

Running head: HOMELESS PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL SERVICES

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY: HOMELESS PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
SCHOOL-RELATED SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES (MCKINNEY-VENTO) FOR THEIR  
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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### Abstract

This qualitative case study explores homeless parents' perceptions of how schools provide supplementary educational supports through the McKinney-Vento Act to their school-aged children to mitigate the impact of homelessness on their children's educational attainment. The researcher used a survey and one-on-one interviews to describe, analyze, and interpret the lived experiences of parents of school-aged children who were experiencing homelessness. The participants were parents who had been homeless within the last five years (2014–2019) or were homeless at the time of the study, and had children enrolled in the school district within this time. *In vivo* coding and focused coding were used in this study. The coding process that occurred after the one-on-one interviews, revealed several salient themes: appreciation and gratitude, limitations, communication, fear, lack of knowledge, and a desire for parents to protect their children. These emergent themes assisted in detailing the experiences of each study participant.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to proclaim my most profound appreciation to the God I serve. It is indeed by His grace, mercy, strength, and power that I was able to embark on and complete this chapter in my life. At the age of 16, when I spoke with Him about my future, I knew accomplishing this achievement was an essential part of my journey in life.

This study would not have taken place if it were not for the parent participants sharing their lived experiences. I am thankful for each study participant for giving me the opportunity to share their personal stories to inform educational practices for parents and students who are homeless. I am equally appreciative of the school district for approving my research request and for its ongoing supports.

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love, and supports. There were times when I had to withdraw from date nights, could not make dinner, and could not engage in conversations because I was deeply embedded in my research. However, he understood and never complained. He was encouraging, understanding, and always worked to ensure I had what I needed to make my dream a reality. I share this accomplishment with him and my love for him is eternal.

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my oldest son. Your life and smile inspired me the moment you entered this world. Your very presence birthed an unbelievable drive within me. You taught me to dream, pray, believe, and set out to accomplish the impossible. Being your mother helped to solidify my educational dreams of pursuing a doctoral degree.

To my amazing husband for all that you are to me. God blessed me with my true soulmate. Thank you for always supporting me, no matter what. This milestone is ours to share, just like our future together and the past 27 years of our lives!

To my children and grandchildren for being my sunshine during every season. I love you beyond words. To my mother, who is amazing. Thank you, mom, for being the absolute best mother in the world. You will always be my queen. Finally, to my nephew, Benjamin Martin II, whom God called home at the age of nine. Thank you for being my super hero of strength and my Guardian Angel.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### ***1.1. Background of the Problem***

Family homelessness in America is a national crisis as a result of ongoing systemic issues, such as lack of affordable housing, unemployment, and poverty. According to the United States Interagency Council for Homelessness (2018), one-third of the homeless population on a single night in America are families with children, and 59% of people in homeless families are children aged 17 or younger. Homeless parents often encounter insurmountable barriers as they try to find stable housing and quality education for their children.

A report from the Southern Education Foundation (2015) affirms, for the first time in recent history, the majority of the nation's schoolchildren come from low-income families living in poverty. According to the same report, in 2013, 47% of students attending public schools were from low-income families living in poverty. Mohan and Shields (2014) assert that eight million children are living in households with incomes deemed inadequate by the government. Jensen (2009) contends, "one problem created by poverty begets another, which in turn contributes to another, leading to a seemingly endless cascade of deleterious consequences" (p. 7). Poverty has many underlying issues. When these issues go unresolved, poverty can lead to homelessness. There are approximately 1.6 million school-aged children each year in America who are considered poor and homeless. This staggering number reinforces the need for more awareness of student homelessness and for more services to be made available to students and families who are experiencing homelessness.

Engaging in research on homelessness can be quite challenging. Exact figures on homelessness in America can be difficult to determine. Definitions of homelessness differ by

organization, and not all people who are homeless share details of their living status. However, according to the United States Census Bureau (2018), in 2017, 39.7 million Americans were living below the poverty line. The number of families living in poverty seems to correlate with the increase in family homelessness in America. According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2018), homeless families with children represent one-third of all homeless people, and 59% of these families have children under the age of 18 years.

According to a report from the National Center for Homeless Education (2019), the number of homeless students enrolled in K-12 schooling has increased over the last decade. The U.S. Department of Education reports that the number of students who were homeless in the U.S. during the 2012–2013 school year reached a record high, with 1.6 million students affected (Bidwell, 2014). The report, which compiles federal data from the Department of Education by states, shows that 1,355,821 students enrolled in public schools experienced homelessness during the 2016–2017 school year. These excessive numbers are an astounding increase from the 2008 report, which shared student homelessness data for the 2007–2008 school year. Based on this data from public school districts, there were 794,617 homeless students enrolled in K-12 schools during the 2007–2008 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008a).

America is one of the wealthiest nations in the world. However, Chatterjee, So, Dunleavy, and Oken (2017) found that there are more families experiencing homelessness in the U.S. than in any other developed country. Haber and Toro (2004) insist that homelessness in this country prevails despite numerous undertakings and financial backing from state and federal agencies to eradicate it. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007), African American women with children represent the fastest-growing homeless population in the United States.

Homelessness experienced by large numbers of families with children creates significant barriers to the educational attainment of students in these circumstances. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2018) reports there are more than 180,000 families with children who faced homelessness on a single night in January. This number reflects a point in time (PIT) count based on one night. This number includes families living in shelters and non-sheltered areas but does not account for the multitude of homeless families living in hotels, motels, or with family members. According to *childtrends.org*, there were 1.4 million school-aged children, aged 6 to 18, who experienced homelessness during the 2016–17 school year. Seventy-five percent of these families were living with family or friends; others lived in shelters, hotels or motels, or were unsheltered (Child Trends, 2019).

The effects of homelessness on parents and children can differ greatly. Ramifications are often based on the duration of homelessness and the particulars of each experience. Paquette and Bassuk (2009) suggest that, regardless of a family's particular circumstance, there are physical, social, and psychological issues they endure as a result of being homeless. Jensen (2009) reports that children living in poverty frequently experience disorder and unstable living conditions. Children living in unpredictable environments are at risk of mental and physical trauma. Homeless parents, of which the majority are single mothers, often suffer from extensive problems, which may include financial hardships, physical and mental health problems, anxiety, shame, depression, and abusive relationships (Paquette & Bassuk, 2009).

Parents who have school-aged children and experience homelessness are faced with many stressors. Concerns vary from the possibility of disrupting their child's current learning experience while remaining in their current school, to looking for a school closer to their new living location. Additional concerns include transportation issues to and from school and not having the required

documentation for school enrollment. Many parents facing homelessness may be unaware that public schools offer support services, which are necessary to ensure students who are homeless have the option of remaining in their school of origin.

Like all children, school-aged children who are homeless have different levels of resilience. Factors that may impact homeless children include the myriad of reasons for being homeless, traumatic experiences suffered before becoming or while being homeless, the length of time living in unstable conditions, supports received while homeless, and the individual temperament of the child. Additionally, school-aged children who are homeless exhibit a high level of anxiety, low self-esteem, and may suffer from depression. According to the National Center on Family Homelessness (2011), the stressful and traumatic experiences experienced by children who are homeless have had a profound effect on their cognitive and emotional development.

According to Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, and Knight (2011) homeless school-aged children are likely to miss school more frequently than other students living in poverty. Schools face challenges in servicing students whose families are living in unstable and undesirable environments and are at risk of homelessness. Students who are homeless may endure social-emotional issues, behavioral challenges, and a lack of focus in the educational setting. Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) contend that behavioral problems are associated with the learned behaviors experienced while being homeless. Students who are homeless are forced to reside in unpredictable situations, this creates barriers to their school achievement. Bidwell (2014) suggests that the living conditions of students who are homeless place these students at risk for failing in school due to academic underachievement.

The McKinney-Vento Act (McK-V) of 1987 was created to aid students who are homeless by ensuring they can attend and succeed in school. The McK-V Act specifies the rights of students

and families who are homeless. These rights include students remaining in their school of origin during the time of homelessness and schools providing immediate enrollment whether documentation (immunizations, physicals, or proof of residency) is available or not. Also included is the right to receive support for academic success and the right to transportation to and from school (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Although the number of homeless families with school-aged children has increased in the last decade, studies exploring if these families are receiving McKinney-Vento services are conspicuously lacking. Moreover, few have examined the perceptions of homeless parents and how they feel about school-related services for their children. Furthermore, the literature suggests that school districts struggle to meet the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act (Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017). Difficulties in identifying homeless students, staff turnover, lack of awareness of the McK-V Act, and limited funding are all factors contributing to the barriers to ensuring the mandates in the Act are successfully implemented (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

### ***1.2. Purpose of the Study***

The U.S. homeless epidemic facing school-aged children is a critical social issue with no signs of abating. The human characteristics of homelessness have shifted drastically over the years to include single parents, predominantly African American mothers with children. Data collected in 2016 suggests that over half of the people who used shelters in America identified as African American or Black (United States Interagency Council for Homelessness, 2018). The literature and studies on homelessness appear to be plentiful. However, there is a lack of information about the views of parents on the educational services provided by the school district during the time they experience homelessness.



