other and work together to benefit the students (Blandin, 2017). School districts should also be understanding of the situations their students may be experiencing, including social and economic factors that are part of the various systems, such as homelessness (Nation et al., 2020).

According to the ecological system theory, if parents and school districts have a good relationship, this should shape the student's development in a positive way (Blandin, 2017). School districts should create a whole-school approach, improving the educational achievement

and student's well-being (Nation et al., 2020). Consequently, service systems, providers, and community support need to address the circumstances of students and families experiencing homelessness and, more specifically, better attend to their ecologies and the diverse factors that can affect their well-being and adjustment trajectories (Blandin, 2017). Such an approach is needed to better understand the range of factors and influences on the development and adaptation of students at home, at school, and with their peers as well as to guide the identification and implementation of adequate family-centered services and supports (Blandin, 2017).

Evidence-based Social Work Intervention

Many homeless students experience educational challenges due to disruption and trauma of not having a fixed, regular, and/or adequate place to live (Mizerek and Hinz, 2004). Homeless students must have equal access to the same, free, and appropriate public education as provided to other non-homeless students (Mizerek and Hinz, 2004). The McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act, mandates that public schools protect the rights and ensure the services for homeless students (Mullins et al., 2016).

The first Federal law to directly impact the education of students experiencing homelessness was enacted in 1987 as part of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (Mizerek and Hinz, 2004). The McKinney Act, which originally contained 15 programs designed to address the needs of homeless persons, contained a subtitle with the purpose of ensuring that students experiencing homelessness could enroll in school without barriers (Mullins et al., 2016). Since the initial passage, the homeless education law has been reauthorized with stronger and specific requirements for State educational agencies to ensure the immediate enrollment, school stability,

and academic support needed to increase the educational success of homeless students (Mullins et al., 2016).

Most public-school districts have noticed the increase in homeless students and have no experience working with homeless students/families (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Knowledge of the definition of homelessness and legal requirements will not ensure homeless students have access to and receive the educational services to which they are entitled (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Public school districts may not be aware that a family arriving at the school to enroll is homeless or that the students they serve can be “invisible”. Public-school districts may not be aware of the indicators that suggest homelessness exist, and families may be reluctant to share such information.

All public-school districts must comply with the basic requirements for serving homeless students as outlined in the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). However, without a school official(s) identified by the district to coordinate such efforts, there are many school districts with little experience and little knowledge of the legal requirements for serving homeless students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Such efforts must be in place if the full intent of the law to meet the educational needs of homeless students is to be realized.

When students experiencing homelessness enroll in school, they require access to special school programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The students and families should relate to appropriate services as soon as possible. Homeless students must have access to all educational programs and services for which they are eligible (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Unfortunately, the normal referral process may delay services, and if families move

frequently, the process may not be complete before students move again.

Project Overview

The Mississippi Department of Education (Title IX, Part A, Homeless) has required all public-school districts to maintain compliance with the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Mississippi Department of Education, 2020). Mississippi public-school districts must designate a McKinney Vento Liaison to assist in identifying, supporting, and ensuring the rights of homeless students and families (Mississippi Department of Education, 2020). The roles and responsibilities of the McKinney Vento Liaison include but not be limited to the following:

1. Ensure students experiencing homelessness have a full and equal educational opportunity with the district, to understand the rights and services.
2. Ensure students experiencing homelessness have access to appropriate supportive services within/outside of the school district.
3. Coordinate and collaborate with State Coordinators for Homeless Education, providing reliable, valid, and comprehensive data on students experiencing homelessness pre the requirement of the McKinney Vento Act.
4. Participate in all professional development and technical assistance opportunities offered by U.S. Department of Education and the Mississippi Department of Education-Homeless Education Department.
5. Develop written procedures and protocols for identifying and enrolling and serving homeless students.
6. Train district and school personnel on the McKinney Vento Act, and related policies and procedures to bring awareness and avoid compliance issues.

7. Meet with district program administrators to ensure that protocols are in place to coordinate services for students experiencing homelessness.

8. Develop collaborative relationships with local service providers.

Currently, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) appointed the Federal Program Departments to oversee each districts' plan for serving homeless students (Mississippi Department of Education, 2020). Most Federal Program Directors do not have the staff, time, or experience to carry out this vital obligation to the districts' Homeless Assistance Program. Those barriers have resulted in several Mississippi public school districts focusing only on the enrollment procedure during the registration process. A lack of commitment and dedication has created a gap in services for homeless students for Mississippi public-school districts, more specifically, the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District.

The Capstone Project was constructed to offer educational workshop(s) to appointed GLCSD personnel, serving as homeless liaisons on their role and responsibilities. The key goal was to educate identified GLCSD personnel on their role and responsibilities as liaisons, so that they may identify, support and link students experiencing homelessness to needed services/resources from a holistic approach. The objectives of the educational workshops were as following:

- Increase awareness on homelessness.
- Increase knowledge of the McKinney Vento Assistance Homeless Act/Roles and Responsibilities of the Homeless Liaison.
- Collaborate, coordinate, and create supportive services in the district and link homeless students to community resources.

The three-step process guided the homeless liaisons on the journey from where they are-to

where they need to be. First, the educational awareness workshop increased the liaisons' ability to recognize the concept of homelessness, students experiencing homeless, and the lack of services/support for those students/families for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year. The second educational awareness workshop provided the homeless liaisons with increasing knowledge of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Homeless Act of 1987, understanding of their responsibilities within their role/responsibilities and building their confidence to assist students/families experiencing homelessness for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year. The third educational workshop informed the homeless liaison of various supportive services and community resources to assist students/families experiencing homelessness for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year.

Implementation Process

Project participants were identified by the District's Superintendent and Federal Program Director. Participants received the project invitation (explaining the purpose of the project and number of educational workshops) via email from the District's Superintendent and Federal Program Director. Contact information for participants that volunteered was sent via email to the DSW student. After collection of the participants' contact information, participants were notified via email the dates, times, and a copy of the informed consent form. Once the participants acknowledged their willingness to participate (by submitting the informed consent form via email) a zoom link was sent via email to each participant. Also, participants were notified that the pre-survey would be sent via email two-hours prior to the start of the first educational workshop. A copy of the informed consent form is located in *Appendix A*.

The project was constructed to offer 3 educational awareness workshops, compiled into a

PowerPoint presentation with video/audio. The DSW student served as the facilitator for the educational awareness workshops. Workshop content included educational material, case study discussion, and district/community services and resources. On the day of the first workshop, a pre-survey was sent via email sent to each participant to assess their level of awareness pertaining to homelessness and students experiencing homelessness. Participants sent the completed pre-survey back prior to the start of the first workshop. Below outlines the workshop content per day:

Day 1: Wednesday, May 18, 2022: Participants were administrated the pre-survey. After completion of the pre-survey, participants joined the educational awareness workshops via zoom and focused on the following topics: defining homelessness, homelessness in the United States, homelessness in Mississippi, homelessness in Leflore County, homeless families, homeless children, and homeless students.

Day 2: Thursday, May 19, 2022: Participants engaged in dialogue and interactive activities on the following topics via zoom: McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, brief history of the McKinney Vento Assistance Act, Mississippi Department of Education (MDE): state homeless policy and procedure, Greenwood Leflore Consolidate School District: district homelessness policy and procedure, procedure for identifying students experiencing homelessness, barriers to education for students experiencing homelessness, impact of homelessness on students in the education setting, educational rights of students experiencing homelessness and, Homeless Liaisons: roles and responsibilities.

Day 3: Friday, May 20, 2022: Participants brainstormed on the following topics via zoom

support services and resources for homeless students in the public-school community, gaps and lack of support services for homeless students in the public-school community, roles, and responsibilities of the GLCSD homeless liaisons, specialized support services for students experiencing homelessness in the GLCSD, specialized resources for students experiencing homelessness in the GLCSD. The post-survey was administered to each participant via email at the conclusion of Day 3. Participants submitted the completed post-survey via email to the DSW student. A copy of the agenda is located in *Appendix B*.

Methodology

Project Design

The capstone project (Protocol ID: #22-04-5588) was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa, AL. The project design was non-experimental research (descriptive), implemented in the form of educational awareness workshops from a holistic approach. The capstone project aimed to increase and/or improve the knowledge-level of homeless liaisons in the GLCSD by incorporating the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance #Act as an intervention model. The intervention model assisted the homeless liaisons with identifying, supporting, and linking students experiencing homelessness to needed services/resources from a holistic approach. A copy of the IRB notice of approval is located in *Appendix C*.

