



NCSE | National Center for School Engagement

WEB-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

**Action Research to Study
Homelessness and High Mobility in
School Communities:
Collection of Essays
2006-2007**

National Center for School Engagement

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**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
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WEB-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
To Study Homelessness and High Mobility in Schools

Essays from National Teams in Cohort 3
2006-07

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National Center for School Engagement

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WEB-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Essays from National Teams in Cohort 3 – 2006-07

This report features the essays from nine Web-based Professional Development (WBPD) project teams. These teams represent 30 participants and five states, Colorado, Georgia, North Carolina, Washington and Wisconsin.

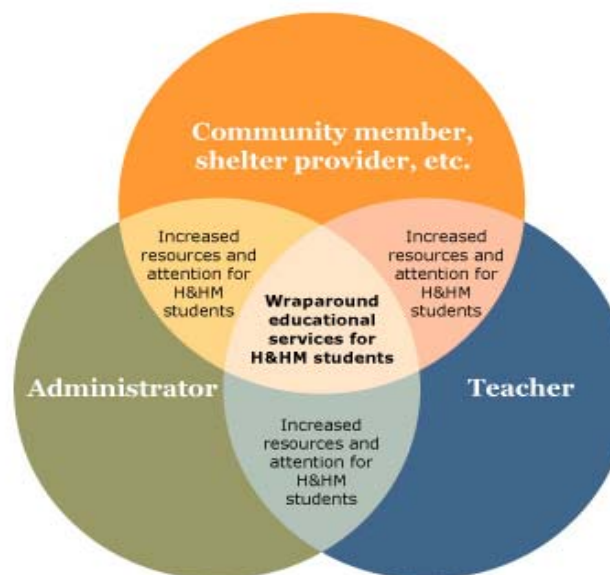
The report includes nine chapters that are sectioned geographically by state. Each chapter contains an essay that represents the hard work and dedication of WBPD participants as that ventured through the cycles of participatory action research to improve educational outcomes for children and youth. Several chapters include literature reviews, surveys, legislative information and practical suggestions on what can be done to support school success of students experiencing homelessness and high mobility.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Between 2003-07, WBPD has involved 90 participants, 31 community teams, and eight states (Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Washington.)

This project, sponsored by the **National Center for School Engagement (NCSE)**, creates teams to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness and high mobility and their families. Each cohort is a year long and coincides with the school year (August to June).

The process of WBPD begins with recruiting teams through an application process. Recruitment efforts target those who have an interest in homeless issues and are concerned about the education of at-risk students. Teams selected to participate in WBPD create a framework for **wraparound educational services for students experiencing homelessness and high mobility (H&HM)**. Each team includes a minimum of three members who represent specific roles (*school administrator, teacher and community member/service provider.*) Each team member works to **increase resources and attention to H&HM students** (*see Venn diagram.*).



WBPD Team Model

Approach

The WBPD approach to professional development integrates: 1) Online instruction; 2) Peer learning; and 3) Participatory Action Research (PAR) to increase the academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness and high mobility and 4) Dissemination of best practices.

1) Online Instruction is facilitated through the WBPD website, which was developed by experts in homeless education and web-based technology. The website features up to ten units that cover federal policies related to homeless education, research-based educational practices, data collection methodologies and other relevant subject matter. This instruction is accredited for up to six graduate credits through Adams State College in Colorado and continuing education units (CEUs). In 2006-07, six participants applied for graduate credits.

2) Peer Learning occurs through face-to-face team meetings and a web-based *Community of Practice*, which refers to an on-going dialogue among team members based on their roles. For example, asynchronous technology allows educators to exchange ideas on classroom instruction at times that are convenient to their schedule.

3) Participatory Action

Research (PAR) is a qualitative research method with a rich history in contributing to educational reforms in disenfranchised communities. It is based on an iterative process that begins with an assessment of factors that contribute to educational barriers and school failure. It evolves around cycles of data collection, planning, implementing, and evaluating action to increase school success (*see diagram*). It is through the PAR process that services and intervention are provided to students and families experiencing homelessness and high mobility.



4) Dissemination of Best Practices occurs throughout each Cohort group. WBPD participants exchange information online and in their community-based teams. Each year WBPD teams submit a written report on their experiences and results of their PAR research. This book represents the collection of essays that were submitted by the 2006-07 Cohort 3 team. This work contributes to the field of education by identifying research-based practices to improve instruction of students who have faced difficult transitions and multiple school changes.

Focus of Improvement

The focus of improvement in WBPD is connected to the Three Domains of Educational Practices, which were identified by WBPD project developer and facilitator, Alana James, EdD.