This research solicited feedback from homeless parents who reside in the fifth-largest city in Michigan. The study allowed parents to share their experiences of the educational services provided to them while homeless. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act. To obtain their perspectives, parents who experienced homelessness were interviewed. The researcher provides essential information regarding the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 and conveys how this federal Act was constructed to reduce school-related barriers by providing supports for school-aged children facing homelessness. Information regarding criteria, definitions, and the purpose of the McK-V was disclosed. The results of this study provide a voice for homeless parents of school-aged children and may assist school districts in better understanding how to support families who are homeless.

### ***1.3. Statement of the Problem***

School-aged children who suffer from homelessness are impacted in many ways. As a result of the strains related to homelessness, it can be difficult for children to be successful in attaining a quality education. The McKinney-Vento Act gives school-aged children rights related to their education. Literature shows that homeless parents are often unaware of these rights. Wynne et al. (2014) suggest that parents who are homeless “may not have the knowledge, skills, or financial capacity to advocate for their children effectively” (p. 4). Additionally, Miller (2011) asserts that “families are largely oblivious of the McK-V Act’s very existence and therefore unable to take advantage of it” (p. 432). As such, many homeless parents are unaware of the services that schools are expected to provide. School liaisons must provide detailed reports on the services that are provided to homeless students and families. However, the McKinney-Vento Act does not include a provision for homeless parents to inform the government or school district about the

services their school-aged children received while homeless. Obtaining feedback from parents who experience homelessness may assist the government and school districts in knowing how well the McK-V Act is supporting homeless families.

There is very little research which focuses on the parents of homeless children and their perceptions of the educational services they receive (or do not receive) for their school-aged children. Swick (2009) asserts that homeless parents struggle with low self-esteem, low confidence in their parenting status, and a lack of supports. Homeless parents also struggle with shame brought on by experiencing homelessness. Homeless parents often fear informing schools of their living conditions. The basis of this fear is rooted in the belief that they could lose their children because of being homelessness.

#### ***1.4. Research Question***

The primary research question for this qualitative case study is the following: What are the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act? The research question was designed to capture the preciseness of lived experiences based on parents' perceptions and experiences.

#### ***1.5. Significance of the Study***

Scholarly literature presents numerous studies on the McKinney-Vento Act and how it was designed to provide services to support school-aged children who are homeless (Masten, Fiat, LaBella, & Strack, 2016; Miller, 2011*b*; Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014). However, no post-adoption policy has analyzed how school districts are supporting homeless students, nor if the services outlined in the McK-V Act are dispensed to homeless families. The United States Department of Education has not instituted a policy which seeks input from homeless parents, school administration, nor school-aged students as to whether services are provided. According to

Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, and Canfield (2016), “Limited research has been conducted about the McKinney-Vento Act’s effectiveness, considering the importance of the policy” (p. 57). Additionally, very little research has addressed parents’ perceptions of the efficacy of these services. Parents who face homelessness can become despondent, confused, and uncommunicative because of their unstable living conditions. Hearing their voices is critical to ensure their school-aged children are receiving an education that has not been disrupted because of their living status.

This study gathers the experiences and perceptions of homeless parents. The study sought input from parents to understand their experiences of school-related services while homeless. It is essential to obtain feedback from parents who are or were homeless – these contributions can inform practices within the school district. Moreover, input from homeless parents about how to best support their school-aged children can assist schools in ensuring they meet the needs of homeless children and their families by providing services outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act.

### ***1.6. Definition of Terms***

This section introduces key terms that will provide the reader with a shared understanding of the concepts applied in this study. Some of the terminology may not be widely utilized. These terms are often associated with the federal definition of homelessness. All definitions include a cited source.

**Continuum of Care:** Local planning officials who are responsible for organizing the count of homeless people and knowing the homeless services in each area (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

**Doubled-up:** People or family living with other heads of households, or family or friends living together (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

**Homeless:** Individuals or families who do not have a stable, consistent, and acceptable nighttime residence (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

**Housed:** For this study, housed children are children who live in a consistent, stable residence.

**Low-income:** A family whose taxable income from the previous year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

**Point in Time (PIT) Counts:** One-night counts on a single night in January of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

**Poverty Measures:** To determine families living in poverty, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) created a baseline for income that varies according to family size. The United States Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is considered to be living in poverty. (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

**Poverty:** A person or family with monetary and material deficiencies (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/poverty>).

**Resilience:** An ability to overcome and adjust to adversity and trauma ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)).

**Sheltered:** Individuals or families residing in shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

**The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 1987:** A governmental policy intended to provide educational access, attainment, and stability for homeless school-aged children (Ausikaitis et al., 2015).

**Unsheltered:** Individuals or families who reside in a public or private place not designated for regular nighttime sleeping accommodations (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018).

### *1.7. Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations, and Internal Validity*

#### *1.7.1. Assumptions*

Some assumptions have been made which impact this qualitative case study. A major premise was that homeless parents would be open in sharing their experiences related to homelessness. Additionally, the researcher assumed that parents participating in this study would be forthright with their perceptions of how schools provided educational supports during their time of homelessness. There are limited studies on the perspectives of homeless parents concerning the school-related services their school-aged children received while homeless. As such, the researcher explained to participants the importance of sharing their experiences. The researcher also explained the assurance of participant confidentiality.

Another assumption was that all participants would be trustworthy in answering all questions. While this could not be proven, and there was no guarantee, the researcher assumed this to be true. The researcher explained the critical need for all questions to be answered accurately.

Lastly, families who are homeless may endure traumatic experiences. There was a consideration that once discussions began, participants may struggle with reliving past events and discontinue their participation. Study participants understood that their participation was completely voluntary, and they maintained the right to withdraw at any time.

### *1.7.2. Limitations*

There were several limitations of this study. According to Glesne (2016), “Limitations are aspects that limited the research in some way but were beyond your control or perceived only in hindsight” (p. 214). The researcher was initially aware of some limitations. Other limitations were encountered as a result of the research process.

The very nature of a qualitative study includes some limitations. A qualitative study does not lend itself to the findings being extended to larger populations. While other districts will be able to utilize the information from this study, the participants shared information about their personal experiences with the school district included in the study. Their experiences may differ from that of parents in other areas.

The first limitation was the sample size of ten study participants. The district included in this study had 360 students designated as homeless during the 2017-18 school year. Efforts were made to solicit the participation of parents with school-aged children who had been homeless within the past five years or who were homeless at the time the study was conducted. The participants had children attending schools located within the school district included in the study. A larger sample size would have allowed for more parents to share their perceptions and experiences regarding services received while homeless.

Another limitation was the decision to focus on one school district and not multiple districts. This meant that only parents within the school district could participate, limiting the generalizability of the study. However, the information gleaned from the research may be useful for all school districts that provide McKinney-Vento services to families who are homeless.

The location of this study also had limitations. This study took place in one of the largest school districts in the state of Michigan. The city is in the southwestern side of the state and

includes a well-known university. The school district also offers schools of choice options to parents in neighboring districts, which increases the district's enrollment. The median income for a family living in this city is \$61,247 ([www.worldpopulationreview.com](http://www.worldpopulationreview.com)). However, in a policy brief released by the University of Michigan Poverty Solutions, Erb-Downward and Evangelist (2018) indicate that during the 2015-2016 school year, the school district in this research had the sixth-highest homeless student population in the state. The researcher limited the research to the school district within this city. The perceptions of parents in other school districts is beyond the scope of the study.

One of the instruments used in this study presented some limitations. The tool, Google Forms, was used to solicit information from parents and it was sent via email. Google Forms is a free online tool that is accessible to anyone who has access to online apps. This presented limitations for those without Internet or Google access, so copies of the survey were made available through the school district's McKinney-Vento Liaison, and printed surveys were shared with local community centers and homeless shelters. Since the surveys were sent electronically or handed out by someone other than the researcher, the researcher was not able to ask clarifying or follow-up questions to participants completing the form.

Gathering data was also a limitation as it was time-consuming to collect information from study participants. Parents who are homeless may not consider it a priority to participate in a study while confronting homelessness. Additionally, parents who are new to homelessness may have a different perspective than parents who have been homeless for some time, or who are no longer homeless.