Project Site and Population

The project was implemented in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District, located in Leflore County, Mississippi (Greenwood and Itta Bena). The Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District (GLCSD) has six Elementary Schools, three Middle Schools, and

three High Schools, with over five thousand students and over 500 employees (Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District Data, 2021). The GLCSD has been in existence since August 2019 as a forced consolidation by MDE. Prior, the GLCSD operated as two separate school districts, Greenwood Public School District and Leflore County School District. Both former districts' Federal Program Directors acknowledged the gap in services for students experiencing homelessness.

The gap in services for homeless students within the GLCSD, stemmed from the lack of training for employees in the GLCSD. Per the district's Federal Program Director, the district's homeless liaisons are not appropriately trained, nor qualified to maintain the positions. In addition, lack of funding has deterred teachers/staff persons from being appointed or volunteering as homeless liaisons. These factors played a vital role in the execution of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act in the GLCSD as mandated.

The 24 participants were designated as homeless liaisons by the District's Superintendent. The designated homeless liaisons consisted of the following: 2 administrative level, 12 assistant principals, 3 social workers, and 7 district administrative assistants/registration staff members. Participants engaged in a series of three educational awareness workshops for 180-minutes each session, including the time to complete the two surveys (pre-survey and post-survey). The participants are scheduled to serve as homeless liaisons for the 2022-2023 academic school year.

Measurement Instruments

A pre-test survey and post-test survey was administered to each participant that volunteered in the project. The surveys consisted of the same content that included 12 closed-ended questions to assess participants' knowledge/information prior to the educational workshops (pre) and

knowledge/information acquired after the educational workshops (post). The surveys were designed using google forms software. The google forms software allowed for each participants' responses to be submitted confidentially and individualized by using district email verification. A copy of the pre-survey and post-survey are located in *Appendix D*.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection method was a quantitative research evaluation process. This evaluation process was structured, with pre-and post-test surveys (12 closed-ended questions) administered through google forms software. Key summative evaluation questions were as following: 1) Did the project achieve its objectives and performance targets; and 2) What was the project's impact on the participants, after examining the impact of the project's content on environmental factors, educational factors, and support services/resources. Collection of participants' data was de-identified and stored securely on UA Box. A copy of the completed pre-test survey and post-test survey is located in *Appendix E*.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the project consisted of descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize group-level demographic information about the participants. Participant demographic information included the following (Q1-Q4): gender, race/ethnicity, work locations, number of years in current location, number of years in current position, and number of years as homeless liaison.

Descriptive statistics were used to compare pretest and posttest scores on the survey. The pre-and post-test surveys consisted of the following: Q4: Did the participant know how to define the term homelessness, Q5: Did the participants know the different types of homelessness, Q6:

Did the participants know what the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act entails, Q7: Did the participants know that the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act assisted students experiencing homelessness, Q8: Did the participants know how to identify students that are at-risk of being homeless, Q9: Did the participants know how to identify students that are experiencing homelessness, Q10: Did the participants know the GLCSD process of reporting homeless students, Q11: Did the participants know what accommodations are available for students experiencing homeless in the GLCSD, and Q12: Did the participants know what community resources are available to students experiencing homelessness in the GLCSD. Participants were not exposed to any risk during the implementation of the project.

Results

The results sections describe the findings of the project. Quantitative data was collected to support the aim of the educational awareness workshops. The aim of the project was to evaluate if the educational workshops increased and/or improved the homeless liaisons' knowledge of homeless, associated factors of homelessness, and the impact of homeless on students in the educational setting. Second, if the educational workshops increased the homeless liaisons' knowledge of effective/appropriate services and resources for students experiencing homelessness based on the McKinney Vento model.

Twenty-four GLCSD employees (21-years and older) volunteered to participate in the capstone project. Of the 24 participants, only 15 completed the pre-and post-test survey. Within the total sample (n=15), participants identified gender as: 2 male (13%) and 13 female (87%). Participants' race/ethnicity was identified as: 13 African American/Black (87%) and 2 Other (13%). The work locations/buildings of participants in the GLCSD included: 6 school buildings

(42%) and 9 central office/educational building (60%). The number of years participants worked in current locations/buildings in the GLCSD was as following: 3- five years or more (20%), 11- more than one year but less than five (73%), and 2- less than one year (13%). The number of years participants worked in current positions with the GLCSD was as following: 1 assistant superintendent (7%), 5 assistant principals (33%), 5 administrative assistants/registration staff (33%), 1 federal program director (7%), and 3 social workers (20%). And the number of years participants served as homeless liaisons in the GLCSD was as following: 1- five years or more (7%), 6- more than one year but less than five years (40%), and 8- less than one year (53%).

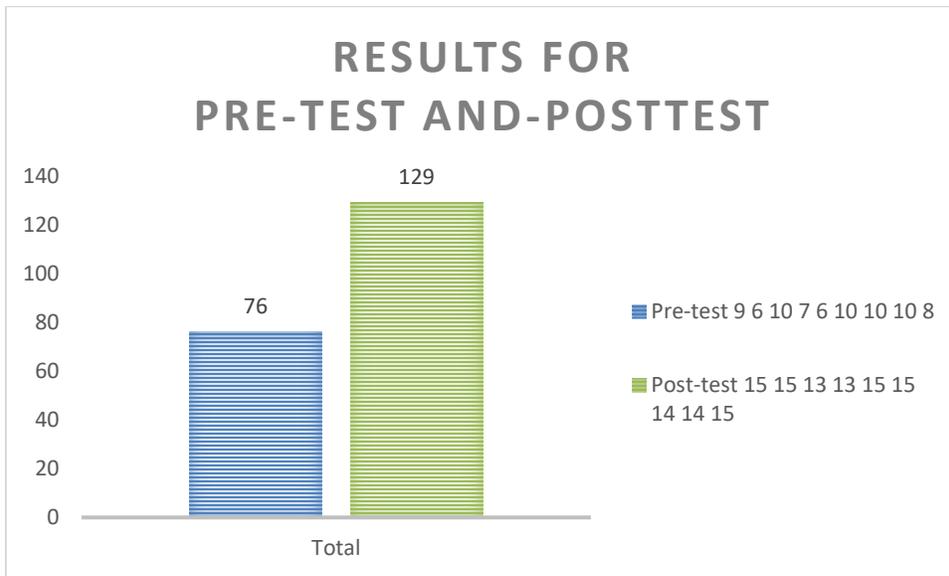
The below table illustrates the participants’ demographics:

n= 15 Demographics	Number of Participants	%
Gender	15	
male	2	0.13
female	13	0.87
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	13	0.87
Other	2	0.13
School Building		
Amanda Elzy Jr. High	1	0.07
Amanda Elzy High	1	0.07
Bankston Elementary	1	0.07
East Elementary	1	0.07
Greenwood Middle	1	0.07
Leflore Middle/High	1	0.07
Central Office/Service Building	9	0.60
Years in current school		
Five years or more	3	0.20
More than one year but less than 5	11	0.73
One year or less	2	0.13

Current position		
Assistant Superintendent	1	0.07
Assistant Principal	5	0.33
Administrative Assistant/Registration staff	5	0.33
Federal Program Director	1	0.07
Social Worker	3	0.20
Years as homeless liaison		
Five years or more	1	0.07
More than one year but less than 5	6	0.40
One year or less	8	0.53

Based on the results from the closed-ended questions (Q5-Q12) on the surveys (pre-test/post test), participants' knowledge increased and/or improved related to awareness of homeless, associated factors of homelessness, and the impact of homeless on students in the educational setting. As well as knowledge of effective/appropriate services and resources for students experiencing homelessness based on the McKinney Vento model. All of the participants that completed the surveys (pre-and-posttest) showed an increase in knowledge of the term homelessness, types of homelessness, ability to identify student at-risk of being homeless, ability to identify students that are experiencing homelessness, and what community services are available for students experiencing homelessness in the district. Most participants (93.3%) that completed the surveys (pre-and-posttest) indicated an increase in knowing the district's process of reporting students that are experiencing homelessness and what accommodations are available for students experiencing homelessness in the district. And several participants (86.7%) reported knowing what entails the McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act and how the McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act assist students experiencing homelessness.

Answers of yes were scored with a 1 and answers of no were scored with 0. The chart below indicates the total summed scores for all participants at pretest and posttest:



Discussion

The McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (reauthorized in 2001 and 2015) was implemented as an intervention model for the homeless liaisons in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District (GLCSD). The intervention model assisted with unveiling the definition of homelessness, key factors associated with homelessness, the impact of homeless in public-schools, identifying homeless students in the public-school community, and addressing the need for supportive services/resources on the district, local, and state levels. The capstone project did embrace the ecological systems theory, addressing the need for the homeless liaisons to view the various aspects that contribute to homelessness, as well as having an impact on the educational/social/emotional development of students (Ozaki et al., 2020). The humanistic theory was outlined to demonstrate the importance of the holistic approach, assisting the

homeless liaisons with recognizing that student success goes beyond the classroom setting (Hanley et al., 2020).

