

## ***Homelessness and High Mobility – What Can We Do?***

**A Presentation by Molholm Elementary**

**Lakewood, Colorado**

**By**

**Joan Chavez, Principal**

**Kelly Johannes, Teacher**

**Kris Snayd, Community Member**

**Abstract:** A presentation of action research projects to increase successful outcomes for students and families in Lakewood, Colorado. Includes: surveying families; providing resources; securing mental health services for students; and creating a welcoming classroom environment. Also featured is information on assessing anxiety in children.

**Key Words:** Academic Achievement; Access to Resources; After School Program; Assessment; Attendance/Enrollment; Classroom Management; Community (Awareness of Homelessness/High Mobility); Elementary School; English Language Acquisition; Literature Review; Poverty; School District; Surveys; Tracking Mobility; and Welcoming School Climate

### **School and WBPD Profile**

School: Molholm Elementary

Grade levels: K-6

School District: Jefferson County

City/Town: Lakewood

State: CO

School enrollment size for 2006-07: 405

Number of students experiencing homelessness/high mobility at your school in 2006-07: app. 100

Number of students experiencing homelessness/high mobility involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: approx. 10

Number of educators/teachers involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: 1 teacher/1 mental health worker

Number of administrators involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: 1

Mobility rate for 2005-06: 50%

Mobility rate for 2006-07: over 50%

Percent of students eligible for free/reduced lunch: over 90%

Title I School: yes\_

Annual Yearly Progress Rating: Math - Met; Reading - Not met;

Number of public agencies involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: 1

Number of community members involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: 1

Number of non-profits involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: 1

High school graduation rate: 89.3%

**Purpose of the WBPB Study**

The Moholm WBPB team focused on two primary objectives:

- To understand factors that lead to poor academic engagement and performance
- To establish support systems to help students perform at proficient levels

**Background of the Two Schools Involved in the Project**

1. Molholm Elementary School, built fifty years ago, is located in Lakewood, Colorado and is part of Jeffco Public Schools. The district serves over 84,000 students and the demographics are varied. For an example, free and reduced lunch rates by school range from 2% to over 90%. Molholm is located very close to Denver, and thus it shares many characteristics of an urban school. We are presently on Title 1 Corrective Action because of not meeting AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) indicators in reading. The free and reduced lunch rate is over 90%, the ethnic minority population is over 80% and the ELL population is over 30%. End of the year data also showed that 10% of our students are designated as homeless. Since the official October 1<sup>st</sup> count of 405 students, we have had an additional 70 students enroll, and 69 students withdraw. Last year the mobility rate was over 50%. The 2005 – 2006 School Accountability Report indicates the overall 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade academic performance on state assessments as “low” and the academic growth as “stable.” Molholm receives additional funding from Title 1 and district at-risk funds. In addition, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century federal grant provides for a home-school liaison, after school programs and adult education programs.

<p><b>Molholm Elementary</b></p> <p>2006-2007 School Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Approximately 400 students</li> <li>– &gt;90% on free and reduced lunch status</li> <li>– &gt;80% on free lunch status</li> <li>– &gt;10% identified as homeless</li> <li>– &gt;50% mobility rate</li> <li>– &gt;30% ELL students</li> </ul>
---

2. Lawrence Elementary, located in the old town part of Arvada, Colorado, is also a part of Jeffco Public Schools. The school, originally opened in a former building built in 1900, was initially called Arvada Grade School and opened in 1920. The school is now located in site built in 1998 and currently consists of 315 students from first to sixth grade. The free and reduced population is over 60% and the ethnic minority population is 30%. There were over

60 new students that came to Lawrence and over twenty students that left Lawrence from January to May in 2007. The 2005 – 2006 School Accountability Report indicates the overall 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade academic performance on state assessments as “average” and the academic growth as “stable.” Lawrence receives additional funding from Title 1 and district at risk funds.