COVID-19 arrived in the United States in January 2020. COVID-19 is a viral disease that can spread from one person to many with droplets from a cough or sneeze (Center for Disease

Control and Prevention, 2020). Social distancing was strongly encouraged and necessary. On March 13<sup>th</sup>, the Governor of the State of Michigan announced the building closures of all PreK-12 schools in the state. As a result, the researcher held all interviews with study participants over the phone. Phone interviews ensured the safety of the researcher and study participants during the pandemic. Creswell (2017) affirms that “a telephone interview provides the best source of information when the researcher does not have direct access to individuals” (pp. 132-133). However, with the phone interview approach, the researcher could not observe the natural responses from participants, such as body language, body movement, and facial expressions, during the interview process. Additionally, the researcher was not able to present a warm and welcoming comfortable space that could have eased participant anxiety as stories were shared.

The timeline for scheduled interviews with some of the participants became a limitation. After the initial conversation with participants, the researcher scheduled interviews by agreeing to dates and times that were most convenient for them. Based on the schedule, the researcher made multiple phone calls to some of the participants who did not answer their phones on the first or second attempts. The third attempt was a text to the participants to see if they were still interested in the study. All participants remained interested and gave reasons for not responding to the first two attempts. Reasons included interruptions with phone service, stress, pain from pregnancy, or being overwhelmed.

### ***1.7.3. Delimitations***

Delimitations for this study included the focus on one school district in Southeastern Michigan. This allowed the researcher to limit the sample size of participants to only families within the school district who had experienced homelessness by the time of the study.



Another delimitation was the selection criterion for participants in the study. The researcher included parents within the school district who experienced being homeless with school-aged children. The researcher did not include homeless school-aged children in the study. The researcher wanted to absorb the parents' experiences and perceptions, not the opinions of school-aged children.

To share recent experiences related to the study, the researcher limited the research to participants who were homeless at the time of the study or within the last five years. Establishing parameters around the homelessness timeline allowed participants to share their most recent experience on the McKinney-Vento Act and school-related services in the district. A second requirement included participants having school-aged children enrolled in the school district during their time of homelessness.

As the principal of a middle school in the district included in this study, parents enrolled in this school were ineligible to participate in this research study. The researcher did not want to have prior knowledge of any of the families and did not want to influence the study's results. It was also crucial that study participants agreed to participate on their own accord, and there was no influence in their decision based on who the researcher of the study was.

Finally, the researcher planned for the timeliness of the study. The researcher was intentional in ensuring the study took place during the school year. This gave the researcher access to parent contact information, so the researcher was able to reach and communicate with parents experiencing homelessness. Homeless families are often transient, moving from place to place. Parents may not always share their updated contact information when their new arrangements are temporary, or they have moved outside the school district. Lastly, having the study take place during the school year allowed for the researcher to better communicate with district personnel.

As everyone was working, the researcher was able to ask principals and the district's liaison to share information with families.

#### *1.7.4. Validity*

The internal validity of this study allowed the school district to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of homeless parents. As a result of internal validity, this study's findings directly relate to the participants' experience while homeless and while having school-aged children enrolled in school during this time. To increase the validity of the study, the researcher collaborated with the district's homeless liaison and school administrators to send surveys to families who were homeless at the time of the study or had been homeless between 2014 and the time the study took place. The researcher also sent an informative flyer (Appendix C) and paper surveys (Appendix E) to local community centers and shelters. Parents who completed the survey were asked if they were interested in participating in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the researcher. The researcher ensured research questions for the one-on-one semi-structured interviews were not leading study participants to an expected outcome.

Accuracy in reporting information was a focal point. Descriptive validity was also used in this study. Maxwell (1992) reports descriptive validity as, "what the researcher reports having seen or heard" (p. 286). The researcher recorded and transcribed the free-spoken perceptions and experiences of each study participant. Extra care was extended to ensure the conventions of qualitative research remained top priority throughout this study. The researcher reviewed transcripts, listened to recorded audio, and reviewed researcher notes. Additionally, the data collection protocol was shared with all participants, research questions did not lead participants to an expected outcome, and the researcher kept an open mind when obtaining the perspectives of the participants. The results of this study were derived from documented findings.

### *1.8. Summary*

Homelessness is a significant problem that has obstructed the educational attainment and success of school-aged children. Instability, trauma, parent under-education, and lack of support contribute to this alarming crisis. Minimal research has been conducted on the perceptions of homeless parents relating to the educational services their school-aged children receive under McKinney-Vento. According to Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, and Canfield (2016), “Limited research has been conducted about the McKinney-Vento Act’s effectiveness, considering the importance of the policy” (p. 57). In communicating with administrators in other districts, it appears many are unfamiliar with the criteria and services outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act. In communities where this is the case, homeless school-aged children may face a downward trajectory in their educational attainment. Homelessness disrupts the lives of those who are impacted by it in many ways. However, it should never interfere with a child’s ability to receive an appropriate education.

## **Chapter II Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Purpose***

This literature review examines the research on homelessness and its impact on homeless families with school-aged children. This chapter attempts to identify findings, gaps, and conflicts, as well as to examine the studies presented in the literature. The first section of the literature review establishes a purpose for the literature and expounds on the state of homelessness in the United States. Next, the researcher shares the historical context of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This section includes the introduction of the McK-V Act, how it has evolved, and federal mandates on what districts must provide for families facing homelessness. The next section of the literature review provides information on American families who experience homelessness.

Additionally, the researcher contextualizes the sources that affirm the impact homelessness has on families with school-aged children. Next, the researcher shares literature on homeless parents' perceptions and experiences and the educational impact on homeless school-aged children. There is literature that reinforce the roles of school personnel and offers suggested strategies for schools to employ as they work to support families facing homelessness. Finally, a summary of the literature will conclude the literature review.

### ***2.2. History of Homelessness in America***

The United States has dealt with homelessness throughout its history. Rahman, Turner, and Elbedour (2015) suggest that homelessness first surfaced during the early American colonies in 1640, again during the Civil War of the 1800s, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and during times of natural disasters, such as the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 and the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. Wallace (1965), as mentioned in Murphy and Tobin (2014), asserts the initial homeless problem in the United States was “literally thrust upon us with the arrival in the early 1600s of the

first boatload of England's homeless, dependent children and youth" (p. 270). He contends that "it was, in fact, England's policy of forcibly deporting her vagrants to the Colonies which forced us to come face to face with the issue of homelessness—and to do something about it" (p. 270). However, according to Murphy and Tobin (2014), there was a decline in America's homeless population during the post-war period. They attribute this decline to a decrease in population and an increase in employment. During the post-war period in America, although homelessness was declining, poverty was on the rise.

In 1964, when the national poverty rate was 19%, President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered the 'War on Poverty' speech during his State of the Union address (Cooper & Mulvey, 2015). While poverty was rising during this time, the majority of the U.S. homeless population were single men (Hendricks & Berkley, 2011). Rossi (1994) found that the majority of homeless people in the 1950s and 1960s were single men over the age of 50 who lived alone. Murphy and Tobin (2014) assert that homeless men during this era were blamed for the conditions of poverty and homelessness they found themselves in, with substance abuse cited as a major factor. These men primarily lived on a meager income or minimal social security pensions. Rossi (1994) further asserts many homeless men during this time were alcoholics, mentally ill, and some were disabled. Levels of homelessness decreased in the early 1970s. However, during the mid-1970s, new trends began to emerge. These trends consisted of a fundamental change in the characteristics of America's homeless population.

In the 1980s, the characteristic qualities of America's homeless population underwent a tremendous shift (Tobin & Murphy, 2013). Poverty among U.S. school-aged children grew significantly. In 1984, the poverty line for a family of four was \$10,200 (Social Security Administration, 1984). Lee (2005) affirms homelessness in the 1980s came with a vengeance, due

to changes in the economy, a lack of affordable housing supply, and changes in welfare and mental health policies. Furthermore, more minorities were suffering from homelessness, as well as single mothers and their children (Murphy & Tobin, 2014). Kirkman, Keys, Bodzak, and Turner (2014) argue that homeless mothers are among those who are “marginalized by inequality” because of “disparities in access to health care, education, housing, and financial security” (p. 723). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2019) reports that 61.4% of single mothers with children reside in shelters across the United States. Rahman, Turner, and Elbedour (2015) report that as the face of homelessness began to change, the plight of children suffering from homelessness surged in the United States. While African Americans are only 13% of the population in America, they make up for more than 40% of the homeless population (“National Alliance to End Homeless,” 2020).

In 2018, the U.S. poverty line for a family of four was \$25,100. There are nearly 40 million people in the US – 1 in 8 people – who live below the poverty line (Family Promise, 2016). Families who live in poverty and who are homeless often endure many issues. Rahman et al. (2015) suggest the number of families living in poverty and the rise in homelessness have prompted renewed research on the phenomenon of youth and family homelessness.