The findings from the capstone project support the need for educational awareness on homeless in the public-school community. The capstone project alluded that the homeless liaisons were familiar with the term homelessness, contributing factors of homelessness and the impact of homelessness on students in the educational setting. However, the capstone project revealed that the homeless liaisons lacked training, knowledge of supportive services in the district as well as resources on the local/state level, and the lack of district policy in the student handbook on homeless students/families. In addition, the homeless liaisons communicated multiple assigned roles/responsibilities within the district has restricted their ability to serve as homeless liaisons.

Currently, the homeless liaisons in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidate School District are preparing for the 2022-2023 academic year which will include an amended registration process (revising the section on the application for homeless students), revisions to the student handbook to incorporate additional policies on homeless students/families, and creation of a homeless resource team/manual (on the district website/hard copy). The Federal Program Director opted to assign a Homeless Resource Team Leader to assist with the modifications, keeping the GLCSD within the guidelines of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Strengths and limitations

Several strengths were recognized during the implementation of the capstone project. First, the project provided the homeless liaisons in the Greenwood Leflore Consolidated School District (GLCSD) with evidence-based information on homeless and an appropriate

interpretation of McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Secondly, the project brought attention to the lack of district policies on homeless students/families in the student handbook. Third, the project assisted the homeless liaisons with exploring effective strategies/techniques to bridge the gaps in supportive services within the district and community resources at the local/state levels. In addition, 24 participants completed the pre-test survey and actively engaged in the 3-day educational workshops.

Overall, the limitations were not risky in nature but did reflect an impact on the capstone project. First, only 15 out of 24 participants completed the pre-and post-test surveys. The lack of participation on the post-test survey skewed the data reported from the pre-test survey. And second, the educational workshops were presented virtually versus in-person. The decision to have the educational workshops virtually was based on the possibility of special call meetings by the GLCSD school board per the District's Superintendent. The GLCSD school host regular and special call meetings in the GLCSD training auditorium.

Conclusion

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (National Association of Social Work, 2018). Social workers should be instrumental in advocating for equal access to housing and educational opportunities. The profession of social work has an obligation to address the issue of homelessness. In keeping with an empowerment perspective, social workers must join with agencies/organizations that promote affordable housing efforts and advocate for systems of change in social structures that continue to violate this population's human right.

Education continuous to promote the intellectual, physical, and social development of students in their environment. Providing all students, specifically those experiencing homelessness with a school climate that is safe, positive, and secure, restoring the stability net that those students lack. In effort to improve the school climate, the public-school community must prioritize supportive services and resources for students experiencing homeless beyond the classroom setting, with the goal of student success.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Project Participants

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the project.

Consent Form Key Information:

- Participate in a 3-day educational workshop
- Take 2 surveys (pre-survey and post-survey)
- Information collected will be stored in a secure location for privacy

Purpose of the research study: To provide evidenced-based information to home liaisons relative to students experiencing homelessness in public-schools.

The goal of the Educational Awareness of Homeless Students in the Public-School Community Project will focus on the significance of public schools offering a place of stability, safety, and supportive services for students experiencing homelessness. Also, the project will define the term homelessness, increase awareness of students experiencing homelessness, the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (supportive services/resources) and the importance of homeless liaisons (roles/responsibilities).

What you will do in the study: You will engage in a series of three educational workshops to spread awareness of homelessness, the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, effective supportive services for students experiencing homelessness and the role and responsibilities of the homeless liaisons. You will be asked to complete a survey before and after taking part in the workshop.

Time required: You will be asked to attend a series of educational workshops for a duration of 3 hours, for a frequency of 3 days. The total amount of time required to complete the workshops will be no more than 9 hours (3 hours on each of 3 days). The surveys should take ten minutes to complete at pre-survey and post-survey for a total 20 minutes.

Risks: You will be at no risks or discomfort in this project. However, it is possible that you may feel somewhat uneasy answering the questions involved relative to homelessness, especially if there have been personal experiences with homelessness.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The information obtained in this project may not directly benefit you. However, the results may

provide needed information about homelessness, students experiencing homelessness, and awareness of further interventive efforts that may be needed to promote effective supportive services.

Confidentiality: All your information obtained during this project will be kept private. That is, we protect the privacy of people by withholding their names and other personal information from all persons not connected to this project. Material collected as a part of the project will be stored securely using UA Box, inaccessible to everyone except for the Principal Investigator and evaluation team.

Data linked with identifying information:

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. We will be using group-level data with no identifiers in our data files, which will be stored securely using UA Box.

Data not linked to identifying information:

The information that you give in the project will be handled confidentially. Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Voluntary participation: Taking part in this project is *completely voluntary*. You may refuse to answer any specific question or participate in any part of the project. Participants may withdraw from participation in the project at any time without penalty or prejudice. Your decision about whether to take part in the study will have no effect on your work with the School District.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: If you choose to withdraw from the project, please notify the Principal Investigator (Sowitz Johnson). You will not be penalized for withdrawing, and any data collected will be destroyed.

If you have questions about the project or need to report a project related issue, please contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Sowitz Johnson
Title: DSW Candidate
Department Name: School of Social Work
Telephone: 662-704-0462
Email address: sjohnson25@crimson.ua.edu

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. Laura Hopson
Department Name: School of Social Work
Telephone: 1 205 348 5270
Email address: lmhopson@sw.ua.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research project, please contact: Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

Agreement:

- I agree to participate in the research project described above.
- I do not agree to participate in the research project described above.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Print Name of Research Participant

Signature of Investigator or other Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Print Name of Investigator or other Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix B

Agenda

Wednesday, May 18, 2022 (9:00 am-12:00 noon)

Day 1: Educational Workshop #1

Defining Homelessness

- Homelessness in the United States
- Homelessness in Mississippi
- Homelessness in Leflore County
- Homeless Families
- Homeless Children
- Homeless Students

Thursday, May 19, 2022 (9:00 am-12:00 noon)

Day 2: Educational Workshop #2

McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

- Brief history of the McKinney Vento Assistance Act
 - Mississippi Department of Education: Office of Homelessness/State Plan of Action
 - Greenwood Leflore Consolidate School District: District Homelessness Policy and Procedure
 - Procedure for Identifying Students Experiencing Homelessness
 1. Eligibility
 2. Identification Strategies
- Barriers to Education for Students Experiencing Homelessness
- Impact of Homelessness on Students in the Education Setting
- Educational Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness
- Homeless Liaisons: Roles and Responsibilities

Friday, May 20, 2022 (9:00 am-12:00 noon)

Day 3: Educational Workshop #3

Support Services and Resources

- Gaps in Educational Support Services for Students Experiencing Homelessness
 1. Tangible Support Services
 2. Intangible Support Services
- Roles and Responsibilities of the GLCSD Homeless Liaisons
- Specialized Support Services for Students Experiencing Homelessness in the GLCSD
 1. School stability
 2. Enrollment
 3. Academic Success
 4. Title 1, Part A
- Specialized Resources for Students Experiencing Homelessness in the Community

Appendix C



Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

May 2, 2022

To: Sowitza Smith-
Johnson
School of
Social Work
Box 870314

From: Carpentato T. Myles, MSM, CIM,
CIP Director & Research
Compliance Officer

1)

Re: **Notice of Approval** IRB Application II: Project Title:

Submission Type: Approval Date: Expiration Date: Funding Source: Review Category: Approved Documents:

e-Protocol 22-04-5588

"Educational Awareness of Homeless Students in the Public School Community"

New

May 2, 2022

May 1, 2023

None Exempt

Informed Consent Document

Dear Sowitza Smith-
Johnson:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. Therefore, your application has been approved according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under exempt review category 2 as outlined below:

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

The approval for your application will lapse, as noted above. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review to the IRB as University policy requires before the lapse. Please note any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the stamped IRB-approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

All the best with your
research.

