



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## Shoring Up Educational Support for DC's Homeless Students

By Soumya Bhat

Children who are homeless need adequate support from their school and community to ensure they are able to stay on track and complete their education. But this can only happen after they are properly identified and offered resources – such as help with food, transportation, or emotional support as they deal with instability at home. Fortunately, every DCPS school and charter school campus has a designated person to help make these connections. Now we need to ensure they have enough resources to do their jobs.



Students who are homeless face greater risks for negative health and education outcomes. A lack of educational continuity can be detrimental to a child's academic path. Homeless students are much more likely to experience anxiety, depression and withdrawal. They are also four times more likely than other children to show developmental delays and twice as likely to have learning disabilities.<sup>i</sup>

A new [national survey](#) shows students experiencing homelessness are 87 percent more likely to drop out than their peers with stable housing. Not surprisingly, most students reported feeling uncomfortable talking with people at their school about their housing situation, making it hard for school staff to know when to get involved.

These statistics are troubling, but there are programs operating in the District that help reach these students through the school system. The federal McKinney Vento program requires that each local education agency (LEA) have a homeless liaison to coordinate services for students and families who are homeless. Often, the liaison is the school social worker or guidance counselor. Services required under the McKinney-Vento program include transportation to and from the school of origin or school of choice, immediate enrollment assistance (including immunizations and assistance obtaining records), identification of homeless youth, awareness of services, and ensuring equal opportunity to participate in all programs and services available to non-homeless students at the school. Unfortunately, federal resources for these services are far from adequate. In FY 2014, the program provided only \$35 per DC homeless student.<sup>ii</sup> In addition, each DCPS and charter school receives additional funding through the school funding formula to help meet the needs of their students identified as homeless. However, it is unclear how much is going towards funding the liaison role or other supports at the school level.

The recent uptick in the homeless student population prompted the District to add more local resources to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE) homeless children and youth program. Here are a few of the investments in action:

- In FY 2015, a new database was launched to help liaisons report newly identified students and allowing OSSE to better analyze enrollment data.
- OSSE also offers additional training and professional development workshops to school liaisons, shelters, and community-based organizations that work with homeless families.
- OSSE is also working on an evaluation of the homeless children and youth program's efforts against specific measurable goals, expected to be released in summer 2016. The goals include metrics such as ensuring preschool-aged homeless children have the opportunity to enroll and attend preschool programs, increasing the timely provision of special education plans and services across schools, and increasing the graduation rate of homeless students.

DCFPI looks forward to seeing the evaluation results this summer to better understand what more can be done to help schools to ensure educational continuity and support for the District's homeless students.

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<sup>i</sup> The National Center on Family Homelessness.

<sup>ii</sup> DCFPI. "Unlocking Opportunities: Services that Help Poor Children Succeed in the Classroom. Helping Students Who Are Homeless," 2014.