A notable burden for families living in poverty is the onset of homelessness because of not being able to afford stable housing. Swick, Williams, and Fields (2014) suggest that poverty is the gateway to homelessness, stating that “poverty not only perpetuates the onset of chronic homelessness but also exacerbates the problems associated with being homeless” (p. 397). Living in poverty and experiencing homelessness creates barriers to receiving an adequate education for school-aged children.

According to a report from Homes for Homeless (1996), proposed federal and state assistance cuts to the poor would destabilize millions of families and force tens of thousands more into homelessness. When the report was written, Homes for Homeless (1996) disclosed that over 400,000 families suffered from homelessness, with another 2.5 million living with friends and relatives. Two decades later, a report from the National Coalition for the Homeless (2006) attributed the rise in homelessness to a decline in public assistance, lack of affordable housing, and eroding work opportunities. These barriers continue to contribute to the homeless issues many families face today. Throughout recent history, homelessness has often been visible in major urban areas. This was a concern that was localized to areas where homeless people resided. Pavlakis (2018) suggests families who are homeless are no longer limited to major urban areas; instead, this growing phenomenon has now reached suburbs and towns.

The National Coalition for Homelessness (2009) suggests that the phenomenon of families with children and teenagers suffering from homelessness is rapidly growing in the United States. Family Promise (2016) asserts that families with children and teenagers constitute about 35% of today's homeless population. Furthermore, according to the Southern Education Foundation (2015), 51% of students across the nation's public schools were low income in 2013. Nationally, over a million students were identified as homeless during the 2011–12 school year (Chow, Mistry, & Melchor, 2015). Ingram, Bridgeland, Reed and Atwell (2017) confirm that 1.3 million students were identified as homeless during the 2013–2014 school year. The National Center on Family Homelessness (2011) reports that an astonishing 2.3 million children and teenagers are homeless each year in America. This staggering number represents one in every thirty children and teenagers in this country.

The homeless data above is not categorical. It does not include families who chose not to report their housing status due to fear, lack of knowledge of their rights, and stigma (Pavlakis, 2018). Furthermore, the data may not represent the numerous families who are homeless (as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act) but do not live in shelters. According to Kamenetz (2016), these families are “doubled-up with relatives or moving frequently from place to place” (p. 2). Researchers confirm that children and youth homelessness is a growing phenomenon with adverse and lasting effects on the children, youth, and families who experience it (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

### ***2.3. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act***

To combat the problems of poverty, homelessness, and its effects on the U.S., the Homeless Persons’ Survival Act was introduced to Congress in 1986. According to the National Coalition for the Homelessness (2006), the Homeless Persons’ Survival Act contained emergency relief measures, and only a small section of the proposal was enacted into law. Since then, poverty among school-aged children and youth in the United States has grown. During the 1980s, when homelessness was spreading in many communities, President Ronald Reagan did not feel that the epidemic required federal involvement. President Reagan believed that issues regarding homelessness should have been regulated at the local level. However, many advocates around the country demanded that the government acknowledge the problem and enact legislation that would help support those who were homeless. Consequently, a few acts were introduced in Congress.

Representative Stewart B. McKinney of Connecticut was deeply concerned with the issues of homelessness and the impact it had on people. He was closely involved in rallying support for the homeless. Subsequently, he was a generous contributor to the causes associated with assisting the homeless (Miller, 2011*b*). As a result, his peers considered him to be a spokesperson



for the forgotten. Representative McKinney worked tirelessly to provide assistance and support in the areas of wildlife conversation, immigration, urban aid, and welfare programs. After Representative McKinney's death, President Reagan signed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act into law on July 22, 1987.

On October 30, 2000, President William Jefferson Clinton renamed the legislation to include Representative Bruce Vento of Minnesota. Representative Vento was another leading supporter and spokesperson for the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). In 2002, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) was reauthorized by then-President George W. Bush. This reauthorization was a part of the No Child Left Behind Act (Miller, 2011*b*).

Although there are more than 27 federal programs that administer services to homeless individuals, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was the first federal law to tackle student homelessness (Rahman et al., 2015). The National Coalition for the Homeless (2006) remains the only federal law responding to youth homelessness in the United States. The McKinney-Vento Act directs school districts across the country to assist students who are homeless. When educating homeless youth, districts must ensure they are providing the necessary resources and tools so that students who are homeless can receive the same education as their housed peers.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2018), the definition of homelessness is an individual or family who does not have a stable, consistent, and acceptable nighttime residence. The description includes a subset for individuals living in an emergency shelter, a place not meant for human living quarters, or a person exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or fewer.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), in 2015, the government allocated \$65,042,000 to states to subsidize McKinney-Vento supports. In 2019, the total allocation was \$93,500,000. The program's central components are the federal program coordinator, the state coordinators for homeless education, and the local homeless liaison assigned to districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Each year, the U.S. Department of Education grants McKinney-Vento subsidies to states based on their distribution of Title I, Part A apportions. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), a state must “distribute no less than 75% of its annual McKinney-Vento allocation to local school districts in subgrants; award subgrants competitively based on need and the quality of the application” (p. 1). To receive McKinney-Vento funding from the state's educational agency, school districts must meet the criteria set by the McK-V Act. This includes applying for the McKinney-Vento grant through an application process. Not all school districts receive the same amount of funding. This presents significant barriers to the services that should be provided to school-aged children who are homeless.

Before 2002, when the McKinney-Vento Act was reauthorized, no definition of student homelessness existed (Miller, 2011*a*). Since then, the McKinney-Vento Act has clearly identified and defined student homelessness. The McK-V Act defines child and youth homelessness according to Subtitle VII-8 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act; Title IX, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Miller (2011*b*) outlines the definitions for child and youth homelessness as follows:

- Family or friends allowing children and adolescents to reside in their home as a result of losing their own home or facing financial adversities;

- Children and adolescents “living in a motel, hotel, or trailer park due to a lack of housing; living in a shelter, abandoned in a hospital, or awaiting foster care placement”;
- Children and adolescents whose main housing quarters at night is a public place where humans do not commonly sleep; and,
- Children and adolescents who are migrant and fit any above descriptions (p. 429).

Without the McKinney-Vento Act, children and adolescents that experience homelessness would not receive the educational supports provided because of the McK-V Act. Additionally, clear definitions of children and adolescent homelessness help alleviate any ambiguity as schools grapple with understanding the eligibility criteria for school-aged children.

The McKinney-Vento Act includes mandates at the state and local levels. When school-aged children meet the above eligibility criteria, the law states that these students have certain rights under the McKinney-Vento Act. The rights include allowing parents to determine which school their children will attend. For example, parents can choose to keep their children at the school of origin before becoming homeless. Parents may also enroll their children in the school closest to their temporary housing. The National Center for Homeless Education (2017) suggests that states should register students who are homeless immediately, even if they lack such documentation as immunization, residence, and other records generally required for school enrollment.

In short, the McKinney-Vento Act is guided by two major rights for homeless youth: (1) students have the right to full access to school, no matter where they live; and (2) students have the right to attend their school of origin, no matter where they live (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014). With clearly established rules enabling school-aged children and youth impacted by homelessness

to receive McKinney-Vento services, one must wonder why much of the literature suggests that students who are homeless persistently lag behind their housed peers.

According to the McKinney-Vento Act, transportation to and from school must be paid for by the school district for students who are homeless. The National Center for Homeless Education (2017) affirms transportation is the most common barrier to homeless students' enrollment in public schools. Other requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act include districts hiring a homeless liaison to assist families as needed. Assistance from the school district's liaison may consist of the following: sharing resources with families, providing backpacks and school supplies to students, providing temporary housing in hotels, and in some cases, health and dental care. Unfortunately, research shows that even with the McKinney-Vento Act, many homeless students remain unidentified, continue to receive insufficient services and are denied enrollment into schools (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

The Education for Homeless Children Youth (EHCY) program is a federally funded program under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. EHCY reported the number of homeless school-aged children and youth increasing from 679,724 during the 2006–07 school year to 1,301,239 during the 2013–14 school year. EHCY requires that State Educational Agencies (SEAs) work to ensure each homeless student has equal access to the same educational services as their non-homeless peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Additionally, schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) are responsible for hiring local homeless education liaisons that are responsible for ensuring the following:

- school personnel identify homeless children and youth during the enrollment process;
- there are no barriers to enrollment and any enrollment conflicts are reconciled quickly;
- students who are homeless have an equal opportunity to succeed;

- families receive educational services for which they are eligible (Head Start, preschool programs, and health referrals);
- parents who are homeless are informed of educational opportunities for their school-aged children or youth and are provided with opportunities to participate in the education of their child; and
- parents are made aware of all transportation services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008*b*, pp. 2–3).

With the support of the EHCY, LEAs, and district liaisons, school-aged homeless students and their families can be adequately identified by schools, receive any needed assistance with enrollment, and are offered related educational opportunities within the school district.