166 Rose Administration Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35401 | 205 348-8461 |
rscompliance@lua.edu

Appendix D

Pre-Test Survey

Name:		
Gender:		
Race/Ethnicity:		
School/Building:		
1. How many years have you been assigned to this school?	Five years or more One year but less than five Less than one year	___ ___ ___
2. My current position is best described as:	Administrator Specialist (e.g., counselor, psychologist, social worker, parent center coordinator etc.) Teacher Teacher Assistant Other	___ ___ ___ ___ ___
3. How long have you been serving as a homeless liaison?	Five years or more One year but less than five years Less than one year	___ ___ ___
4. Do you know how to define the term homelessness?	Yes	No
5. Do you know the different types of homelessness?	Yes	No

6. Do you know what the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act entails?	Yes	No
7. Do you know how the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act assists students experiencing homelessness	Yes	No
8. Do you know how to identify students that are at-risk of being homeless?	Yes	No
9. Do you know how to identify students that are experiencing homeless?	Yes	No
10. Do you know the school district's process of reporting students that are experiencing homelessness?	Yes	No
11. Do you know what accommodations are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?	Yes	No
12. Do you know what community resources are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?	Yes	No

Post-Test Survey

Name:		
Gender:		
Race/Ethnicity:		
School/Building:		
1. How many years have you been assigned to this school?	Five years or more	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	One year but less than five	
	Less than one year	

2. My current position is best described as:	Administrator Specialist (e.g., counselor, psychologist, social worker, parent center coordinator etc.) Teacher Teacher Assistant Other	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3. How long have you been serving as a homeless liaison?	Five years or more One year but less than five years Less than one year	<hr/> <hr/>
4. Do you know how to define the term homelessness	Yes	No
5. Do you know the different types of homelessness?	Yes	No
6. Do you know what the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act entails?	Yes	No
7. Do you know how the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act assists students experiencing homelessness	Yes	No
8. Do you know how to identify students that are at-risk of being homeless?	Yes	No
9. Do you know how to identify students that are experiencing homeless?	Yes	No
10. Do you know the school district's process of reporting students that are experiencing homelessness?	Yes	No
11. Do you know what accommodations are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?	Yes	No

12. Do you know what community resources are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?	Yes	No
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Appendix E

Educational Awareness of Homeless Students in the Public-School Community-Pre-Survey

24 responses

Name 24 responses

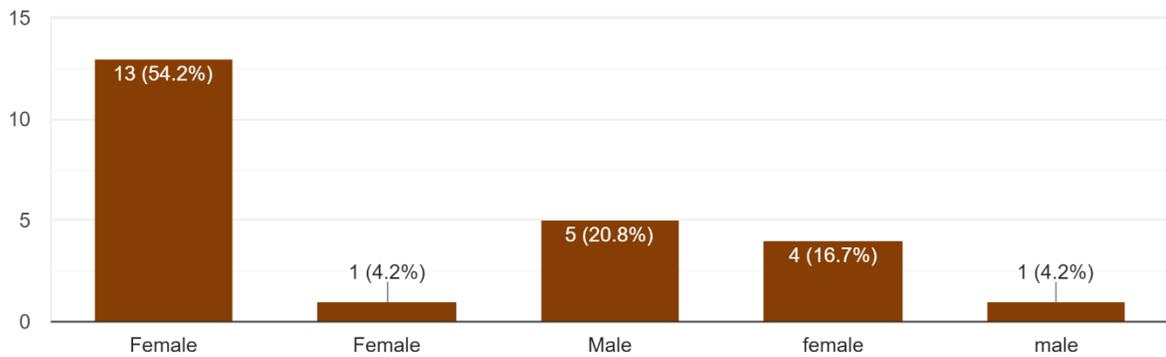
Participants' names were removed for confidentiality.

Email 24 responses

Participants' email addresses were removed for confidentiality.

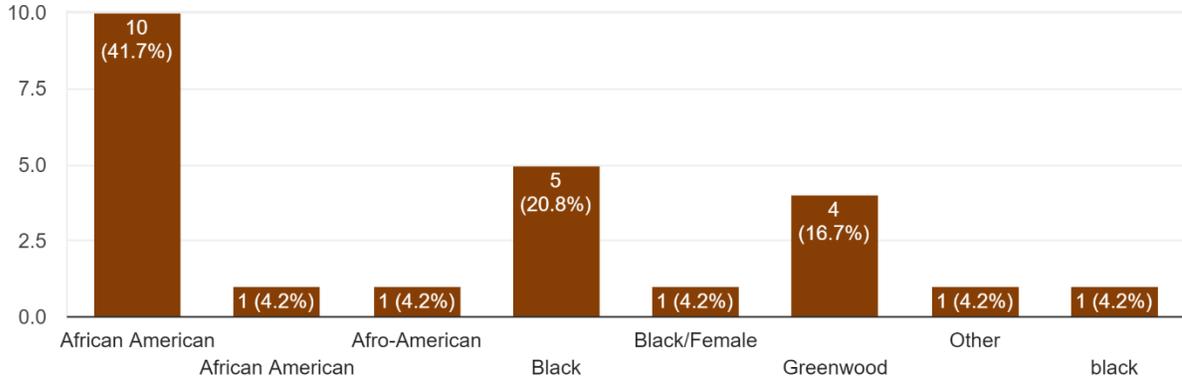
Gender

24 responses



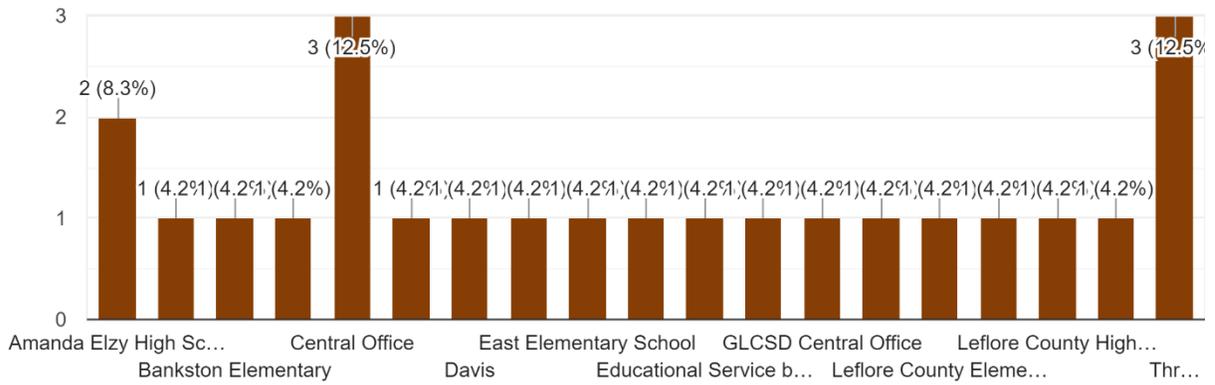
Race/Ethnicity

24 responses



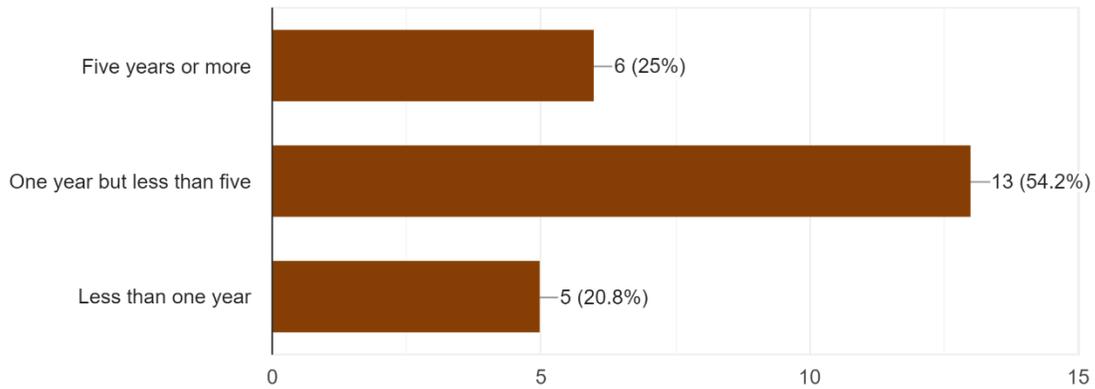
School/Building

24 responses



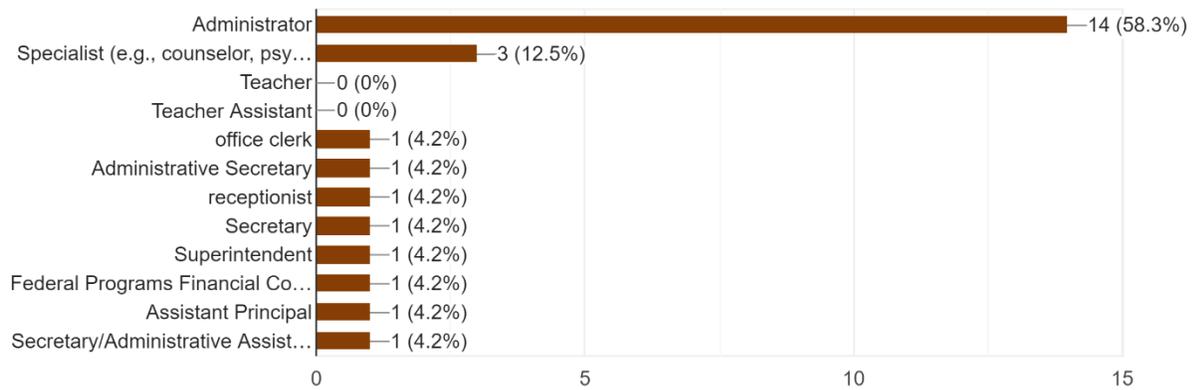
1. How many years have you been assigned to this school?