The diversity and mobility of the Molholm and Lawrence communities provides challenges that we, as educators, must face and try to overcome. This PowerPoint is designed to educate the staff of Molholm, and possibly other schools, of the needs our homeless and highly mobile families experience, as well as the best methods to overcome these challenges. The PowerPoint has been divided into six sections. The first covers the school profile as discussed above. The second section will cover the purpose of the study. The next three sections will discuss the qualitative data that we acquired and the actions we took in terms of the community member, principal, and teacher. Finally, this presentation will show current trends and our ideas for the next steps in our process.

**Community Actions (as discussed by, Kris Snayd, the community member of our team)**

**Community Learning and Actions**

– Actions

- Developed surveys and parent packets
- Distributed surveys and parent packets to enrollment secretaries, home school liaison.
- Made referrals to community agencies, social workers and parent liaison.

The issues of homelessness and mobility have always been relevant to my clinical work, but I never considered these issues as prevalent as they are, nor did I adjust my practices to meet the needs of these families. For example, prior to this study, I did not always ask enough questions about a home situation.

Instead, I may have requested that a family do

a list of things for counseling rather than first looking at helping to get their basic needs met. Now, if a family seeks my assistance after transferring in, I ask the family to explain the living situation and then try to determine and supply resources that a family may need at that time. If a family does not have food, they probably will not see making a family tree together as a priority at that time. I also try to determine specific family dynamics (i.e., languages spoken, immigration status, contact person, and any other relevant variables) that need to be known before referring a family to a resource agency.

In addition to an increased awareness through research and discussion, I also created a family resource folder and a survey. The surveys were to be returned and the resource folders kept by the families. The folders were distributed to the enrollment secretaries at both schools, the community liaison at Molholm School, and to the social workers at each school. The survey requested information regarding housing, family members, past experience at schools and how we could make their experience at our school more positive.

The plan was that after the families completed the surveys, they would return them. No surveys were returned and very few folders were given to families. It appeared that staff members were not passing information out at Lawrence Elementary via the folder. They were utilizing the resources in the packet and passing the information to the family, or they were referring the families to the social worker or me. On several occasions, I was able to give families the packet and would highlight certain information relevant to their situation and needs. I found myself not giving the survey with the folder or not mentioning that it was in the folder or requesting the information back. Somehow, asking the family to fill out the form felt more intrusive in an already sensitive situation. In talking to other school employees, whom had not passed out the forms, they appeared both unsure of the family's housing situation and appeared uncomfortable with giving the information to the family, so usually they referred them to me.

Through my attempts to gather data via a Family Homeless Survey, I learned that it is difficult for many reasons. Sensitivity is a key factor in approaching the family in a way that does not cause shame or embarrassment. The project was successful in increasing an awareness of community resources for both the staff members working with our families, as well as the new families themselves. It may be helpful in the future to have less information and include some of these resources in registration packets for all families. The information that a school or community is looking for, in order to collect data, may also be included in a registration packet. Forms and materials should be written with the utmost sensitivity, which will increase the likelihood of the family answering the questions honestly and without discomfort. Our responsibility as

### Community Learning and Actions

- Learnings
  - Treat families with sensitivity and empathy
  - Packets for families and family surveys
    - Expand to include information for all families
    - Include as enrollment information and enrollment process

providers in the community is to reach out and attempt to meet the needs of all our families in need.

**Principal’s Actions (as discussed by, Joan Chávez the principal member our team)**

The purpose of my study was to understand the factors that lead to poor student engagement and performance of many highly mobile/homeless students and to establish support systems to help highly mobile/homeless students perform at a proficient levels. I initially assessed the services provided to homeless students at our school. We followed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act by immediately enrolling students who are designated as homeless as indicated on the emergency card as either living in an emergency shelter, in a transitional housing program, at/in a campground/RV/car/, with relatives/friends, or in a hotel/motel. This information was also forwarded to the district homeless liaison. The liaison also furnished us with a notebook that gave us information about community support for homeless families. I next began to review previous research concerning specific academic gaps that occur with highly mobile students/homeless students and the kind of social/emotional issues that result in learning gaps for highly mobile/homeless students. It is the review of academic gaps that led me to my first action.