The EHCY program under the McKinney-Vento Act does not specify the role of teachers in the lives of children and youth who are homeless (Chow et al., 2015). This is especially disturbing as teachers play an immense role in noticing the lived experiences of their students. Heybach (2002) asserts despite McKinney-Vento regulations, many school districts have failed to understand the real nature of homelessness among school-aged children and how to fully implement the requirements outlined in the federal law.

#### ***2.4. Homelessness in Michigan***

Erb-Downward and Evangelist (2018) report that the homeless population of Michigan is one of the largest in the country. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires states to administer a PIT count of all sheltered and unsheltered individuals in the state. According to HUD, each state must develop Continuums of Care (CoCs), who must organize and conduct a PIT count of homeless individuals on a single night in January (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019*b*). The homeless individuals include those

in homeless shelters, safe havens, on the streets, in a park, or emergency shelters. The count does not include families doubled up with family or friends.

Although the Mena Report (2018) suggests a three-year decline in the homeless population of Michigan, numbers remain exceedingly high. According to Michigan's 2018 PIT count (conducted on January 31, 2018), there were 6,090 homeless households and 8,351 homeless individuals (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019a). The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (2018) estimates that 39,092 school-aged children in Michigan experienced homelessness during the 2018 school year.

Student homelessness in Michigan is a statewide hindrance for many school-aged children and it is not confined to urban areas. Erb-Downward and Evangelist (2018) affirm there are students who are homeless enrolled in schools across the entire state, including the Upper Peninsula. Students who experience homelessness in Michigan have significantly lower high school graduation rates and the highest dropout rate among any other group in the state (Kerecman, 2018). In January 2018, Michigan's homeless population was 8,351, according to a PIT count. Additionally, in 2018, 39,092 students were classified as homeless based on public school data (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018). Erb-Downward and Evangelist (2018) affirm "there are eight Michigan school districts where the rate of homelessness was higher than the statewide average of 3%" (p. 3). The school district included in this study is one of the eight districts.

### ***2.5. Families Experiencing Homelessness***

Bush and Shinn (2017) report most families begin their route to homelessness by temporarily residing with family, friends, or in motels. When families are doubling, tripling up, or living in a motel, it creates overcrowding and it is unstable. As a result of overcrowding, children

and youth who are homeless lack the space to study (Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Often, these living conditions do not include the necessities of a single-family apartment or a home, such as a kitchen with a stove and refrigerator, storage facilities for food, and private sleeping areas (Samuels, Shinn, & Buckner, 2010). There are many negative impacts related to overcrowding, including social withdrawal, high levels of aggression, psychological trauma, low cognitive ability, and poor behavior acclimatization (Evans, 2006). Furthermore, in crowded and temporary living environments, parents talk less to their children, and they are more likely to participate in a more chastising approach to parenting due to the stressors they face with homelessness (Smith, Holtrop, & Reynolds, 2015).

Lee et al. (2010) assert the number of families who are homeless is on the rise. According to Huntington, Buckner and Bassuk (2008), there are at least 400,000 families with school-aged children that are homeless. Morris and Butt (2003), note the average homeless family in the United States consists of “a single mother, age 30, with two to three children averaging 5 years of age” (p. 43). Hart-Shegos and Associates, Inc. (1999) extend this claim, asserting that homeless parents are more likely to be single mothers with issues relating to drug abuse, mental illness, physical disabilities, or other health issues. Furthermore, they are less likely to receive supportive services than single mothers who are not homeless. Lee et al. (2010) suggest some of the reasons include personal experiences and circumstances, governmental policies, and financial conditions. Swick (2009) contends that parents who become homeless share a collective experience of losing their self-esteem and confidence, and their parenting skills can diminish quickly.

School districts and community agencies are frequently confronted with challenges in how to serve and support families who face this increasing epidemic of homelessness. In addition to being homeless, many homeless families experience some type of past trauma. Many of these

displaced and disenfranchised families suffer from substance abuse, physical and sexual assaults, and a high rate of mental illness (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Furthermore, Paquette and Bassuk (2009) explain that parents display a range of struggles in addition to being homeless. These struggles include unaffordable housing, physical and mental health issues, abusive relationships, depression, guilt, anxiety, and shame. Additional factors that may influence the process of being homeless include chronic unemployment, illiteracy, and a history of family instability (Duffield & Lovell, 2008).

Violence is also a prevalent issue concerning homeless parents. According to Anooshian (2005), at least one-third of homelessness among parents was directly linked to violence. It was reported that parents, children, and youth report high levels of anxiety and fear due to violence in relationships. Swick and Bailey (2004) assert that homeless parents confront violence in their lives regularly. Several studies by the National Coalition for Homeless (2006) suggest that 30–70% of homeless families list violence as either the primary gateway to their homelessness or a major issue in their lives. Swick (2007) further reports that violence comes in many forms, which may include street violence, domestic violence, violence dating back to an adult's childhood experiences, witnessing violence, and other means of aggressive behaviors. Anooshian (2005) contends that mothers who experience violence may exhibit more aggressive behaviors toward their children. Wenzel (2001) suggests that issues with violence and homelessness can result in families becoming more isolated and often stressed due to living in inadequate housing. The combination can increase problems, leading to more arguments and even more violence.

In addition, other stressors impact the lives of homeless families, particularly single mothers who are homeless. Research suggests that losing stable and permanent housing is a significant stressor for families (Isaacs, 2012). Hong and Piescher (2012) assert that a common



experience for homeless parents is not having resources that would otherwise allow them to maintain permanent housing. Rossi (1994) suggests homeless families suffer from what is known as “homeless distress” (p. 356). According to Rossi (1994), distress enters families when they have no housing, are about to lose their house, or they are living in housing that is too expensive, inadequate, dangerous, or unsafe. Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater, and Haber (2012) report there are obstacles that add to the experience of being homeless and stressors that center around gaining an independent living status. Researchers also suggest that single mothers who are homeless stress about such things as isolation, a lack of privacy, a lack of parenting skills, and inconsistency in the lives of their children (Swick, Williams, & Fields, 2013).

Healthcare is also a noteworthy challenge for homeless families. Most families who are homeless receive Medicaid as their primary source of health coverage (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Families who are homeless are at a much higher risk of health concerns. Homeless children are at risk of under-nutrition or over-nutrition, dental decay, and chronic illness. Homeless parents, along with their school-aged children, also face a greater risk of health issues and an increased risk of harmful sexual behaviors, smoking, and drugs (Chatterjee et al., 2017). As a result of the health issues, many homeless children face, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy in June 2013 that outlines recommendations for better health care (Chatterjee et al., 2017).

Although there are many uncertainties in the lives of homeless families, the education of their school-aged children should not be one. Schools should be a consistent place where students who are homeless can attend regularly and feel safe. Furthermore, students experiencing homelessness should be able to eat a full meal, learn, and receive any necessary educational supports. Yon and Sebastien-Kadie (1994) affirm schools must work to provide safety and security

for homeless students, stating, “it was a safe haven from the vulnerability created by life in temporary housing or on the streets” (p. 71). However, when it comes to their children’s education, homeless parents often have the following concerns:

- Being unable to communicate with school personnel regarding their needs and their child’s needs;
- Being unaware of the cause of their child’s issues while at school (stressors from being homeless, whether the child has disabilities, etc.);
- Being unable to help their school-aged child adapt to unpredictable and unstable living settings; and
- Being unable to ensure they have transportation to attend school-related activities after the school day has ended (National Center for Homeless Education 2015, p.1).

To alleviate the concerns of homeless parents, Swick and Bailey (2004) emphasize the importance of schools communicating regularly with parents regarding the needs of students and their educational journey. A study completed by Yon and Sebastien-Kadie (1994) found that parents were disappointed and frustrated with schools due to the lack of contact made by the school regarding the progress of their children.

## ***2.6. The Impact of Homelessness on Families***

### ***2.6.1. Parents and School Climate***

Parents’ attitudes and involvement are essential factors in their children’s education. Their involvement can impact how well their children perform in school (Swick, 2009). Parents’ perceptions can determine how their children feel about school (Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyre, & Gehlbach, 2014). Lareau (2002) explains “children seem to absorb the adults’ feelings of powerlessness in their institutional relationship” (p. 773). Because of this, deepening school-

parent relationships are paramount. According to Quint (1994), communicating with homeless families is essential. Factors such as limited social networks, lack of education, and lack of communication from the school may keep a parent from participating and feeling like a valuable member of the school's culture (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). Parents' experiences and perceptions can also impact whether they participate in school activities, such as the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), parent-teacher conferences, and supporting their child academically. Miller (2015) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the disparities between the involvement of homeless and housed parents and the need to work to "engage all parents as partners in the schooling process, especially those who face great obstacles to involvement" (p. 6). Ongoing communication with homeless families is imperative when building school-parent relationships. Communication keeps parents informed of events taking place at the school, reiterates to parents that they matter, and empowers them. Swick and Bailey (2004) maintain that positive communication with homeless parents encourages them to have control of their lives and the lives of their children.

