



OUR HOME

Opening Doors: Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

OUR HOME

September 2006

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HOMELESS AT THE STATE BOARD

Donna J. Luallen, Accountability Division Administrator, Illinois State Board of Education

The Illinois State Board of Education is feeling homeless at this time since Rich Dehart our State Homeless Coordinator decided to retire June 30, 2006. However, we are in the process of interviewing and filling this position. In the meantime feel free to contact Donna Luallen, Division Administrator of Accountability at 217-782-2948 with questions.

The State is collecting NCLB Education of Homeless Children and Youth Data until August 31, 2006. Reports will be available by district and state-wide shortly thereafter.

Data collected as of August 23, 2006, indicates there were approximately 15,420 PreK-12th grade enrolled homeless students in the State of Illinois in FY06. This data has been collected from 525 school districts so far. At this time, the largest number of homeless students were in the 1st-3rd grades. 75% of the homeless students are in a doubled-up situation. Approximately 16% of the homeless children received special education services. These numbers will change due to some data corrections that still need to occur.

The homeless numbers reported in FY03 were 6,979. In FY04 there were 11,824 homeless students reported. The numbers for FY05 were 14,464 students with 637 school districts reporting. Over the past few years the data collection process has greatly improved and is becoming more accurate.

Homeless students and serving their needs is becoming more and more understood by the school districts of Illinois. This has been done through the Area Lead Liaisons, Regional Offices of Education and the School District Liaisons. With everyone continuing to work together FY07 should be an even better year.

EVOLUTION

Matthew Hanafee, Executive Director - Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness

It is hard to believe that another school year is starting. Last week, I had a conversation with a long time colleague, we reminisced about the changes that we have seen here in Illinois over our careers. For me it began in 1994. I took a part time position with the Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness (ICH). I was hired to help ICH's former director, Joe Clary, in his efforts to garner support for what was called Charlie's bill. Charlie's bill became the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act (IEHCA).

Education advocates across Illinois worked tirelessly to show legislators that Charlie's Bill would help homeless students succeed without putting undue burdens on school districts. In the end, the legislation passed unanimously. This landmark legislation was an inspiration to improve federal legislation for homeless students. In 2001, the McKinney-Vento Act was passed, it incorporated many of the provisions of IEHCA. No legislation is perfect and in 2004, the IEHCA was amended to address concerns about how disputes are handled between homeless families and school districts. Last year the ISBE realized that their policy on the education of homeless children and youth should be updated to reflect the changes in state and federal law.

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New Youth Brochures

The *Opening Doors Project* is pleased to announce the development of two new brochures. Area Lead Liaisons and other practitioners helped in the development of these new re-



sources. These brochures explain in detail the educational rights of homeless unaccompanied youth. The first is aimed at youth on their own and the second is aimed at staff who work with youth. These two brochures will be sent with the fall mailing to all district liaisons and are also available to order on the enclosed order form or online at: www.homelessed.net/resource/publications.htm

**Resources on the Web
National Coalition for the Homeless**

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>
AmeriCorps*VISTA
<http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista.asp>

Hotline Assistance

If you have questions or comments regarding the Opening Doors Project, or a homeless student, you may contact the ISBE Homeless Hotline at **800/215-6379** or contact Principal Consultant
Accountability Division
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777-0001
Phone 217/782-2948
Fax 217/524 - 8750

BEST PRACTICES*Continued from page 1***Choosing School District Homeless Education Liaisons**

Who makes the best district liaison? There is much written information about the duties of school district homeless liaisons but not much about who is best suited to fill this vital position. Barbara Duffield, Policy Director of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, recommends that we look at the duties that are described in the law and use that to determine who would be the most appropriate liaison. The law does not specify the position because school personnel duties vary greatly from state to state; indeed even from district to district.

The duties of the district liaison include identifying homeless children and youth; making sure that children and youth are able to enroll and have equal opportunities to succeed in school; that they receive educational services they are eligible for; and that parents or guardians are informed about the opportunities that are available to their children. The liaison also needs to reach out to service providers such as shelters and soup kitchens to disseminate information about the educational rights of homeless children.

In many cases, the most suitable individual for this position might be a social worker, counselor, or other staff member who is already familiar with the obstacles faced by at-risk children and youth and also familiar with the network of support in the community.

