



OUR HOME

Opening Doors: Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth
ILLINOIS MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Homeless Data In SIS

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requests that school districts provide more detailed information on homeless children and unaccompanied youth through the Student Information System (SIS). This tracking system is more accurate than IWAS and will give those who work with homeless children and youth a better idea of what areas of need should be addressed.

Information on the new homeless data elements can be found at:

<http://www.isbe.net/sis/pdf/homeless.pdf>

Please work with your district staff to identify and report this very at-risk population.

The receive an electronic copy of OUR HOME, please send your request to: mworthin@roe26.net or this current issue of OUR HOME and back issues are available at <http://homelessed.net/resource/newsletters.htm>

ISBE Homeless Assistance Hotline
800/215-6379
Sharon Neely,
Principal Consultant
Curriculum & Instruction
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777-0001
Phone 217/557-7323
Fax 217/782-7937
saneely@isbe.net

Early Childhood and Homelessness: How Can We Help?

Ann Schwarm, Area 5 Lead Liaison, ROE #3 Bond/Fayette/Effingham

Identifying our youngest homeless students is among the most difficult responsibilities assigned to the local homeless education liaison. Those potential students who are eligible for Head Start, Even Start and preschool programs are sometimes challenging to find, especially if they do not have siblings of regular school age. However, it is an important responsibility of the local homeless education liaison to, in fact, find these most vulnerable students and facilitate enrollment in an appropriate early childhood educational program.

Local, state, and national entities recognize the importance of this part of the local liaison's job. It is noted in the [Local Homeless Education Liaison Toolkit](#) (chapter 3, page 22), the "Illinois State Plan for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program" (pages 13-16), and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act reauthorized in January, 2002 [Section 722, (6) (A) (iii)]. Furthermore, since this liaison responsibility is also part of the Illinois State Board of Education's policy, it is, no doubt, part of most local school board policies.

However, if you don't know for whom you are looking or where young homeless students might be, what do you do? Training, outreach, and collaboration will lighten the burden placed on the liaison to fulfill this responsibility.

By training other staff members within the school district – administrators, teachers, secretaries, counselors, bus drivers, cooks – more people will be on the outlook for our youngest homeless students. Simply by knowing that a school district has the duty to identify and serve these children, more school employees are empowered to help meet the needs. When a liaison steps up and steps out, asking for help from colleagues, that help will come. Back-to-school staff meetings and in-services are the perfect place to remind colleagues regarding the details of the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and a prime time to point out that this applies to preschool homeless children as well.

Reaching out to other community organizations which serve homeless students and their families will help the liaison not only serve known students, but also help him or her discover the unserved homeless preschooler. Collaborating with these service providers will strengthen the support system for both the families and the school.

In the pages of this newsletter, liaisons have an opportunity to discover more about early childhood education and homelessness and meet some of the key stakeholders who can serve as guides to understanding the issues and the opportunities to support the needs of this important group of young learners.

BEST PRACTICES

Helping Homeless Teen Parents Prepare Their Young Children For School

*Jenny Calvert, ROE 26
Teen Parent Coordinator*

Although numbers have fluctuated in recent years, teen pregnancy seems to be a pervasive problem. Parenting for adults can be an arduous task at best but for teen parents, who are still struggling to obtain their own education, it can be very difficult. Many of these young people are ill-equipped to parent young children or prepare them for entering a preschool program. Since the foundations for learning are rooted very early in life, school liaisons can support homeless young children by connecting the teen parents with service providers and furnishing contact information for early childhood programs for young children.

Homelessness can have harmful effects on children which impact their development, behavior, and physical and mental health. When working with this population, the school district liaison can make a difference by looking to the community to provide support services for both the parent and the young child. Referrals can be made to programs such as [Even Start](#), [Head Start](#), [Pre-K For All](#), [ISBE Birth to 3 Programs](#), and the [Illinois Department of Human Resources-Bureau of Early Intervention Programs](#). These programs may offer the stability and support to provide young children with the opportunity to develop and succeed.



A Head Start for Homeless Children

*Gina Ruther, Head Start State Collaboration Director
Illinois Department of Human Services*

Head Start is a comprehensive family-focused early childhood development program with the overall goal to increase the social competence of young children from low-income families. Social competence means the child's everyday effectiveness in his or her current environment and later responsibilities in school and life. In addition to preschool children, Head Start serves children birth to age 3 and pregnant women in Early Head Start.