### ***2.6.2. Parents' Perceptions of Perceived Barriers***

According to Swick (2006), family trauma and issues like natural disasters can lead to families being homeless. When parents become homeless, they lose control of their housing status, and barriers to school-related services are deepened. Losing a home removes the safety net of living in housing that belongs to them. In comparison to families who are housed, homeless families no longer feel "safe and secure" (Swick, 2005, p. 195) when they are removed from their permanent residence. Losing a home can also trigger depression and other mental illness in families. Swick (2005) suggests "the feelings of isolation, anxiety, despair, and chaos that are so prevalent in the homeless culture discourage the development of empowerment in homeless

parents and children” (p. 199). Providing access and opportunities for parents and school-aged children to develop social skills can help to empower them and create a sense of agency. Pine (2000) suggests it is essential for homeless parents to engage in supportive experiences to create a sense of agency, to learn, and to build their confidence.

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness (2014), 94% of homeless school-aged youth attend schools. However, the attendance rate among homeless children is high, with more than 50% of homeless school-aged children missing two or more weeks during a school year (Sulkowski & Kaczor, 2014). As families become homeless, parents with school-aged children need consistency in the education of their children (Yon & Sebastien-Kadie, 1994). Wynne et al. (2014) assert “educational opportunity is the major access point for marginalized families and their children to have any hope of upward social mobility” (p. 2). If parents are unaware of the school-related resources available to them because of their homeless status, they can go to great lengths and added stress to ensure some level of normalcy in their children’s lives. A study completed by Yon and Sebastien-Kadie (1994) presents the need for parents to go to “extremes to preserve the continuity of their children’s schooling” (p. 71). In the study, parents facing desperate times chose to allow their children to live with family members so they could finish the school year in their current school. Additionally, some parents provided transportation to and from their children’s schools. To help eliminate barriers and to support homeless families, school district personnel and parents must work collaboratively to establish transparency and build relationships.

Homeless parents can develop a fear of having their children taken from them. As such, not all parents communicate their homeless status to the school. According to Zlotnick, Kronstadt, and Klee (1998), the more families face homelessness, the more children enter the foster care

system. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2006) reports 62% of homeless children were removed from family shelters and placed in foster care. Gelberg and Lim (1992) suggest parents who experience homelessness may not disclose their living situation out of fear of having to relinquish their guardianship. When schools are unaware of a family's living status, they cannot provide necessary supports as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act. Additionally, without this crucial information, school personnel can become concerned about children's wellbeing, including their emotional regulation, hygiene, and hunger. When school personnel have these concerns about a student, they may contact children's services.

Homeless families may miss out on opportunities to interact in school-related activities due to a lack of transportation, living situations, or a lack of adequate clothing and resources. Connolly (2000) argues homeless families need supportive experiences to develop new abilities and to build their confidence. Swick (2005) writes there are inadequate resources and unfavorable treatment from those who should be helping homeless families, which can further add to their challenges. School districts can initiate supportive experiences when there are intentional efforts to eliminate barriers that are within the schools' control. In a study examining the experiences of homeless families, Miller (2015) asserts the families studied were unaware of the options provided by the federal and local government. As such, these families were disassociated from opportunities from the McKinney-Vento Act and other systems that were designed to assist families in need. Supportive measures must exist so that families can participate in school-related activities. Practices such as ensuring transportation to all school events, making childcare available to homeless families, eliminating barriers to school enrollment, educating parents on the McKinney-Vento Act, and working with local shelters to ensure time restraints are not a hindrance to

participating in school-related activities could prove to be beneficial for homeless families.

### ***2.6.3. Parents' Perceptions of School-Related Services***

There is a lack of research into the perceptions of homeless parents and supports they receive from school districts as a result of the McKinney-Vento Act. Grothaus et al. (2011) investigated the perceptions of parents and children regarding school-related services during their time of homelessness. The qualitative study consisted of nine parents and thirteen children. Two of the parents stated that their children participated in the schools' tutoring program. The parents of two other participants noted their children were involved in the schools' mentoring program. Only two of the nine participants believed their children met with the school counselor during their time of homelessness. Most of the parents approved of their children's academic performance. However, five parents shared that their children had behavioral issues at school. Two of the nine parents shared positive experiences with their children's schools, while others made recommendations for the schools. Parents suggested that teachers and mentors could reach out to them more and provide more community resources. They also highlighted a need for school advocacy on behalf of their families. This study presented evidence of the need for school districts to seek feedback from homeless parents and to consider implementing some of their recommendations. It also reinforces the importance of educational services like tutoring and mentoring programs.

Morris et al. (2003) aimed to understand the parents' experiences and perceptions related to homelessness and the effects it had on their children's educational development. Three major themes were established: "understanding relationships, abdication of responsibility and perceptions of their children's educational needs" (pp. 46-47). The study proposed that school

districts should offer purposeful educational services to families, ensure staff development opportunities for school personnel with a focus on homelessness, work with community agencies to support families in need, and establish inclusive relationships so that parents have a sense of belonging when it comes to their children's education. Lastly, the researchers suggested that the "educational rights of homeless children should be made available to parents" (p. 50). Consequently, districts must be transparent about the educational rights and supplemental services available to homeless school-aged children. Also, districts must inform parents of their rights and available services offered to them as a result of their homeless status.

Parents who are involved in their children's education can positively impact their learning. Furthermore, there is "considerable research on the important role of parents in their children's academic achievement" (Cox, 2005, p. 473). Unfortunately, not all homeless parents feel welcomed at their children's school due to the stigma of being homeless. Swick (2006) asserts there are teachers with mistaken ideas of homeless families that derive from conventional descriptors of what and who homeless people are. In a Swick and Williams's study (2010), the study participants – single mothers who were homeless – expressed their views on the need for school personnel to participate in professional development to dispel any "negative stereotypes" (p. 53) of homeless families. Teachers play an essential role in the lives of the students and families they encounter and educate. Therefore, it is essential for educators to learn about homelessness, how this phenomenon can hijack the lives of students and families, and how they can support students who are homeless.

During a time of uncertainty, homeless parents should feel a sense of empowerment and belonging. Torguati (2002) reports that homeless mothers who were recovering from addiction were perceived as being vile parents. Consequently, they felt they were treated harshly. Swick

(2008) suggests “the very nature of being homeless draws negative value judgments from others” (p. 328). Parents who are homeless should encounter welcoming opportunities from their children’s schools. When parents and schools work together, the collaboration can significantly benefit children who are homeless.

Homeless parents also have perceptions related to how their children are doing academically. In a study completed by LaFavor, Langworthy, Schevita, and Kalstabakken (2019) a study investigated the relationship between teacher and parent perceptions of their students’ behavioral regulation and competence in achievement. “First, parent stress unduly affects reports on child behavior” (p. 452). It is essential to recognize the stress placed upon homeless parents and how this stress may increase homeless students' academic and behavioral challenges. For this study, parent and child sessions were conducted at two emergency homeless shelters. Parents completed a survey while teachers completed a questionnaire sent to them. Teachers reported numerous concerns with students’ behavior while parents reported concerns with inhibiting behaviors. Additionally, “reports of behavioral functioning, academic competence, and school engagement differed significantly between parents and teachers” (Lafavor et al., 2019, p. 457). This study sheds light on the critical need for teachers and parents to work together and communicate often. The study included participants who were majority parents and children of color. Finally, it is paramount that teachers participate in bias training through professional development. Trainings could assist in teachers recognizing any biases they may have related to homeless families, minority students, and families living in poverty.

#### **2.6.4. *Educational Impact on School-aged Children Experiencing Homelessness***

The national crisis of family homelessness has increased the number of students identified as being homeless. According to Miller (2011a), this crisis exists in urban, suburban, and rural



school districts across our country. Hallet, Low, and Skrla (2015) assert the number of students who identify as homeless has reached a record level in the U.S. Issacs (2012) reports that more than 8 million children lost residential stability through foreclosure or loss of rental property. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2018) reports homeless families with children now comprise nearly 40% of the American homeless population. It is difficult to determine the exact number of homeless youth in the United States. In a study by Ascher, Jarvis, and Mokhtar (2007), homeless liaisons reported the majority of education professionals are unaware of the estimates of homeless students attending their schools. Estimates are provided and do not accurately reflect the exact number of homeless youth. However, estimated numbers show that there is a growing crisis amid the country's homeless population, particularly among homeless families with school-aged children.