24 responses



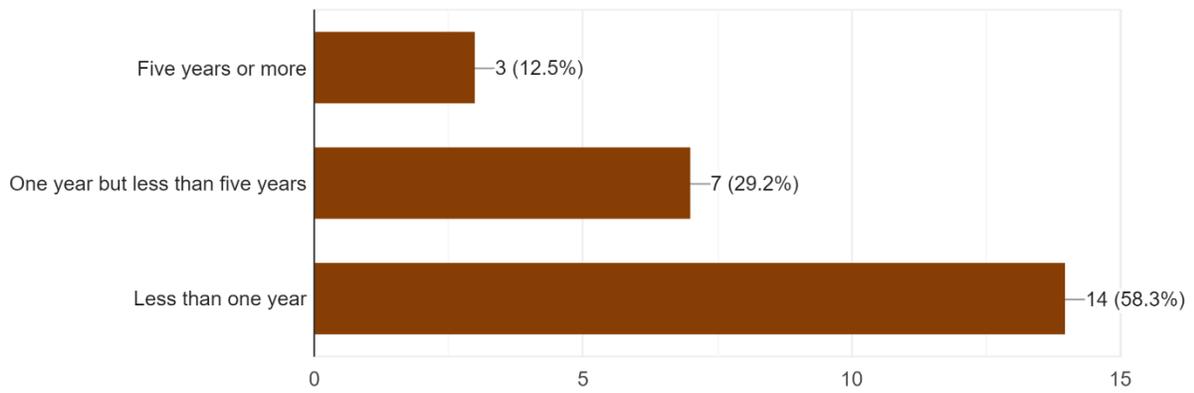
2. My current position is best described as:

24 responses



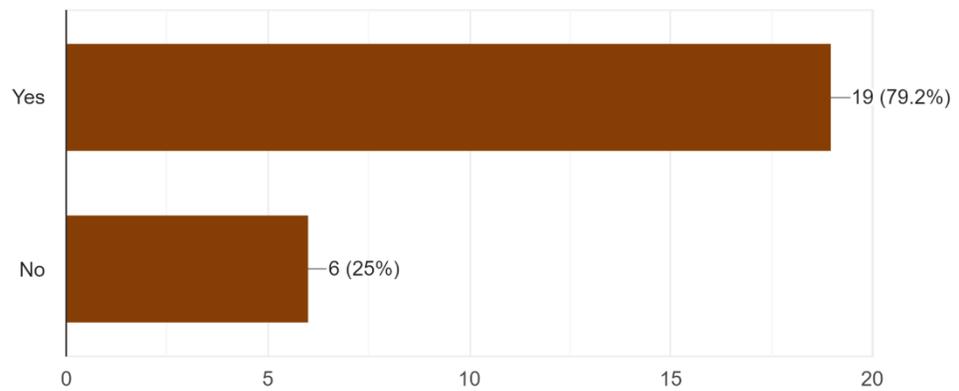
3. How long have you been serving as a homeless liaison?

24 responses



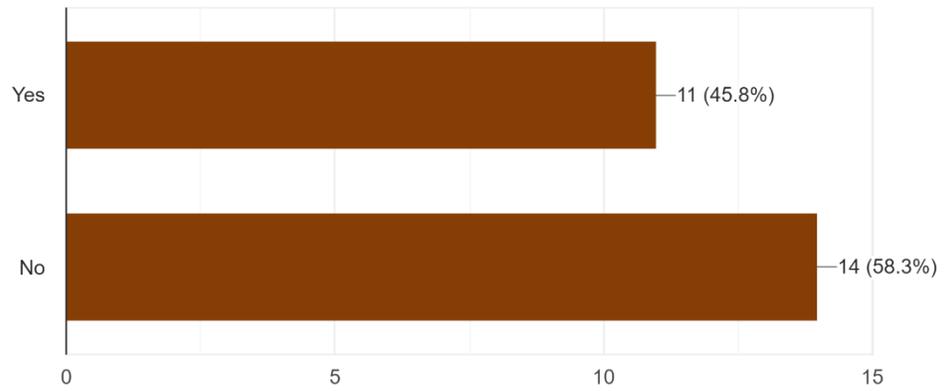
4. Do you know how to define the term homelessness?

24 responses



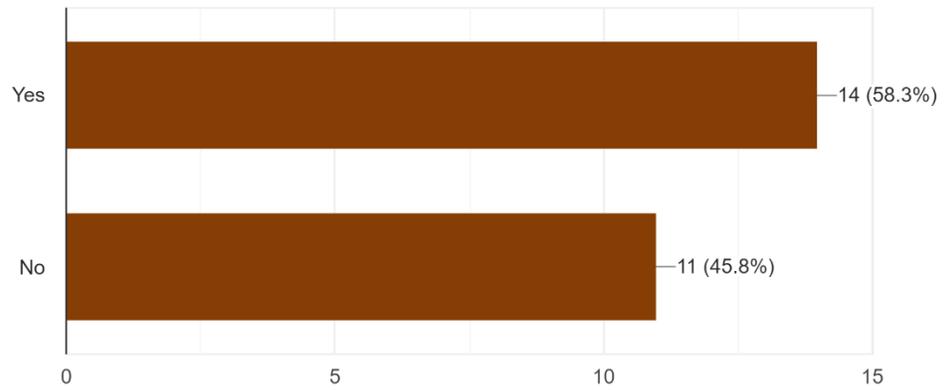
5. Do you know the different types of homelessness?

24 responses



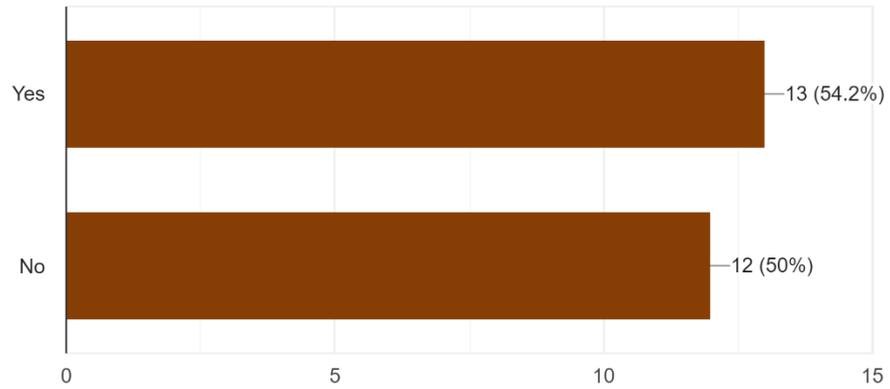
6. Do you know what the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act entails?

24 responses



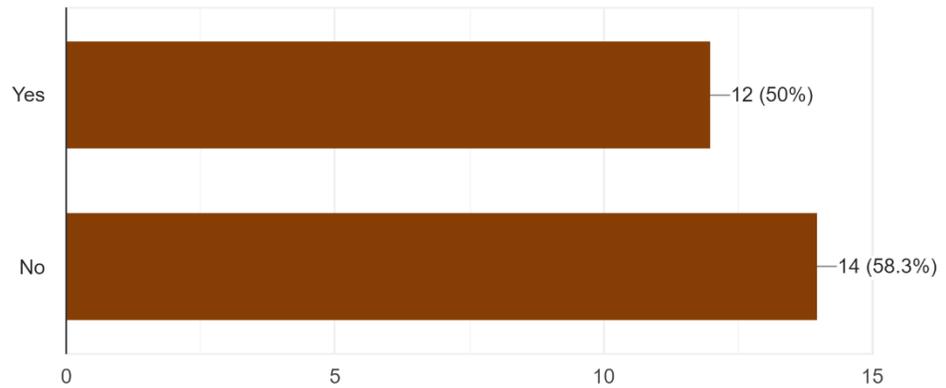
7. Do you know how the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act assists students experiencing homelessness?