### McKinney Vento Act

- From No Child Left Behind Act
- Schools required by law to:
  - Continue education in the student’s “school of origin”
  - Immediately enroll the student without all documentation
  - Provide services comparable to those offered to other students
  - Provide transportation to keep student in “school of origin”
- Definition of homeless:
  - Due to economic reasons
    - Living in a shelter
    - Doubled up with another family or family member
    - Living in temporary housing such as hotel, motel, campground, RV or car

### Principal Learning and Actions

- Contact former schools for pertinent information
  - Academic levels
  - Behavior concerns
  - Attendance
  - Homelessness/high mobility
  - Other pertinent information

As indicated in the data about Molholm, we have a continuous addition of students throughout the school year. Patrick Delmore (2004) suggests that we can support the academic growth of our homeless students by attaining information from former schools. This would give their new teachers immediate information about their academic and social/emotional progress. I also know that it

is important to assess our students as quickly as possible so we can establish a support system for each of our students. In addition, student files sometimes take quite a long time to arrive at the school.

It was after October 10, 2006, that I began gathering pertinent information about our new students by contacting either a teacher or an administrator at the students' former school. This was initiated when the enrollment secretary gave me a copy of the emergency card for a new student. After contacting the former school, I filled out a new student profile card that indicated academic, behavioral, attendance, parental support, and other information that a teacher might need. I also asked if the student was homeless or highly mobile. I then forwarded this information to the classroom teacher and compiled this information on a spreadsheet to look for trends. The classroom teachers were very appreciative of the information and I believe that it helped our new students because our teachers began their interactions with new students with some important background information. For example, information gathered from this process led to a fairly immediate placement of a new student, who had moved from Washington and had severe learning needs, to a suitable communication lab located at another school site. For another student, I discovered that he was on probation, spoke to his probation officer, and helped to transfer his case to our county court system. I also found out that his family was receiving in-home counseling that was about to end. We provided counseling for him at school as soon as possible. For another student, I learned that he and his family were chronically homeless. In fact, he had been out of school for part of the previous year. He had huge gaps in his academic levels and thus we were able to provide him with immediate intensive reading intervention services.

### Principal Learning and Actions

- Institute a school wide welcoming environment for all new families
  - Newcomers breakfast/lunch
  - Welcoming committee and tour of building

My review of research also indicated a need to provide a safe and secure environment for our homeless/highly mobile students. This led to my second action. We instituted several activities with the hopes of welcoming our new students throughout the year. The assistant principal

would host a new student breakfast/luncheon about once a month. During that time, SMART behaviors and the positive reward system was reviewed. In addition, Conduct Code rules and regulations were also discussed. Student Ambassadors were also invited to help host and present information about the school. In addition, every attempt was made by the enrollment

secretary to get as much information as possible to the teacher as quickly as possible so that the teacher could prepare a desk for the new student. As it is, by law, we must accept students when they walk through the door and allow them to join the class immediately if that is the parent's wish. This does sometimes cause a commotion within the classroom, as the teacher struggles to get a desk ready. In the future, we hope to refine this procedure with a welcoming committee that would allow the teacher time to prepare while the student receives a tour of the school.

Finally, my review of research, specifically Jennifer Baggerly (2004), gave further credence to my belief that our highly mobile/homeless students arrive at our school with additional stress factors in their lives. The American School Counselor Association National Model recommends a comprehensive support system for students who are homeless. Many homeless/highly mobile students need school-based