School-aged children who are homeless can struggle with obtaining their education. As a result of being homeless, students are often not engaged in the classroom and do not feel a sense of belonging. Additionally, they often find it difficult to focus on learning when they worry about issues such as not knowing where they will sleep or if they will be safe. Fantouzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, and Culhane (2012) explain homeless students have problems with academic achievement, classroom engagement, and task management. Murphy and Tobin (2011) confirm homeless children and youth perform worse than their housed peers. Kilmer et al. (2012) assert school-aged children who live in homeless families cannot envision a future for themselves as a non-homeless adult. As such, homeless children and youth are pessimistic about the possibility of growing into capable adults. Students who are homeless consistently lag behind their peers. These students are at risk of dropping out of school, not continuing their education after high school, or imitating the poverty cycle with their own children.

Research highlights factors associated with homelessness and how it interrupts the educational experience of school-aged children (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). For students to learn at the same academic level as their peers, students must grow academically, cognitively, and socially. Homelessness can impact students in various ways. The literature reveals many risk factors associated with student homelessness. Chow et al. (2015) affirm homeless students are at a higher risk of academic difficulties in comparison to their middle-class peers. There are also concerns with behavioral, emotional, and social challenges. Lee et al. (2010) confirm weaknesses in the verbal and language development of children and youth who are homeless. Tobin (2016) reports test scores and grades are often lower for students who are homeless, whereas dropout rates are higher.

The literature referenced throughout this study reveals that many students suffer as a result of being homeless. This includes poor attendance, frequent location changes, traumatic stress disorders, a decline in grades, an uptick in disruptive behaviors, and a higher incidence of medical conditions (Chow et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2010; & Tobin, 2016). A study by Hallett et al. (2015) found homeless and highly mobile (HHM) students in Chicago change schools an average of 3.2 times while homeless. Sixty percent of the changes were made in the middle of the school year. All these changes can introduce trauma to school-aged children.

The Merriman-Webster dictionary defines trauma as a “disordered physic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury; an emotional upset; an agent, force, or mechanism that causes trauma.” Literature affirms most students who have a lived experience of homelessness have undergone some form of trauma (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater & Haber, 2012). Students do not feel safe and secure when living in shelters or temporary housing, and they may lack self-confidence. Hallet et al. (2015) explain older children and youth who are

homeless have a sense of shame and embarrassment that is tied to the scar of being homeless. Fantauzzo et al. (2012) assert younger children and youth face more difficulties cooperating with their peers than children and youth without a homeless experience. In a study by Ingram, Bridgeland, Reed, and Atwell (2017), students overwhelmingly responded that homelessness was taking a toll on “their lives, their health, their relationships, and their education” (p. 5). With the experience of homelessness affecting school-aged children, it is unsurprising that there are many issues children must endure just to receive an acceptable education.

Homeless students often suffer from depression and anxiety because of not having a stable home life or consistent routines. Additionally, students compare their lived experiences to those of their peers. Samuels et al. (2010) assert that homeless children and youth exhibit higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as behaviors of aggression, hyperactivity, and noncompliance, in comparison to their non-homeless peers. Gewirtz, DeGarmo, Plowman, August, and Realmuto (2008) found that 14% of homeless children younger than 5 years old had a least one indicator of a severe mental health concern. These numbers increased to 47% for children and youth between the ages of 5 and 11. Hernandez and Israel (2006) assert that behavior issues among homeless children and youth are related to parental distress, grade retention, shame, and educational disabilities.

## ***2.7. The Role of Schools***

### ***2.7.1. The Role of School Liaison***

School districts or LEAs are responsible for having at least one district liaison to help classify homeless school-aged children within the school district. District liaisons are also responsible for providing homeless families with the educational supports and services as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008b). Liaisons connect

homeless families with the services that are provided through the McKinney-Vento Act. Liaisons are responsible for ensuring the following:

- Homeless children and youth are identified at the school level;
- Homeless children and youth can enroll and have an equal opportunity to succeed in schools;
- Enrollment conflicts are resolved according to the terms outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act;
- Homeless children and youth can receive the educational services they need, including Head Start and other preschool programs;
- Parents or guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of all educationally related opportunities available to their children, and there are no restrictions related to their homelessness, for participating;
- Public notice of education rights for homeless children and youth are shared where they receive services (for example, school setting);
- Parents or Guardians are fully aware of transportation services and are assisted with access and set up (National Center for Homeless Education, 2008b, pp. 2-3).

District liaisons are hired to ensure homeless families receive the resources outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act. However, the McK-V Act does not provide a mandate to ensure homeless families are receiving all the services described therein. The school district included in this study has one liaisons.

Groton, Teasley, and Canfield (2013) suggest the lack of collaboration among liaisons, schools, agencies, and families who are homeless also creates barriers for implementation. Miller (2011a) asserts the lack of funding at the state and district level is a known barrier to the

implementation of the McK-V Act. Miller (2011a) further suggests homeless liaisons lack the community connections that would help create support structures needed by homeless families.

Additional obstacles include liaisons feeling inadequate to carry out the job tasks. This is due in part to liaisons not having an in-depth understanding of homelessness and the McKinney-Vento Act (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2016). In an Illinois study, Thompson and Davis (2003) found a significant number of liaisons were not aware they were the liaison for their district. In a study completed by Wilkins et al. (2016), the liaison respondents were white females over the age of 45, who lived in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia. Of the respondents, 91% reported holding a master's degree or higher in the education field. Only 13.4% said their primary job title was a homeless liaison. Other job titles included social workers, administrators, truancy officers, and directors of federal programs. Miller and Bourgeois (2013) assert when liaisons have multiple responsibilities, rather than solely working with homeless families, their time for dealing with the significant issues that homeless families face is limited.

The liaison in the district included in this study works full time in supporting McK-V families. Families who are identified as homeless as a result of their initial enrollment form, are contacted by the McK-V Liaison. There is a four-step process to designating a family as McK-V eligible:

- 1.) Determine eligibility via enrollment paperwork or online registration.
- 2.) If families are declared homeless, they are given the option to complete the Education Project for Homeless Youth (EPHY) referral form. This form outlines some of the provided supports, asks for general information about the family, allows parents to provide information on their emergency needs, and includes a *Know Your Rights* section with a concise overview of the McK-V Act.

3.) The school proceeds with the enrollment process under the McK-V Act. This means that parents are asked to provide enrollment information (parent identification, student birth certificate, phone, address, utility bills, and emergency contacts). Parents who are homeless are only required to provide documentation as it is available to them.

4.) All information is submitted to the liaison who will contact families for additional supports and guidance.

The liaison also shares with families a brochure containing information regarding the McK-V Act and a school allies list. The school allies list provides parents with a McK-V contact person at each of the district's schools.

### ***2.7.2. School-Related Services from Teachers***

Teachers are often the first group of service providers who regularly spend time with homeless students during any given school day. Literature suggests teachers can significantly impact the lives of homeless students (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2011). Therefore, teachers should learn how to identify students who may be homeless and serve as the gatekeepers. Thielking, LaSala, and Flatau (2017) provide a list of warning signs for teachers to assess whether a student may be suffering from homelessness. Symptoms include clothing issues, which include students wearing clothes that are unclean and repeatedly wearing the same clothing; chronic attendance issues; work issues, such as a lack of focus, tiredness, and not completing assignments and homework; hunger issues; social-emotional issues; and trauma. When teachers come from a place of understanding and take on a more supportive role for students facing homelessness, the students' academic and social-emotional skills may increase.

Teachers can create a positive classroom environment for students who are homeless. It is vital for students who are homeless to feel like they are in a classroom setting where they are

appreciated, welcomed, and supported as unique individuals. Rogers and Shafer (2018) advise that teachers should consider ways to build authentic relationships with homeless students, by providing a welcoming physical classroom environment, and reviewing classroom rules and expectations.

According to Erb-Downward and Watt (2018), 40% of homeless students in Michigan had high absenteeism during the 2016–2017 school year. This alarming rate is higher than the statewide average. Teachers can assist in eliminating chronic absenteeism by communicating concerns with families and district administration early on. Teachers can also help by working with the district's homeless liaison to ensure transportation is not a barrier to school attendance. Students should be able to attend all school-related events and activities during and after the school day. Resources should be made available so that a lack of funding is not a contributing factor of a student's inability to purchase items that are for sale during school-related activities. Teachers have a shared role and responsibility of eliminating barriers and making school a place where students want to be by creating warm, understanding, and nurturing classrooms.