Part of Head Start's charge is to serve families with young children experiencing homelessness. These families do not have to pass the income test to qualify for Head Start enrollment.

Families experiencing homelessness can benefit from Head Start because of the following approaches every Head Start program uses:

- Family support services, including case management, family planning, crisis intervention, family goal setting and planning, and parent education
- Comprehensive children's services, including health, dental, nutrition, and mental health
- Research-based educational programs, including curriculum, low child:staff ratios, and developmental screening and ongoing assessment
- Extensive community partnerships that help bring services to families as needed

Head Start services are designed to affect and improve the overall impact of homelessness on families and young children, including health issues, developmental delays, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, and domestic violence. Because Head Start offers a nutritional component and tailors its programs to child and family needs, homeless children's sleeping and eating issues can be addressed. Head Start programs approach learning recognizing the interrelatedness of all areas of development, including physical, cognition and language, and social emotional. Children find what they need in Head Start, a safe and caring environment, routine and structure, one-to-one nurturing relationships with adults, learning experiences, friends and fun!

Sustaining all quality Head Start services are sound management practices that include program self assessment, community assessment, planning and outcomes. Most distinctively, Head Start's management system includes input from community partners and the parents served. Two core values Head Start has used for its 45 years of service that are of particular benefit to providing excellent service to low-income families include:

- Addressing the child's strengths and needs within the context of his or her family and community
- Understanding and respect for the values, culture and beliefs of each family

Head Start agencies serve all counties in Illinois, although preschool services are much more readily available than services for children birth to age three and pregnant women. To locate and contact your local Head Start agency, visit www.ilheadstart.org. You can also contact the Head Start State Collaboration Office at gina.ruther@illinois.gov. Inform the Head Start agency that you are a school district or a parent and you want enrollment information. The agency will be glad to assist.

Preschool for ALL Children

Kathy Villano, Director

Early Childhood Development Enrichment Center, Arlington Heights

Throughout the ISBE *Early Childhood Preschool for All/Block Grant*, Illinois' most at-risk families are enrolled in programs that cross school districts and community organizations. Every competitively-funded grant includes a plan to address children who are homeless within their program. For those who actually are working in and administering these grants, there are resources to support these families made available through the McKinney-Vento Education Act and the local districts. Every public school district has a Homeless Liaison appointed and the ISBE website has a School District Homeless Liaison Locator link. Guidance, resources and tool kits for planning and supporting children and families who are homeless are also available on the ISBE Web site.

An example of how one Preschool for All program has addressed homeless concerns is the Early Childhood Development Enrichment Center (ECDEC), Arlington Heights. In the fall, the director established contact with the local school districts for identification of the district contact person to assure uninterrupted attendance in ECDEC preschool classes for currently-enrolled students. If a family is referred to ECDEC with a preschooler who has not been enrolled, screening becomes a priority and placement in the program occurs as quickly as possible to begin educational and program support. The ECDEC and local prevention initiative created a local resource toolkit last fall - community agencies that might support families, the listing of PADS sites (the organization that provides overnight shelter, meals, and supportive services throughout the region on a daily rotational basis from October until May), and other resource options as identified through community collaboration meetings held with area providers. If you would like more information or have questions about ECDEC programs, please contact Kathy Villano at kvillano@cntrmail.org.

Some Early Childhood Resources to Check Out...

www.inccrra.org The Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) is a statewide organization which, in partnership with its 16 partner Child Care Resources and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, is a recognized leader, catalyst, and resource for making high quality, affordable early care and education options available for children and families in Illinois.

www.isbe.net/earlychi The Early Childhood Education Division provides leadership and technical assistance to support quality programs for children birth to age eight years. The goal for these programs is to assist young children to enter school with a foundation of knowledge and skills that allows them to be successful throughout their school experience.

www.thecenterweb.org/ec Illinois Resource Center: Early Childhood is a statewide comprehensive professional development program designed for personnel associated with Prekindergarten Programs for Children at Risk of Academic Failure, Prevention Initiative Programs for At-Risk Infants and Toddlers and Their Families, and Model Early Childhood Parental Training.

www.illinoisearlylearning.org The Illinois Early Learning Project Web site is a source of evidence-based, reliable information on early care and education for parents, caregivers, and teachers of young children in Illinois. The Web site offers printable tip sheets for caregivers and parents in English, Spanish, and Polish.

<http://www.starnet.org/about/statewide.php> Illinois STAR NET provides a variety of opportunities for personal and professional growth for those parents and professionals who touch the lives of young children, ages birth through eight, with an emphasis on children with special needs.

www.naeyc.org The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age eight.