### Principal Learning and Actions

- Understanding Increased Social/Emotional Stresses Experienced by Highly Mobile Homeless Students
  - Administer Children's Revised Anxiety Scale
  - Advise and involve Special Education staff and/or in school therapist
  - Work with classroom teachers to engage parents in solution-based outcomes

counseling because their increased social, emotional, behavioral and familial problems often hinder their ability to achieve success in school. So, as part of gathering information on students who are having such difficulties, I decided to use the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale as a tool to determine levels of anxiety for some students. This information was shared with the SPED (Special Education) team during weekly meetings, with our JCMH (Jefferson County Mental Health) school-based therapist, with teachers, and with parents. A successful example of using this tool was when a teacher and I used one of the indicators to convince a mom that her children, although now in a more stable home-life, were still showing high levels of physiological anxiety, worry/oversensitivity and social concerns and lack of concentration. So based on this, and other data, we attempted to wrap as much support around the students as possible. We made sure that the children were part of after-school clubs and summer school. In addition, classroom teachers and support staff also attempted to provide additional personal support by having lunch with the students and encouraging their positive behavior. Finally, mom agreed that her children could work with our JCMH school-based therapist.

**Teacher’s Actions (as discussed by Kelly Johannes, the teacher member of our team)**

As the teacher member of our study, I learned a great deal and realized that there is so much more that I don’t know. Most of the information that I collected is qualitative and experimental in nature. To collect my data, I conducted interviews, both formally and informally, made observations, and simply talked with my homeless and highly mobile students. I started thinking about my own

experiences with students who come into my classroom after the year has started. I know that each time I am informed of a new student enrollment, I panic and frantically race around the classroom trying to pull together supplies that will allow the new student to fall right into the routine of things. I have color coded folders and spirals that I collect from the students and label the first day of school. So this year, I made five new students kits complete with labeled folders, spirals, pencils and my new student welcome letter. This year, when I received a new student, I simply grabbed one of the bags and they were all set to begin. Of the six new students that joined my class, three of the parents personally thanked me for providing the supplies. It is my hope that teachers at Molholm will take some time at the beginning of the year to create these bags for their classrooms as well. It definitely alleviated some of my stress and the stress of my new student.

**Teacher Learning and Actions**

- Being prepared
  - Beginning of the year
  - Avoiding the panic
  - Creating new student bags with supplies
  - Time and supplies to create the bags

**Teacher Learning and Actions**

- So much to learn:
  - Identification of homeless and highly mobile students
  - Interviews
  - Lunches
  - Conversations
  - Observations

As the year progressed, I began to conduct interviews with my students. I found that the homeless and highly mobile students responded very well to the individual attention that the interviews allowed them. Of the four interviews I conducted, three of the students stated that they had trouble connecting with teachers because they were always moving

around. Because of these comments, I began to have lunch with these students on a random basis. Ideally, I know I should have had lunch with them at least twice a month, if not more. However, time and energy were always an issue and I only ate with them about once a

month. I learned so much about their lives and their families just by allowing them to talk, and I think it aided in the connections I made with my students. We also worked to enroll my highly mobile students in the after school clubs for the second semester. This made a difference for a student whose attendance was very poor. Once this student was engaged in the clubs, she had only one absence until the end of the year. I believe that her improved attendance was due, in part, to her feeling more connected to the school. Our after school program is funded by a grant, and my hope is that we will look to pull more of our identified homeless and highly mobile students into those clubs along with those students who are behind.

### Teacher Learning and Actions

- Connections
  - Teachers eating with students
  - After school clubs and activities
  - Correlation between sense of belonging and attendance

Students who come from highly mobile or homeless families often lack the security of other more stable households. We learned that students often bring toys or special belongings to school in order to feel more secure. In one 4th grade classroom, one of our highly mobile and homeless children continually brought toys and other mementos from home to keep in his desk. His teacher was constantly trying to get him to stop playing with them and to put them away in his backpack. We talked with the teacher about the information we had regarding his sense of security. She compromised with the student and allowed him to keep one toy on his desk as long as he did not play with it. This student seemed to accept the offer and for a short time was doing better. Further, these students need to feel right at home as soon as possible. Teachers need to be aware that new students are

### Teacher Learning and Actions

- Security
  - Students need sense of security
  - They often don't know if home will still be home when they leave
    - Toys and personal belongings
    - May need something from home in sight during the day

unfamiliar with established routines and should assign a buddy to help the student for the first few weeks of his or her new school.