Some districts have instituted a "best practice" of having a homeless education liaison or contact person in each school building. This way, each building has one person who is knowledgeable and a true resource for homeless children and youth and their parents or guardians.

Barbara Duffield says that some key characteristics to look for in a district liaison include someone who has adequate time, authority, an existing network, and, most of all, real **interest** in reaching out to and working with homeless children and youth and their families.

In December of 2005, ISBE adopted a new Board Policy for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (The Policy). A copy of The Policy can be found on the Opening Doors website at <http://homeless.net> by clicking on the legislation page. The Policy clearly states the importance of helping homeless students. "ISBE considers the enrollment, attendance and success of homeless children and youth throughout Illinois as a high priority." As with the IEHCA and McKinney-Vento Act the Policy's underlining goal is, ". . . minimizing educational disruption for homeless children and youth . . ."

The Policy clarifies State and Federal law in several key areas. First, it clearly states that there is no specific time limit on homelessness and each situation depends on the individual circumstances of the homeless child or youth. Also the Policy reminds school districts that according to the Illinois Student Records Act it is prohibited to provide student records to any landlord, municipal official or housing authority. School districts that have failed to follow this provision in the past have caused homelessness for many who have taken in families with no other place to stay.

Finally, The Policy delineates the steps that school districts should follow when disputes arise. It states that the school district must inform the guardian or youth in writing regarding why they are disputing their homelessness with a degree of specificity. Also the arbiter of the dispute, called the ombudsperson, should be fair and impartial. In the past, many school districts chose one of their employees or contractors to serve as the ombudsperson. In addition, the ombudsperson, ". . . should be familiar with the educational rights and needs of homeless children . . ." Also, there is now a review of the dispute process by the the State Superintendent of Education.

We have come a long way in the past twelve years. Many of the problems homeless students faced when we were working on Charlie's bill are no longer an issue. While Illinois continues to be a leader in the struggle to ensure ALL of our students perform to the best of their abilities, we can do better. This new ISBE policy on homelessness will help all of us achieve this goal. Let's hope this will be another successful year in our journey helping homeless children succeed.

CPS HOMELESS EDUCATION and AmeriCorps*VISTA PROVIDE OUTREACH*Ericka Smith, VISTA Volunteer, CPS Homeless Education Program*

Chicago Public Schools Homeless Education Program has recently begun a 5-year AmeriCorps*VISTA project to provide additional services for homeless students and their families. For the duration of the project, the Homeless Education Program will be working with seven VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) members to set up tutoring programs in the shelters where CPS students are residing as well as in some of the schools they attend. This is especially important because these students are often far behind their peers academically because of the instability of both their living and learning environments. Under the supervision of Patricia Rivera, manager of the Homeless Education Program, VISTA members will also be doing outreach to community organizations, organizing parent advisory groups, and creating a referral system for other services homeless children and families may need.

The AmeriCorps*VISTA program is an anti-poverty program funded by the Corporation for National Service that employs full-time volunteers in more than 1,200 projects across the country. Volunteers create sustainable programs that work to counter the causes and effects of poverty. In return for a year of service, some of the benefits these volunteers

receive are a modest living allowance, dependent on the relative poverty level where they serve, health care benefits, and an end-of-service stipend or educational award.

The first group of AmeriCorps*VISTA members serving with the Homeless Education Program are all recent college graduates with varying backgrounds and include: Alison Brock, Goucher College; Stephanie Chacharon, Ripon College; Leann Grabski, SUNY Brockport; Jennifer Fabrini, Cornell University; Jamie Hetherington, University of Missouri; and Ericka Smith, University of Notre Dame. They will spend much of their year of service developing tutoring programs that will be tailored to the needs and conditions of homeless shelters and implementing this program in as many shelters as possible. This task will be continued by each group of VISTA volunteers in subsequent years.

GET YOUR STUDENTS INVOLVED!

*Hunger & Homeless Awareness Week
November 12 – 18, 2006*

Every year during the first full week before Thanksgiving, the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness and the National Coalition for the Homeless co-sponsor National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. This week is designated as a time for local communities across the country to engage in awareness-raising events.

