

Frequently Asked Questions

WEB-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

to improve educational practices and increase academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness and high mobility

1) What is WBPD?

WBPD stands for *Web-Based Professional Development Project* and is sponsored by the National Center for School Engagement. This **accredited, professional development opportunity** is open to teachers, administrators and community members/providers.

WBPD was created to address educational barriers and foster academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness and high mobility. This is accomplished by building the skills of educators to institute best practices in educational instruction and helping communities to leverage critical resources.

Since the project began in 2003, WBPD has involved over 90 participants, 34 community teams, and eight states (*Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Washington.*) Results show that over 6,000 students in 24 schools have been impacted by the actions WBPD teams took to enhance educational instruction, improve services, and create welcoming school climates.

2) How is WBPD set up?

Teams are recruited annually, and each team includes a minimum of three members who represent specific roles (*school administrator, teacher, and community member/service provider.*) Teams selected to participate in WBPD receive an orientation and are required to attend a national training in Colorado. Each cycle of WBPD lasts a school year (August – June) and involves up to 20 teams from across the U.S.

3) Who organizes the teams?

The teams organize themselves. Many come together based on a common interest or goal. Sometimes outside stakeholders recruit participants they think will add success while benefiting from the process.

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4) What is included in WBPB work?

The work connected to WBPB centers on four areas:

- **Online Instruction** - Participants review federal policies related to homelessness and high mobility, and study research-based best practices.
- **Collaborations (Peer-to-Peer and Peer-to-Advisor)** - Share successes, struggles, and resources with peers in monthly threaded discussions, which generally follow themes that are highlighted in the facilitated online modules. Participants also write monthly journal entries which are private discussions with the Project Facilitator. These experiences tend to be the glue that holds the year together and can create lifelong professional bonds among participants. The use of asynchronous technology allows educators to exchange ideas at times that are convenient to their schedule.
- **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** – PAR is a qualitative research method that has a rich history in contributing to educational reforms in disenfranchised communities. In the WBPB project, PAR represents a group professional development process that brings data driven decision-making to address issues of educational disadvantage. Participants work in their teams and individually to study issues of homelessness and high mobility in their schools and communities. Their research evolves around cycles of data collection, planning, implementing, and evaluating their “action”. It is through the PAR process that services are provided to students and families experiencing homelessness and high mobility.
- **Dissemination of Best Practices** – Participants are required to submit a written report on their experiences and results of their PAR research. These reports are compiled by NCSE staff into a publicized body of research that is distributed through local and national networks. To date 29 studies have been completed and contribute to the field of education by identifying research-based practices to improve instruction of students who have faced difficult transitions and multiple school changes.

5) What is the time commitment to participate in WBPB?

Participants spend approximately 2 to 3 hours a week (or an average of 8 to 10 hours a month) on WBPB.

In general, team members spend their time in these areas:

- 2 hours a month engaged in online instruction, participating in threaded discussions, and journaling
- 2 to 4 hours a month on local team efforts
- 2 to 3 hours with their own with data, related to Participatory Action Research (PAR)

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6) What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

PAR is a qualitative research method that has a rich history in contributing to educational reforms in disenfranchised communities. In the WBPD project, PAR represents a group professional development process that brings data driven decision-making to address issues of educational disadvantage. Participants work in their teams and individually to study issues of homelessness and high mobility in their schools and communities. Their research evolves around cycles of data collection, planning, implementing, and evaluating their “action”. It is through the PAR process that services are provided to students and families experiencing homelessness and high mobility.

WBPD Project Developer and Facilitator, Alana James, Ed.D. is an expert in PAR methodology and she consults with NCSE staff to advise WBPD teams through an iterative process that starts with assessing factors associated with school failure.

7) What “action” will be taken as part of PAR process?

Teams actually do whatever they think will best address the issues they face with students experiencing homelessness and high mobility. They craft their own solutions to their problems and measure their results. They work together in their communities to complete a substantial amount of work that builds their community’s capacity to address the educational issues of these students.

8) What PAR “actions” have teams done in the past?