24 responses



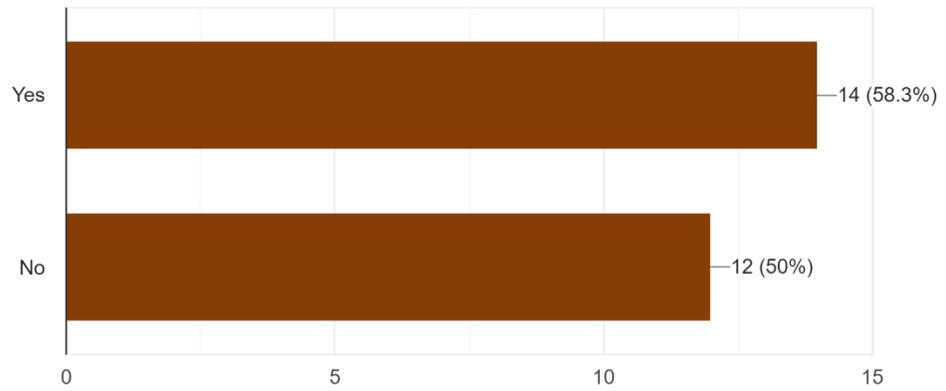
8. Do you know how to identify students that are at-risk of being homeless?

24 responses



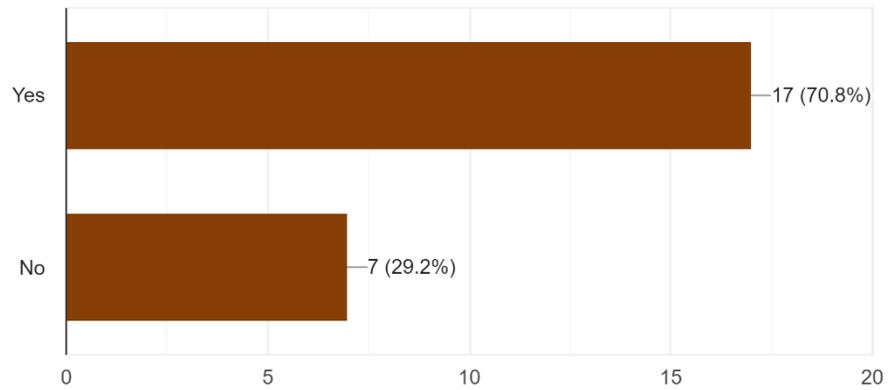
9. Do you know how to identify students that are experiencing homeless?

24 responses



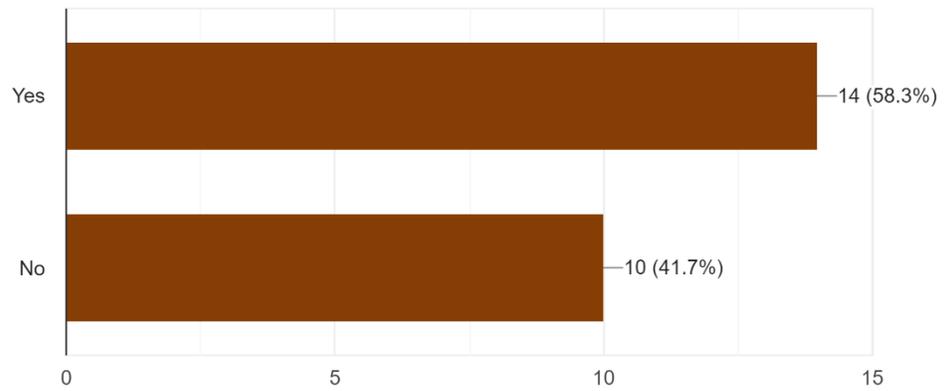
10. Do you know the school district's process of reporting students that are experiencing homelessness?

24 responses



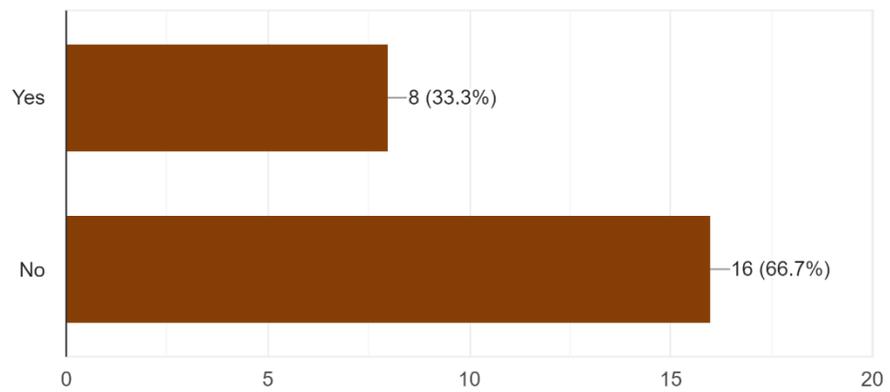
11. Do you know what accommodations are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?

24 responses



12. Do you know what community resources are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?

24 responses



Educational Awareness of Homeless Students in the Public-School Community

Post-Survey

15 responses

Name 15 responses

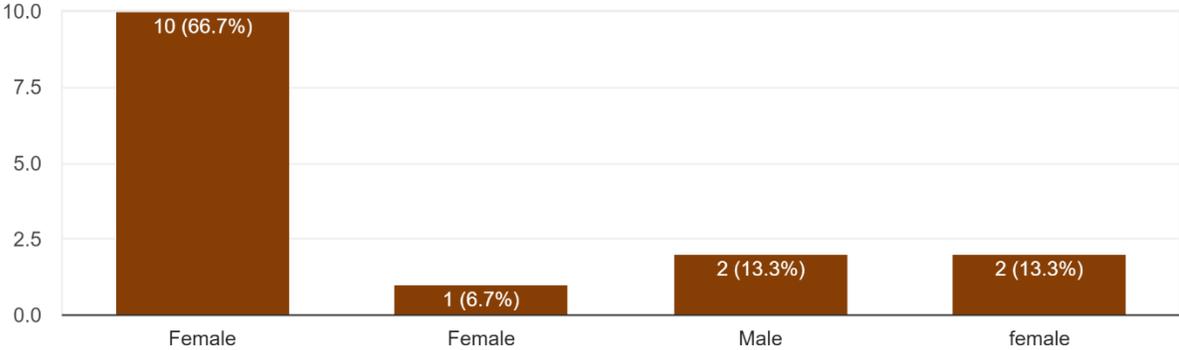
Participants' names removed for confidentiality.

Email 15 responses

Participants' email addresses removed for confidentiality.