Finally, I learned that highly mobile and homeless children often lag academically behind their peers. One of my students came into our classroom in early September. My first impression of

her was that she was sweet and kind and at grade level in most areas. Unfortunately, her behaviors changed in her second week of school. She began hanging out with a few students that were not the best role models and she began to cause some problems. To make matters worse, her mother told her and her two siblings that they would be moving and switching school again (six schools in three years) and my student completely shut down. She stopped listening, failed to complete any homework, and refused to participate in class. It was the end of October that her mother told her they were moving, yet they did not leave until Thanksgiving (November). My student lost an entire month of school because she knew she was leaving. This student went to another area school and was there until Christmas. It was reported to us that they had not returned after the break and that they were planning a return to Molholm. Three weeks after school had started again the children were finally re-enrolled at Molholm. The students took a few days to acclimate again, and so over the course of their transitions between schools, they lost around two months of learning time.

I know that to ensure that my highly mobile students lose as little learning time as possible, I need to find a way to motivate them even when they know they are moving. I have also learned that I need to follow the pacing calendar as best I can, so that those students who move within our district can do so without losing or repeating a great deal of curriculum.

### Teacher Learning and Actions

- Academics
  - Attendance issues
  - Lost time and curriculum
    - Before move
    - In between
    - Acclimation in new school
    - Routines
    - Buddies
    - Pacing calendar within district

### **Current Trends and Next Steps**

Through the principal's actions of calling the former school of our incoming students, several trends appeared. First, we found that many of our homeless/highly mobile students live in a doubled-up situation, moving frequently between family members and friends. We also found that we had twelve students that had withdrawn from Molholm this year, only to reenroll later on. Finally, we found that the majority of the students entering after the beginning of the year were from highly mobile families.

As for our next steps, the first is to present this PowerPoint presentation to the staff at the beginning of our 2007-2008 school year. Our hope is to develop a basic understanding of the McKinney Vento Act, the struggles of our homeless and highly mobile families, and the needs of our homeless and highly mobile children within the classroom. Time and supplies to complete the new student bags will be provided during staff- development hours at the beginning of the year following this PowerPoint presentation.

### Current Trends

- Doubling up with family and friends
- Withdrawal and re-entry
- Highly mobile

### Next Steps

- Staff Development time
  - Present PowerPoint
  - Prepare student bags
- Work with new fulltime social worker
- Continue to use Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale
  - RTI data

We have already hired a full-time social worker for the 2007-2008 school year using at-risk funds to supplement the half-time position allotted by the school district. Our new social worker formally worked for the Homeless Medicaid Office within our district and will be able to provide additional information and resources to our families. We will continue to collect data using the

Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale. We will use this data in a twofold manner. One will be to provide necessary Response to Intervention (RTI) data to support our students and the other will be used as part of documentation to convince the district that schools working with homeless and highly mobile families desperately need full-time support within their schools.

## Overall Findings and recommendations of existing research

- Conduct an enrollment interview
- Contact former schools
- Provide school necessities
- Provide intensive academic and personal support
- Stabilize the educational setting
- Train teachers about ways to increase pro-social behavior
- Create a positive and secure school environment
- Meet regularly with school support staff, parents and teachers to monitor progress of students
- Enhance and engage community resources and agencies

### Resources

- Baggerly, Jennifer and Tammilyn Borkowski. (December, 2004). Applying the ASCA National Model to elementary school students who are homeless: A case study. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(2), 116-123.
- Deforge, Zhender, Minick and Carmon. (Jul/Aug, 2001). Children's perceptions of homelessness. *Pediatric Nursing*, 27(4), 377+.
- Delmore, Patrick (December, 2004). The door's open: Educating students who are homeless. *Principal Leadership*, 5(4), 32+.
- Swick, Kevin J. (2004). The dynamics of families who are homeless: Implications for early childhood educators. *Childhood Education*, 80(3), 116-120.