The three domains include:

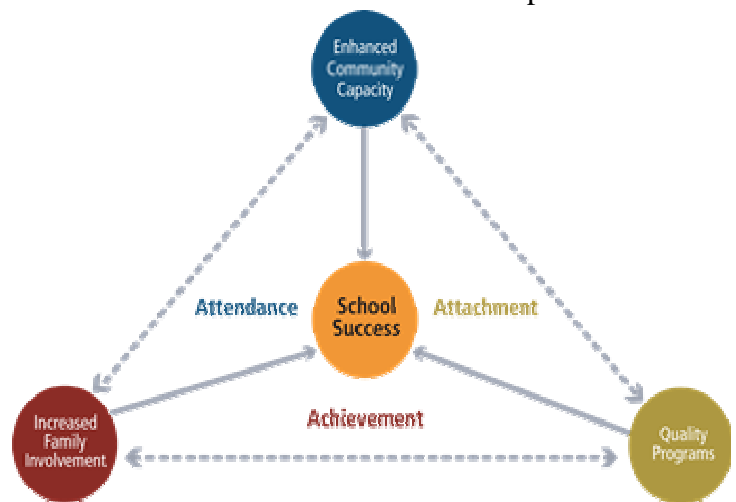
1. **Access to educational services** - To address barriers in getting a quality education.
2. **Welcoming school culture** - To create a safe social/emotional context for learning.
3. **Flexible instructional strategies** - To develop systems that help students succeed in their education.

These practices are aligned with NCSE's framework for school success, which is based on the integration of three A's - attendance, attachment and achievement.

- **Attendance** involves the design and implementation of evidence-based strategies to reduce excused and unexcused absences, and address issues of high student mobility.
- **Attachment** focuses on establishing meaningful connections with youth and their families through caring, support, and mutually-defined expectations.
- **Achievement** includes ensuring that students have the tools and resources to complete courses and graduate from high school.

This framework is supported by parent and family involvement in schools, community partnerships, and quality programs and resources for students who are at high-risk of dropping out of school.

NCSE Framework for School Success



WBPD Results from 2003 to 2007

Reviewing WBPD activities between school years 2003-04 to 2006-07, the following results have been achieved.

- **29 schools and 21 school districts have benefited from action research** to increase parent involvement, improve assessment of educational needs, and foster understanding of the strengths and challenges of students who are at high-risk of school failure.
- **Over 9400 students have been impacted** as WBPD participants implemented programs and made improvements to create welcoming school climates.
- **Over 2000 students experiencing homelessness and high mobility, and their families, have been directly impacted** by the efforts of community teams.
- Nationally, **38 studies** have contributed to increasing what we know about the impacts of homelessness and how to improve instruction and support for students who have faced

difficult transition and multiple school changes. Essays from nine studies, from the 2006-07 school year, are featured in this book.

- **34 rural, small towns, suburban, and urban areas have benefited** by gaining a greater awareness of how homelessness touches the lives of children, youth, and families in their community.

Examples of WBPB Actions in 2006-07

- **Welcoming Kits** – Several WBPB teams instituted welcoming kits for students experiencing homeless and high mobility. These kits generally include school supplies and other items and information that are helpful to students. At Steven Elementary in Wheatridge Colorado, 12 welcoming kits were distributed by teachers. These teachers said that initial conversations with the students, along with giving of the kit, created an immediate atmosphere of trust, bonding, and greatly accelerated students' comfort level in the class and the school. A positive result was that attendance overall was strong and consistent with almost all of the students who received the kit.
- **Mental Health Services** – The principal at Molholm Elementary in Lakewood, Colorado used the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale as a tool to determine levels of anxiety for some students. Information from this assessment helped a mother understand that even though her children were now in a more stable home-life, they were still showing high levels of physiological anxiety. As a result the children received counseling from the school-based therapist.
- **Buddy System** – In an elementary school in Forest Park, Georgia, two educators paired new students with a class "buddy" and shared their observations and overall learning from their WBPB project with their colleagues. As a result, the school staff gained a greater awareness of the circumstances faced by families who are experiencing homelessness and high mobility and by year-end, several teachers had adopted the "buddy system."
- **Graduate Courses for Teachers** - Two professors at Georgia State University built on their experience with WBPB to develop two new courses. One course focused on poverty, high mobility, and homelessness and the other looked at truancy, high mobility, and dropping out of school. Students taking these courses reported "eye-opening," "heart-grabbing," and "perspective-changing" experiences that left them with "a powerful need to *act*, not just read and talk" about these issues.
- **School-Community Partnerships** - Eight WBPB teams addressed building school-community partnerships. The team from Ashley Park in Charlotte, North Carolina developed a partnership with the faith community to recruit reading tutors. Also, a congregation adopted the school to help provide supplies, uniforms and other needs. It was noted that community volunteers benefited as much as the students and positive connections were developed among families.