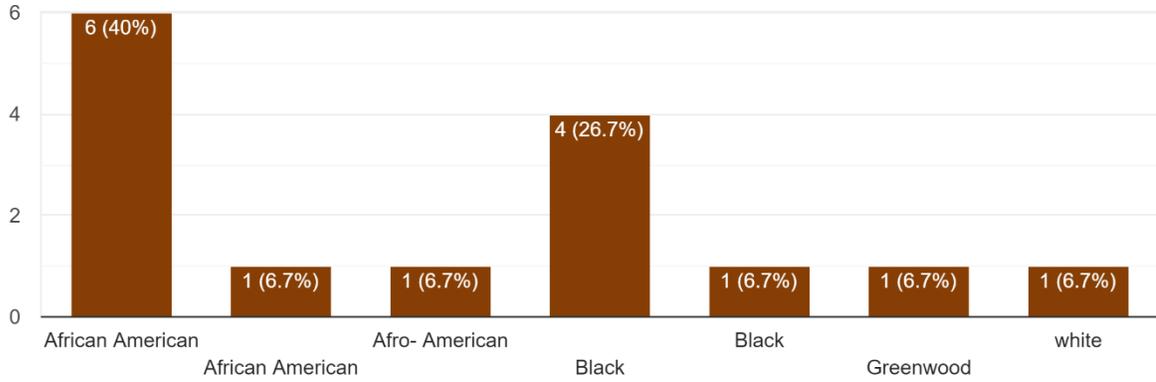
Gender

15 responses



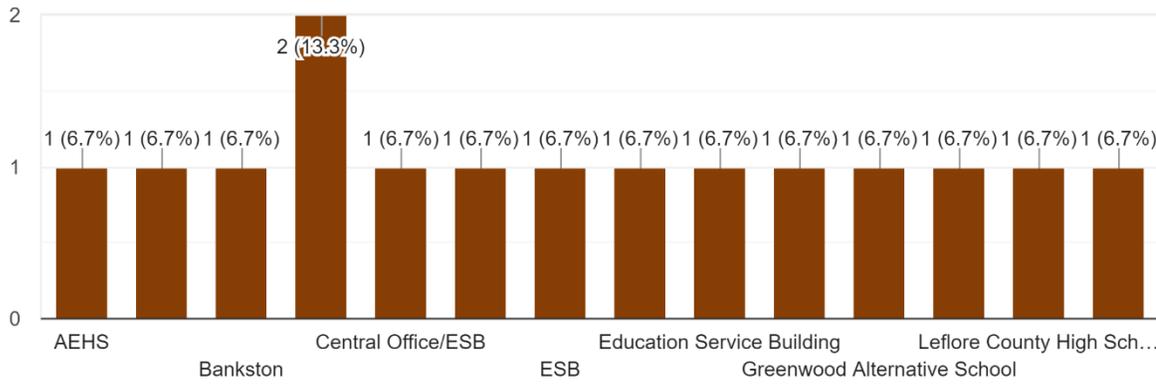
Race/Ethnicity

15 responses



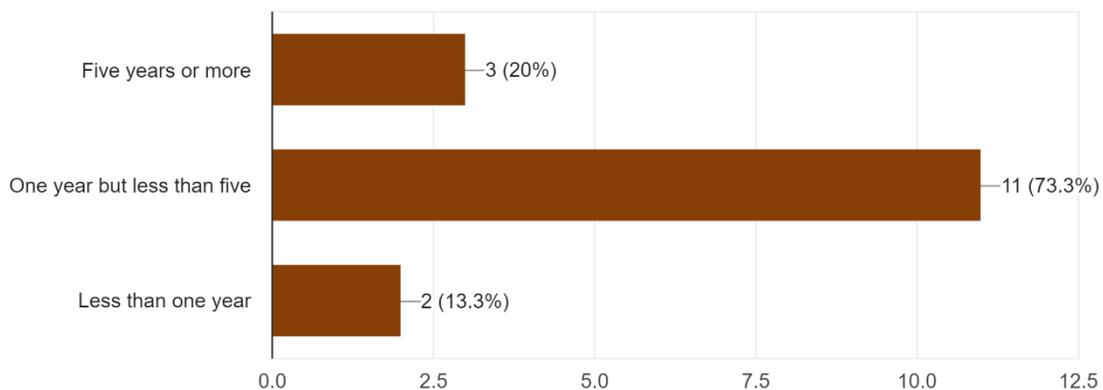
School/Building

15 responses



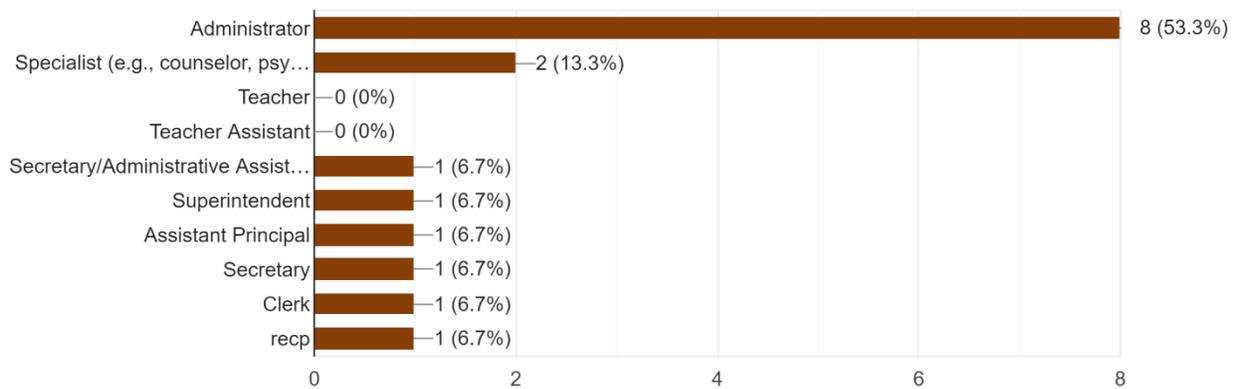
1. How many years have you been assigned to this school?

15 responses



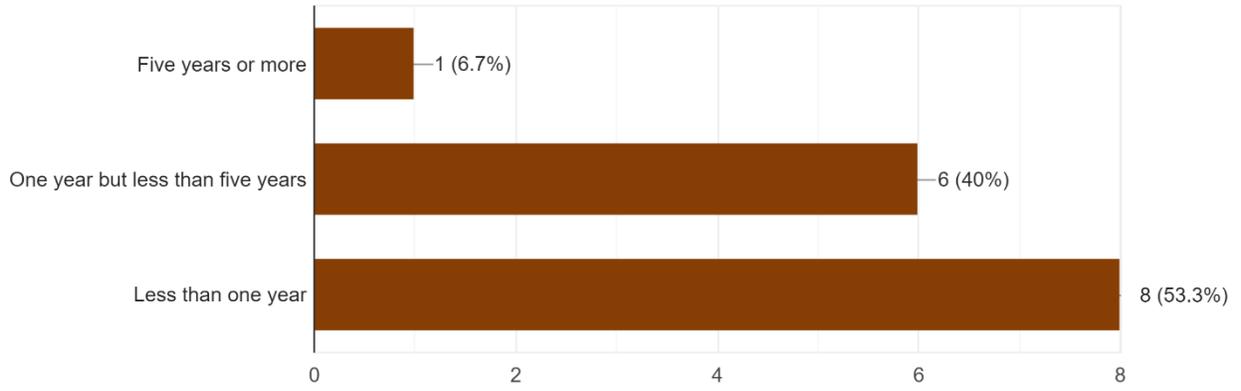
2. My current position is best described as:

15 responses



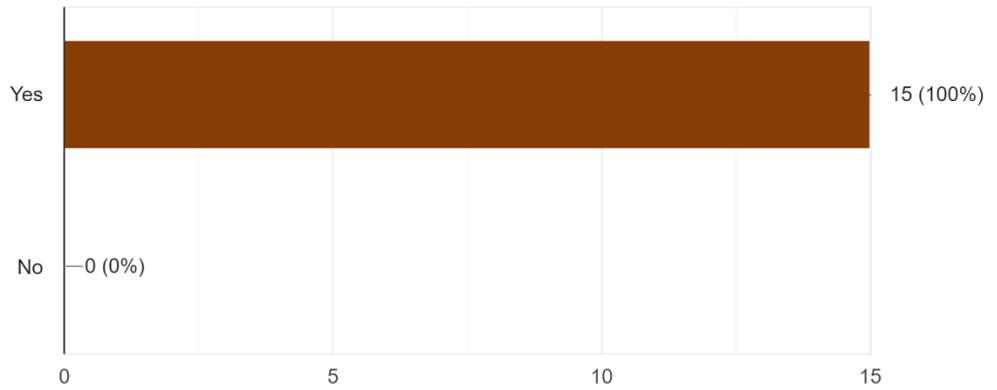
3. How long have you been serving as a homeless liaison?

15 responses



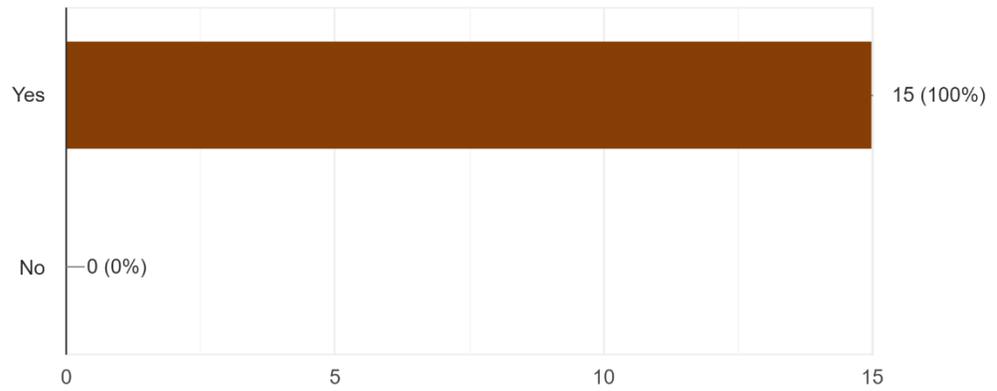
4. Do you know how to define the term homelessness?

