



## *The Benefits of Housing and Education Cross-Systems Collaboration*

Improving cross-systems coordination and partnership helps both local and state homeless provider and educational systems to better serve children, youth, and families who are experiencing homelessness. Collaboration is important because people rarely experience homelessness as an isolated event. Housing stability significantly affects how children fare in school. Conversely, services that enable children to remain in school or early care help to moderate some of the disruption of a family housing crisis, including limiting child care needs for families in shelter. When homeless and educational services providers work together, each can better concentrate on core functions and strengths and build more responsive and robust solutions.



Coordination of efforts creates benefits for children, youth, and families, and for the systems that serve them. Active cross-systems collaborations establish a foundation from which both homeless services programs and educational services providers can most effectively address housing, education, and other needs of these vulnerable households. The [Housing and Education Collaborations to Serve Homeless Children, Youth, and Families brief](#) is designed to help homeless service providers and homeless education staff better understand each other's role in these systems.

As highlighted in [Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#), "Homeless school age children are more likely than similar age children in the general population to have emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and manifestations of aggressive behavior. Repeated school mobility leads to decreased academic achievement, negatively impacting both the child's and the school's overall performance." Increased cross-systems communication and collaboration can help education, Continuum of Care (CoC), and Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers that serve homeless children, youth, and families better understand these social and emotional dynamics and, in turn, develop and deliver more meaningful and appropriate services.

Research sponsored over the past several years by [the MacArthur Foundation \(How Housing Matters\)](#), [the Annie E. Casey Foundation \(National Center for Children in Poverty\)](#), and [the What Works Collaborative \(Urban Institute\)](#), as well as other academic and governmental research partnerships, suggests that housing stability and educational success are closely linked and mutually reinforcing. Findings of the recently published [Family Options Study](#) also establish a strong link between housing stability and child and family well-being. Providers of shelter, housing, and related support services for children and youth experiencing homelessness can support the academic success of children and youth by strengthening their linkages to school systems and community-based education programs. Similarly, educational services provided by Local Education Agencies (LEAs), homeless education liaisons, teachers, social workers, and early childhood education providers can help connect at-risk households to housing and services, and strengthen developmental outcomes for children and youth, thereby contributing to housing stability and prevention of family homelessness. Read more about the role of schools in the [Urban Institute Brief, "Housing and Schools: Working Together to Reduce the Negative Effects of Student Mobility"](#) and ["Homelessness and Education Cross-System Collaboration: Applied Research Summary and Tools"](#) by [the National Center for Homeless Education](#).

Children and youth in families with stable housing attend school more consistently, perform better academically, experience less stress/mental health trauma, and are less likely to be disruptive in the school setting. Conversely, high degrees of school mobility have been linked to decreased levels of academic achievement. Provision of high quality educational services and supports to homeless children and youth helps decrease the stress of parents associated with child care needs as they deal with finding or maintaining housing and other challenges of homelessness. Access to stable educational settings for children and youth (including Early Head Start, Head Start, and K-12 programs) undergirds parental success in maintaining employment and economic stability, and thus supports subsequent housing stability. For more information on the relationship between education and housing stability, see [School Stability and School Performance: Literature Review](#) by [the National Center for Homeless Education](#).

With this broader context as background, it is relatively easy to identify a number of ways in which cross-systems collaboration can enhance the impact of both the homeless provider and educational service systems in responding to the needs of children, youth, and families experiencing a housing crisis.

### *Increases Access to Available Supports and Services*

- Systems working together help ensure that children and families can access the full range of housing, education, health and mental health, employment, and other support services that are essential to promoting child, youth, and family well-being. Coordinating service provision, in turn, helps to strengthen educational outcomes and prevent or more quickly resolve housing crises.
- Cross-systems collaboration assures that necessary services can be brought to bear in assisting children, youth and their families, no matter which local provider identifies a housing crisis. Services can be identified and referrals can be made by either the education or housing systems, and the process can be facilitated through the community's policies concerning coordinated entry.
- Provision of transportation and other services that keep children in their school of origin, whenever possible, can mitigate the trauma of homelessness and avoid additional educational challenges, while enabling schools and housing agencies to attend more effectively to their core services.

### *Strengthens Cross-Systems Referrals*

- Inclusion of both K-12 and early childhood education programs in the CoC's planning and implementation of a coordinated entry process will help the community develop effective cross-system referral, and, in turn, has the potential to dramatically increase access of children, youth, and families to important crisis and mainstream housing and services.
- Collaboration can also inform the development of comprehensive systems mapping that more accurately describes the pathways into and out of crisis than any one system could develop alone.

### *Builds a Foundation for Shared Use of Common Data*

- Sharing of data across systems helps paint a more complete picture of child, youth, and family homelessness than the information gathered by different local education, housing, and service providers alone.
- Local CoCs already have Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) in place. Among its capacities, HMIS is designed to document and report on housing and services provided to families and youth experiencing housing crisis within a geographical area. School systems keep attendance records, and schools may be the first to identify pupils with housing instability problems. The RHYMIS system used by RHY providers is now actively integrating its data with HMIS data in communities across the country. Combining these robust information systems can be invaluable both in supporting success of individual students and supporting effectiveness of system level planning and coordination. [\*Interagency Data Disclosure: A Tip Sheet on Interagency Collaboration\*](#), developed by the U.S. Department of Education in coordination with USICH, provides guidance on how to effectively and efficiently share information to best help children and youth experiencing homelessness.

### *Increases Community Capacity for Effective Response*

- When homeless and educational providers work hand-in-hand to create and share more accurate counts and/or descriptors of child, youth, and family data, this, in turn, helps the entire community services system to more effectively deliver services. Active collaboration has the potential to improve the capacity of communities to:
  - Identify and respond to pressing individual and/or systems-wide problems;
  - Inform planning and evaluation of programs and services;
  - Monitor program impact and achievement of goals;
  - Inform responsive policy and practice; and
  - Target use of scarce resources where impact is most significant.
- In general, the process of working together can increase understanding among service providers, educators, advocates, and policy makers about the broad range of unique and complex needs of homeless children, youth, and families. This heightened understanding, in turn, can facilitate the planning and implementation of programs that better meet these needs.

Click the following to head back to the Youth Homelessness main page: [Back to Youth Homelessness](#).