There are many more examples featured throughout this book. There is much richness and learning in the experiences of WBPB teams. May their lessons learned be of value to local and national communities.



WEB-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: To Study Homelessness and High Mobility in Schools

Summary of Essays from National Teams in Cohort 3 2006-07

COLORADO

1: Fort Morgan, Colorado – Web-Based Professional Development at Columbine Elementary – Year 3

Provides the background on participatory action research to develop a better understanding and greater awareness of homelessness and high mobility in the rural community of Fort Morgan. Provides a review of the team's challenges and successes in supporting parental involvement in school and developing a process to facilitate academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness and high mobility.

2. Lakewood, Colorado - Homelessness and High Mobility – What Can We Do?

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.

3. Wheat Ridge, Colorado - Web Based Professional Development at Stevens Elementary – Year 2

This essay charts a course in developing a procedure for enrolling students experiencing homeless or highly mobile. Steps involve: Parent Placement Surveys at registration; parent interviews with the principal; Welcoming kits presented to the students by their teachers; Continued conversation with the families; and Follow-up with teachers. Includes a PowerPoint presentation.

GEORGIA

4. Forest Park, Georgia - Learning by Choice and Leading by Example: Teachers understanding homelessness and high mobility within their schools

This report tracks efforts to implement positive, lasting change in instructional practices at the elementary school level and college level. It documents the development of graduate courses for teachers, which cover issues such as, poverty, high mobility, truancy and students who drop out of school. Chronicled are actions taken to create a welcoming school atmosphere for new children and their families and to increase awareness of issues that impact student success.

NORTH CAROLINA

5. Charlotte, North Carolina - Increasing Parent/Community Involvement with the Homeless and Highly Mobile Families at Ashley Park University Learning Center

A presentation on actions taken by an elementary school to support academic achievement of low income students and increase school-community relations. Highlights include, building partnerships with the faith community to recruit reading tutors and donate school supplies; developing training sessions to build parenting skills and increase family involvement in education, and expanding after school programs to serve all students.

6. Conway, North Carolina - Conway Middle School: Presentation on Homeless and Highly Mobile Families

A presentation by a rural school district on improving educational outcomes for low-income students. Results of parent surveys are summarized and the importance of parental involvement in schools is discussed. Special features include: strategies and resources to support homeless and highly mobile students.

7. Knightdale, North Carolina - Examining Homelessness and Highly Mobile Students at Hodge Road Elementary School: Breaking Barriers by Raising Awareness

This participatory action research involved gathering information to gauge the school staff's level of knowledge on homelessness and high mobility and determine the types of interventions in place to welcome students. Included is a literature review and an overview of McKinney-Vento legislation.

WASHINGTON

8. Sumner, Washington - School Involvement of Homeless & Highly Mobile Parents In the Sumner School District

An examination of perceptions and school involvement among Sumner School District parents, who were experiencing homelessness and receiving services through Helping Hand House in eastern Pierce County, Washington. Interviews with parents indicate that they were welcomed in their children's schools and that they had access to adequate information about school and classroom events. Parents expressed wanting more information on school curriculum and strategies on how to help their children with homework. Included is a literature review on parent and family involvement.

WISCONSIN

9. Madison, Wisconsin - Supporting Homeless and Highly Mobile Families at Ralph Waldo Emerson Elementary School

This report details an approach to ensure that homeless and highly mobile students and their families are welcomed and connected to school. It provides examples of surveys and outlines how survey results were used to develop a plan to support students, families and teachers. Specific strategies and practices include: sharing up to date contact information with teachers; initiating a 2-week check-in to encourage more family participation; and facilitating easier transitions when difficulties arise. There is also a discussion on increasing community connections to develop support networks for students and families in need.

Key Words	Chapters
Academic Achievement	1, 2, 5, 6, 7
Access to Resources	1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9
After School Programs	2, 4, 5, 7
Assessment (achievement/instructional and needs	1, 2
Attendance/Enrollment	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
Classroom Management	2, 9
Community (awareness and partnerships)	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Elementary School	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9
Flexible Instruction	1, 4
Language (English Language Acquisition/Translation)	1, 2
Literature Review	2, 7, 8
Middle School	6
Parent and Family Involvement	1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Poverty	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
Professional Development/ Courses for Teachers	4, 9
Reading	1
School District	1, 2, 6, 8
Surveys	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
Tracking Mobility	1, 2, 3, 6
Transitional Housing/Shelters	4, 8
Welcoming School Climate	1, 2, 4, 8

To download the book, *Action Research to Study Homelessness and High Mobility in School Communities: Collection of Essays - 2005-2006*, or select a chapter to review, visit the National Center for School Engagement website @ www.schoolengagement.org.