Why? This question may seem obvious but it is important to ask. Organizing events will not be as meaningful if you do not stop yourself to ask "Why is Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week so important?" Nationally, the Week promotes thought and action on an issue that many might not otherwise recognize. Collective efforts from each state and community strengthen this movement. You might discover further reasons for the importance of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week in your school or in your community. Talk about hunger and homelessness with your staff and students for the Week. Remember, before you can raise awareness in school or in your community about hunger and homelessness, it is important to think and talk about the issue and what impact the Week should have on your community, your school, and on you.

Student activities for the week could include: The Grate American Sleep Out; A Fast For World Hunger; a Hunger Banquet; or an Offering of Letters. (*All of these activities are described in a student manual available from NCH*). Additional projects might include: hosting educational forums; designating one day for students and/or community members to "Skip-a-Meal", donating the money that they would have spent to hungry persons in their community; organizing a drive to collect non-perishable items (such as certain foods, hygiene products, clothing, blankets, books and toys); or sponsoring a benefit concert with local musicians, donating collected money to a local shelter.

All of these ideas leave a great deal of room for ingenuity. Take one of these ideas and change it around some - brainstorm tactics which will add to the events you select for Hunger Homelessness Awareness Week.

A complete manual for these events can be downloaded from the National Coalition for the Homeless at: <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/getinvolved/projects/awareness/index.html>



Save the Date - November 11 - 14, 2006

The Peabody Little Rock - Little Rock, AR

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth 18th Annual Conference

For more information go to <http://naehcy.org>



Opening Doors

Who are we?

Opening Doors is an Illinois State Board of Education grant-funded project provided through the McKinney - Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001.

Under the direction of the Accountability Division, the goal of this initiative is to disseminate information and provide technical assistance to Illinois schools and shelters as to the educational rights and needs of homeless children and youth. The Opening Doors project partners include:

Adult Learning Resource Center
1855 Mt. Prospect Road
Des Plaines, IL 60018
Phone 847/803-3535
Fax 847/803-3231

Regional Office of Education #26 Hancock/McDonough
130 S. Lafayette Street
Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone 309/837-4821
Fax 309/837-2887

Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness
P.O. Box 3956
Oak Park, IL 60303
Phone 708/263-3590
Fax 708/401-0105

Visit us on the world wide web at <http://homelessed.net> to receive FREE materials!

Our Home

To submit an article for OUR HOME please send to:
Eileen Worthington
ROE #26 - Hancock/McDonough
130 South Lafayette
Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone 309 / 837-4821
Fax 309 / 837-2887
mworthin@roe26.k12.il.us



Opening Doors

Statewide Access to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

ROE #26 Hancock/McDonough
130 S. Lafayette - Suite 200
Macomb, IL 61455
Phone: (309) 837-4821
Fax: (309) 837-2887
Email: mworthin@roe26.k12.il.us

We're on the Web! <http://homelessd.net>

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SCHOLARSHIPS FOR CPS HOMELESS STUDENTS

Leann Grabski, VISTA Volunteer, CPS Homeless Education Program

On June 29, 2006, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Homeless Education Program and Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) scholarship award ceremony was held. This year students from the CPS-JROTC programs raised \$10,000 for scholarships that were awarded to five deserving students enrolled in the Homeless Education Program. Each student received a \$2000 scholarship.

All of the scholarship recipients experienced homelessness during their education but continued to persevere in school, and were successful. All of the recipients graduated from high school in June and will be beginning their college careers in the fall.

Arne Duncan, CEO of Chicago Public Schools, attended the ceremony offering praise and congratulations to the scholarship recipients. Mr. Duncan also challenged the recipients to not just begin college, but to strive for academic success and obtain a degree. Pierre Lewis, a scholarship recipient last year, also attended the ceremony. Pierre recently completed his first year of college and spoke to the recipients about his own academic success. He also offered encouragement and advice to this group of future college freshman.

During the ceremony each scholarship recipient read from their application essay sharing their very personal experience and strong desire to attend college and be successful. This scholarship will help each student to attend college and reach their full potential. This would not have been possible without the generous donation provided by the JROTC students and staff.

Scholarships were presented to the following students: Jocelyn Latrice Barnes, Simeon Career Academy, who will be attending Western Illinois University; Sharee Nicole Brackenridge, Dyett Academic Center, attending Northeastern Illinois University; Vianey Contreras, Lane Technical High School who will be attending Harold Washington College; Cheri Kilpatrick, Englewood Technical Academy, attending Kennedy-King College; and Valerie Latonia Moore, Gage Park High School, attending Northeastern Illinois University.