Opening Doors

Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth — <http://homelesseed.net>

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Early Childhood and McKinney-Vento

Sharon Neely, Principal Consultant, Curriculum & Instruction, ISBE

Illinois allows the use of McKinney-Vento grants in part to provide activities and services for preschoolers in homeless situations, so they can enroll in, attend, and succeed in preschool programs. Local homeless education liaisons are instrumental in identifying homeless children with preschool-age siblings during initial school enrollment or as part of a family in transition services during the school year. Local homeless education liaisons ensure that families and children experiencing homelessness can enroll in Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs administered by school districts, including Title I preschool programs. School districts can also use their McKinney-Vento subgrants and Title I homeless set-asides to provide early childhood education programs for children in homeless situations if such programs are not otherwise provided through federal, state, or local funding.

Early childhood programs available in Illinois include Preschool for All, Pre-K programs for children at risk, model early childhood training (birth to three and three to five years), Head Start, and Even Start programs. Homeless children are categorically eligible for Head Start, meaning that homeless status, rather than income, qualifies a family for Head Start. The Head Start Act uses the same definition of homelessness as public schools, which includes families living in motels and doubled-up situations, as well as other living arrangements described in the McKinney-Vento Act.

The State Board of Education believes that educational development and the success of all Illinois children can be significantly enhanced when children participate in early childhood programs and services.

RESOURCES: Illinois McKinney-Vento Lead Liaison Programs

Area 1 ROE 56 Will-Dave Levek, dlevек@willcountyillinois.com
702 West Maple Street, New Lenox, IL 60451
Ph: 815/462-5404 Fax: 815/740-4788

Area 2 ROE 47 Lee/Ogle-Lois Porter, lporter@leeogle.org
7772 Clinton Street, Dixon, IL 61021
Ph: 815/652-2054 ext. 234 Fax: 815/652-2053

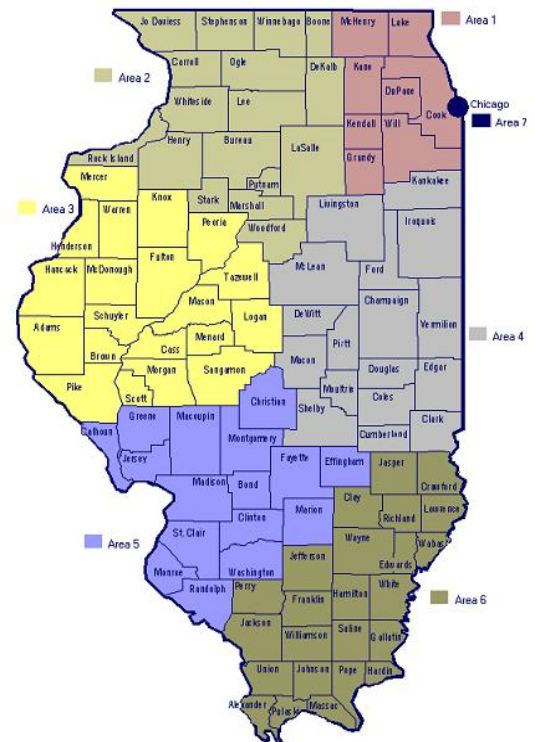
Area 3 ROE 26 Hancock/McDonough-Eileen Worthington, mworthin@roe26.net
130 South Lafayette Street, Macomb, IL 61455
Ph: 309/837-4821 Fax: 309/837-2887

Area 4 ROE 32 Iroquois/Kankakee-Jim Moberly, jmoberly@i-kan.org
189 East Court Street - Suite 600, Kankakee, IL 60901
Ph: 815/937-2952 Fax: 815/937-2921

Area 5 ROE 3 Bond/Fayette/Effingham-Ann Schwarm, aschwarm@fayette.k12.il.us
1830 W. Fletcher St. - Suite B, Vandalia IL 62471
Phone: 618/283-1763 Fax: 618/283-9833

Area 6 ROE 21 Franklin/Williamson-Mickey Sullivan, msullivan@roe21.k12.il.us
4004 N Monroe St., Marion, IL 62959
Ph: 618/998-1283 or 800/455-5843 Fax: 618/998-9226

Area 7 Chicago Public Schools District 299-Patricia Rivera, privera@cps.k12.il.us
125 S. Clark, Chicago, IL 60603
Ph: 773/553-2242 Fax: 773/553-2182



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