15 responses



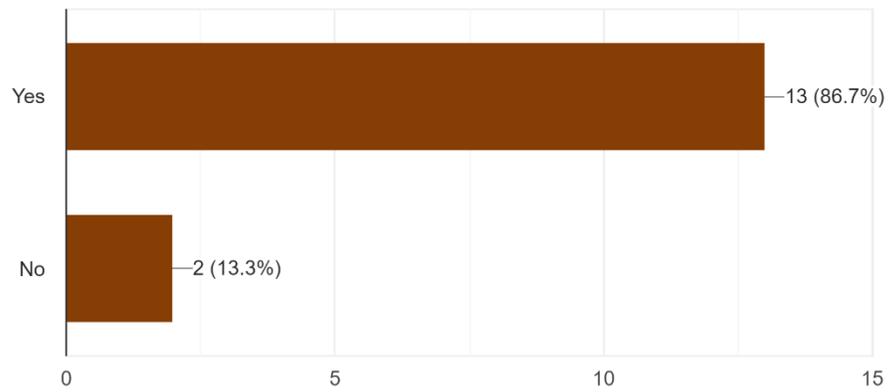
5. Do you know the different types of homelessness?

15 responses



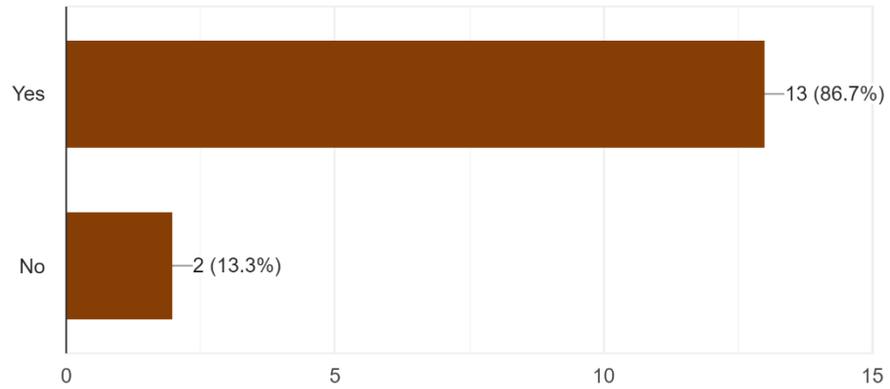
6. Do you know what the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act entails?

15 responses



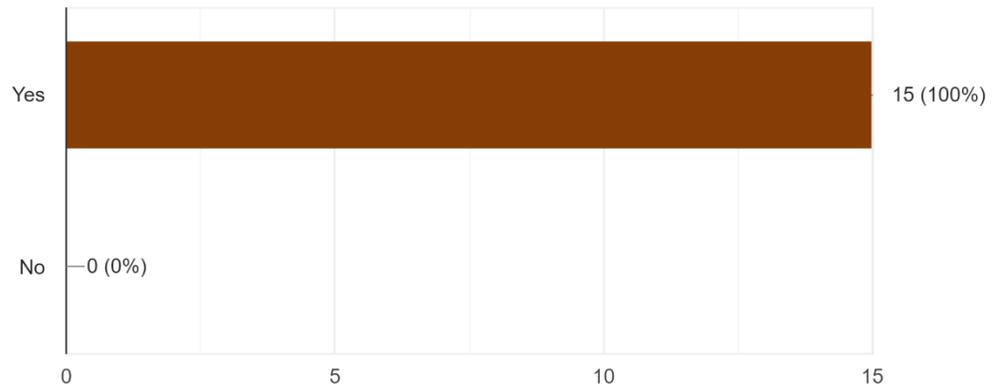
7. Do you know how the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act assists students experiencing homelessness?

15 responses



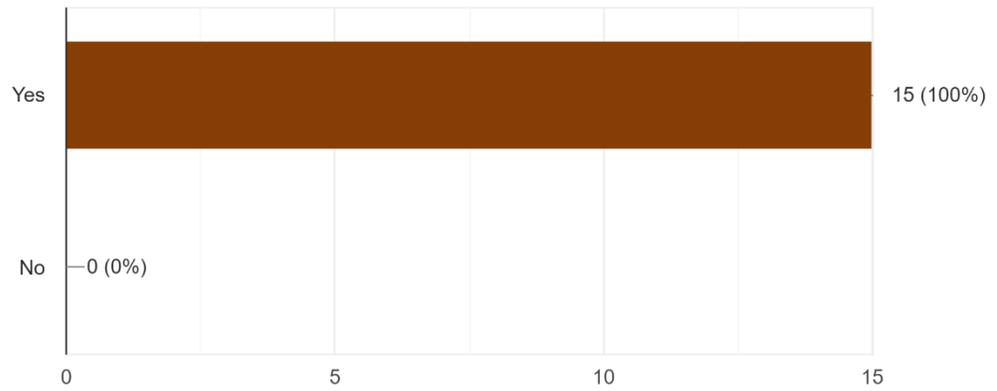
8. Do you know how to identify students that are at-risk of being homeless?

15 responses



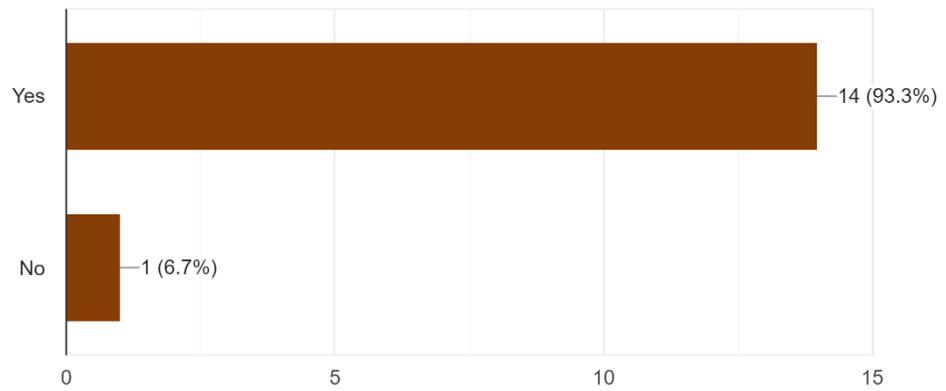
9. Do you know how to identify students that are experiencing homeless?

15 responses



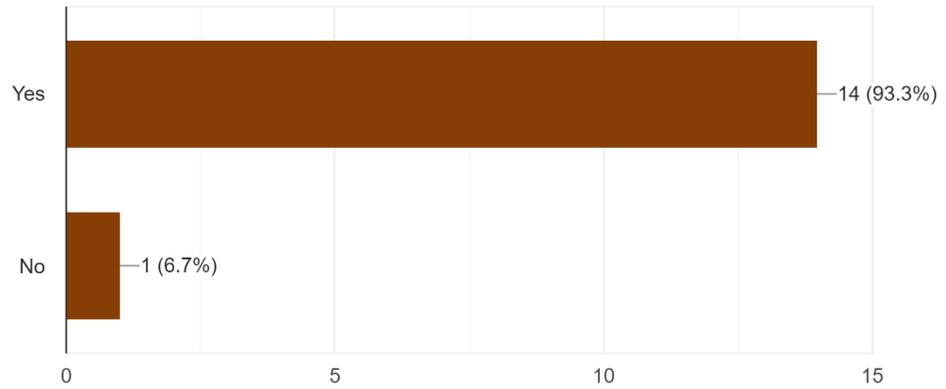
10. Do you know the school district's process of reporting students that are experiencing homelessness?

15 responses



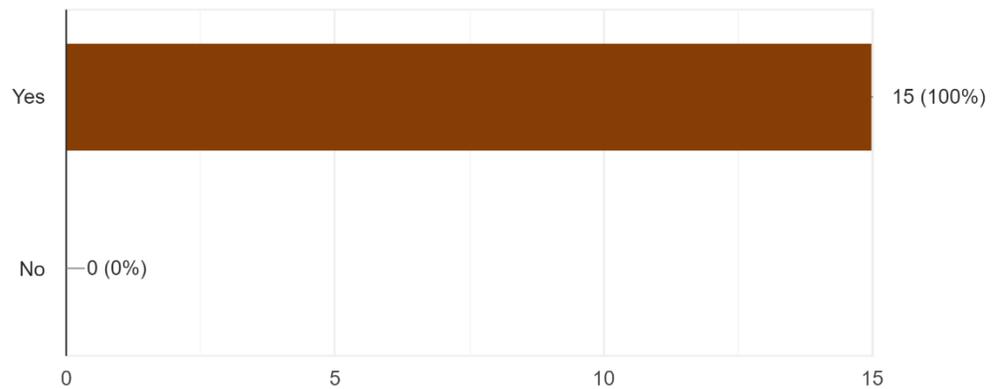
11. Do you know what accommodations are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?

15 responses



12. Do you know what community resources are available for students experiencing homelessness in the school district?

15 responses



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