# Homelessness and High Mobility

What can we do?  
Awareness is our first step

## Molholm Elementary

2006-2007 School Year

- Approximately 400 students
- >90% on free and reduced lunch status
- >80% on free lunch status
- >10% identified as homeless
- >50% mobility rate
- >30% ELL students

## McKinney Vento Act

- From No Child Left Behind Act
- Schools required by law to:
  - Continue education in the student's "school of origin"
  - Immediately enroll the student without all documentation
  - Provide services comparable to those offered to other students
  - Provide transportation to keep student in "school of origin"
- Definition of homeless:
  - Due to economic reasons
    - Living in a shelter
    - Doubled up with another family or family member
    - Living in temporary housing such as hotel, motel, campground, RV or car

## Purpose of Study

- Understand factors that lead to poor academic engagement and performance
- Establish support systems to help students perform at proficient levels

## Findings and recommendations of existing research

- Conduct an enrollment interview
- Contact former schools
- Provide school necessities
- Provide intensive academic and personal support
- Stabilize the educational setting
- Train teachers about ways to increase pro-social behavior
- Create a positive and secure school environment
- Meet regularly with school support staff, parents and teachers to monitor progress of students
- Enhance and engage community resources and agencies

## Community Learning and Actions

- Actions
  - Developed surveys and parent packets
  - Distributed surveys and parent packets to enrollment secretaries, home school liaison.
  - Made referrals to community agencies, social workers and parent liaison.

## Community Learning and Actions

### ● Learnings

- Treat families with sensitivity and empathy
- Packets for families and family surveys
  - Expand to include information for all families
  - Include as enrollment information and enrollment process

## Principal Learning and Actions

### ● Contact former schools for pertinent information

- Academic levels
- Behavior concerns
- Attendance
- Homelessness/high mobility
- Other pertinent information

## Principal Learning and Actions

- Institute a school wide welcoming environment for all new families
  - Newcomers breakfast/lunch
  - Welcoming committee and tour of building

## Principal Learning and Actions

- Understanding Increased Social/Emotional Stresses Experienced by Highly Mobile Homeless Students
  - Administer Children's Revised Anxiety Scale
  - Advise and involve Special Education staff and/or in school therapist
  - Work with classroom teachers to engage parents in solution-based outcomes

## Teacher Learning and Actions

### ● So much to learn:

- Identification of homeless and highly mobile students
- Interviews
- Lunches
- Conversations
- Observations

## Teacher Learning and Actions

### ● Being prepared

- Beginning of the year
- Avoiding the panic
- Creating new student bags with supplies
- Time and supplies to create the bags

## Teacher Learning and Actions

### ● Connections

- Teachers eating with students
- After school clubs and activities
- Correlation between sense of belonging and attendance

## Teacher Learning and Actions

### ● Security

- Students need sense of security
- They often don't know if home will still be home when they leave
  - Toys and personal belongings
  - May need something from home in sight during the day

## Teacher Learning and Actions

- Academics
  - Attendance issues
  - Lost time and curriculum
    - Before move
    - In between
    - Acclimation in new school
    - Routines
    - Buddies
    - Pacing calendar within district

## Current Trends

- Doubling up with family and friends
- Withdrawal and re-entry
- Highly mobile

## Next Steps

- Staff Development time
  - Present PowerPoint
  - Prepare student bags
- Work with new fulltime social worker
- Continue to use Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale
  - RTI data

## Bibliography

- Baggerly, Jennifer and Tammilyn Borkowski. (December, 2004). Applying the ASCA National Model to elementary school students who are homeless: A case study. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(2), 116-123.
- Deforge, Zhender, Minick and Carmon. (Jul/Aug, 2001). Children's perceptions of homelessness. *Pediatric Nursing*, 27(4), 377+.
- Delmore, Patrick (December, 2004). The door's open: Educating students who are homeless. *Principal Leadership*, 5(4), 32+.
- Swick, Kevin J. (2004). The dynamics of families who are homeless: Implications for early childhood educators. *Childhood Education*, 80(3), 116-120.