Examples of WBPD Team Actions:

- Increased enrollment of H&HM students in after school programs by enhancing outreach efforts, which included establishing protocols to translate materials.
- A WBPD participant offered lunchtime tutoring (called *Lunch Bunch*), which improved academic achievement of participating students.
- WBPD team members worked collaboratively with families living in transitional housing to organize a parent/child homework club. This effort increased parental involvement.
- Protocols were developed and welcoming kits distributed to help students enrolling after the start of school. This type of welcoming process is now being replicated in other schools.
- Title I teachers tailored assessments to better track academic achievement of H & HM students.
- Gave voice to how homelessness impacts the education of children and youth. For example in Colorado: *Two high school students interviewed expressed how important it was that the school made them feel welcomed, that the teachers cared that they showed up, and that the school staff acknowledged their existence. The hardest part of staying in school for them was “getting there”, and when at school, not knowing whether or not they had somewhere to go afterwards.*

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9) Do projects need to be conducted as a team or individually?

They can be either - but each person needs to conduct a process from their own role level decision making view and with their own relative access to the community. These separate views make up a powerful joint effort. (*Role levels = teachers, administrators, community members/providers*)

10) Does each team member need to write a report at the end of the project?

Reports (or smaller reports and presentations) can be submitted either individually or jointly as long as all three role-based perspectives are included in the final submission.

11) Who facilitates the WBPD Project?

The rigorous work of WBPD is facilitated by NCSE consultants and staff who are expert in web-based technology, facilitation, and qualitative research methods. Alana James, Ed.D., developed the project and conducts the national training. She also provides oversight to online instruction and the Participatory Action Research (PAR) component. Brian McKay-Epp, Online Facilitator, supports team members in creating role level dialogues, known as “Communities of Practice.” Brian is exceptionally helpful in walking participants through navigating the WBPD website.

12) Do you need to have experience in online instruction to participate?

Not at all. While computer literacy is helpful, it is not required. However, the more experience you have the easier it will be.

Some past WBPD participants have not had any experience this area and they were quite successful. Our Online Facilitator, Brian McKay-Epp, does a great job in helping participants to navigate the WBPD website.

13) What is asynchronous technology?

Our primary communication method is a threaded discussion board that allows participants to discuss important issues at times that are convenient to their schedule. Asynchronous contrasts to synchronous tools such as a *chat* or *instant messenger* session where participants must be online at the same time. While we can make synchronous tools available to participants, it is not a main focus of the project.

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14) How is it the stipend determined?

Participants who meet all expectations receive the full \$1000. Partial stipend awards are given in proportion to the work completed. Expectations of participants are outlined in the *WBPD Participation Rubric*, which is reviewed during the project orientation and training.

15) What are the professional development goals?

- To learn the parameters of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Title I and X of No Child Left Behind, and work to improve and implement services or supports for students experiencing homelessness and high mobility in their communities.
- To study and implement research-based best practices in order to ensure that the team's efforts have the highest maximum potential to improve student level outcomes.
- To learn and implement the cycles of **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**. Team members implement individual projects designed to improve student level outcomes in one or more of the **three domains** of practice, which encompass:
 - *Access to educational services;*
 - *Welcoming and inclusive school culture;*
 - *Flexible instructional strategies that meet the individual needs of the learner*
- To work within the broader community that supports their school environment to ensure the comprehensive needs of children experiencing homelessness and high mobility are met. The goal is to assure maximum school readiness in order to increase the likelihood of student level outcomes across the three domains of educational practice.

16) What are there incentives to participate?

WBPD enriches the lives of participants personally and professionally. Here's what team members say about WBPD:

Action research supports the belief that educators have the capacity to build their own evidence-based practices. Colleagues have expressed interest in wanting to learn from my work.

I am better equipped to handle the academic achievement of a student population impacted by homelessness and high mobility. More over, I have sought out collegial collaboration on positively and effectively addressing those needs and issues through the process of action research. Finally, I gained personal knowledge that I have made, and will continue to make, a difference in the lives of the children.

It also offers attractive incentives, such as:

- Stipend awards of up to \$1000 for team members who successfully complete the project.
- An opportunity to earn six graduate credits from Adams State College (Colorado), Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) and/or participate in a doctoral program through Jones International University.