Teachers can also provide more individualized teaching for students who are homeless. This allows students to work closely with their teacher, complete work, and ask questions. This type of teaching helps to eliminate the shame homeless students may face because of being homeless and underperforming as a result. According to Murphy and Tobin (2011), students can also benefit from cooperative learning in the classroom. Cooperative learning allows students who are homeless to enhance their social skills while working and interacting with their class peers. Teachers should consider a flexible curriculum while understanding students may not have the necessary time and tools to complete assigned homework. Murphy and Tobin (2011) affirm the need for flexibility with schoolwork, stating “evidence suggests that breaking assignments for

homeless children and teenagers into discrete pieces of work is a good instruction strategy” (p. 35). Finally, teachers can assist students by allowing extra time to complete all instructional work during the school day, refrain from giving students too much work, and maintain flexibility with due dates for assignments that extend beyond the school day. When homework is required, teachers can assist homeless students by allowing extra time students may need to complete work due to their living situation.

### ***2.7.3. School-Related Services from Counselors and Social Workers***

School counselors can also help students who are homeless. Havlik and Bryan (2015) suggest counselors should adhere to the criteria outlined in the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) guidelines. The requirements include meeting with homeless students individually or as a group, providing classroom guidance and support to students and teachers, intentionally planning academic instruction and advice, collaborating with outside agencies and the district’s liaison for supportive services, and providing additional parental supports as needed.

Havlik and Bryan (2015) asked 207 counselors who were members of the ASCA about their knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. The school counselors reported having an average understanding of the McK-V Act. ASCA provides ethical standards for school counselors, which include creating a safe and supportive environment for underserved and at-risk populations and ensuring students are not discriminated against based on their housing status. For counselors to effectively work to support students who are homeless, they must learn more about the provisions set forth within the McKinney-Vento Act and they must be willing to be a voice for the homeless students they serve.

Counselors can also ensure students who are homeless have their basic needs met. This effort can be in conjunction with the district’s homeless liaison and community agencies. Murphy



and Tobin (2011) suggest homeless students require items that other students may take for granted. These items include school supplies, food, clean clothes, and personal hygiene items. Additionally, there is a need for health and dental services for homeless students. Counselors can work with local businesses and organization to assist in providing these services.

According to Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006), students who are homeless have a higher degree of social-emotional and behavioral issues than their non-homeless peers. Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, and Neemann (1993) assert homeless students are at risk of experiencing trauma, depression, isolation, hostility, contentiousness, and drug or alcohol abuse. School social workers are advocates for the students they serve. They often work with students who are at risk behaviorally or emotionally. There is no anecdotal evidence of the work school social workers do with homeless students. However, social workers can assist homeless students by understanding their emotional and behavioral struggles.

Like homeless liaisons and school counselors, social workers are an important link between homeless families and local community agencies. Social workers can assist students who are homeless by serving them in school social groups, partnering with homeless parents, and seeking resources through community agencies, as well as supporting teachers by providing them with strategies for how to best support homeless students. School social workers can also seek grant opportunities to fund resources that would benefit students who are homeless. Ideally, these resources would help to provide programs and services within the school and provide basic necessities that homeless students can often go without. In-school resources, such as a food pantry, before- and after-school tutoring services, and a clothes closet, could benefit homeless students and their families.

#### *2.7.4. Suggested Strategies for Schools to Employ*

Schools can be the one consistent place for students who are homeless. Consequently, school personnel (administration, teachers, social workers, counselors, and other service providers) must understand the impact of homelessness and how this phenomenon can affect the students they serve. Powers, Costello, and Swick (2011) assert teachers can make a significant difference in the lives of students who are homeless. However, Jones et al. (2018) contend children and teenagers who are homeless continue to experience adverse outcomes in school, as educational setbacks and academic barriers persist. School personnel can improve the support for students who are homeless and ensure the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act are made available to them.

Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, and Knight (2011) suggest support services for students in school can include after-school academic programming. Schools can assist with the academic needs of students who are homeless by offering tutoring programs after school. Rogers and Schafer (2018) suggest stereotypes can prevent educators from noticing the characteristics of homelessness among students in their classrooms. They explain the importance of schools working with teachers to engage in self-reflection, which helps to challenge any preconceived notions of homelessness. Administrators can also assist teachers in becoming knowledgeable on this issue by offering professional development, partnering with community agencies and organizations, and partnering with homeless service providers in training school personnel. Lastly, Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) suggest districts can create action teams who are responsible for developing goals and ensuring policy and programs support students who are homeless.

Swick (1996) suggests teachers should acquire accurate information about student homelessness. He suggests that teachers should engage in school and community service projects to gain a better understanding of the needs of their students, develop relationships with local

shelters, and provide homeless students with mentors. Swick (1996) further suggests that teachers should allow students to write reflective journals on homelessness – through this experience, teachers can learn more about the students they serve. Rogers and Shafer (2018) agree teachers can have a significant impact on the lives of their homeless students, highlighting the importance of developing teachers as advocates for students who are homeless. Rogers and Shafer (2018) contend teachers must create a positive classroom culture that allows students who are homeless to feel welcomed. They suggest building authentic relationships with students, demonstrating compassion, providing snacks, investing in their students, and creating a calm and quiet environment.

Rogers and Shafer (2018) suggest teachers should maintain academic supports and high expectations. Moore (2013) asserts that teachers should plan for differentiation of instruction and assignments as they identify gaps in students' knowledge. Murphy and Tobin (2011) provide an educational framework which suggests seven approaches schools can take to better support students who are homeless: be aware of homeless students and their conditions; provide professional development to train parents and staff; ensure the essential needs (food, hygiene, and school materials) of homeless students are met; deliver useful instruction; build a nurturing and caring environment; make increased supports available as needed; partner with local businesses and organizations, and encourage parental participation.

### **2.8. Summary**

Students who are homeless face many struggles in their lives. Often lagging behind their peers, homeless students suffer academically, emotionally, and physically. Additionally, students who are homeless can demonstrate poor social skills, work habits, and are more likely to have unanticipated school moves (Fantuzzo et al., 2012).

New federal data suggests a 70% increase in the nation's student homeless population from 2008 to the 2017 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2019). As the child and youth homelessness rate continues to increase in the United States, students who are homeless must receive the same education as their housed peers. While the McKinney-Vento Act has legislation to support homeless students, there is no research indicating the McK-V Act has been successful in reaching all homeless school-aged children. Finally, there is no research that indicates homeless students are receiving an equitable education as their peers.

## **Chapter III Methodology**

### ***3.1. Purpose***

This chapter introduces the methodological approach that was used in this qualitative case study. According to Yin (2003), “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2). This chapter discusses the researcher's rationale for using a qualitative approach and a case study. The chapter also presents the researcher's role, data sources, population, data collection, the analysis of the data, and ethical assurances.

### ***3.2. Research Question***

The primary research question for this study is the following: what are the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act?

### ***3.3. Research Design***

The qualitative research approach was employed because of its unique ability to understand authentic experiences through insight provided by the participants. Wilson (1998) asserts “qualitative research is research that attempts not only to understand the world but also understand it through the eyes of participants whose world it is” (p. 1). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) affirm qualitative research refers to various research strategies that share commonalities. They further suggest the data collected by the researcher is considered “soft, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 2). The researcher in this study intended to bring life to the school experiences of homeless school-aged children from the perspective of their parents.

Qualitative research allowed the researcher to connect with the participants to understand their lived experiences of homelessness. Creswell (2007) asserts qualitative research is appropriate when an issue needs to be explored, in this case, the phenomenon of homeless families with school-aged children. The researcher sought to understand how parents with school-aged children perceive the educational supports their children received (or did not receive) while homeless. Devers and Frankel (2000) suggest qualitative research methods have made great progress over the years as researchers have developed the disciplines and procedures needed to transition from the research question to actual results. Devers and Frankel (2000) affirm qualitative researchers must identify their study sites, studies, subjects, and methods for data collection.

### *3.3.1. Case Study*

The researcher selected a case study as a method for understanding the perceptions of homeless parents through their lived experiences of their school-aged children's school district. Creswell (2007) suggests with a single case study, the researcher focuses on an issue then selects "one bounded case to illustrate the issue" (p. 74). This case study focuses on parents who have experienced homelessness and have school-aged children enrolled in the school district. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define a case study as an investigation of a single setting, subject, or event. According to Yin (2003), "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13).

Case studies have a long history in various disciplines. Creswell (2007) affirms this approach has been used in social science, medicine, law, and political science. Additionally, Yin (2009) asserts case studies allow for human behaviors such as emotions, personalities, and thoughts to be examined and discovered using research. The researcher wanted to share the

participants' story through their eyes. The participants experiences and perceptions were crucial in providing a narrative analysis for this study.

Yin (2003) suggests completing a case study is very demanding because the information collected is not systematized. Yin (2003) provides a set of skills that are needed for case study researchers:

A good case study investigator should be able to ask good questions and interpret the answers. An investigator should be a good listener and not be trapped by his or her own ideologies or perceptions. An investigator should be adaptive and flexible so that newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities, not threats. An investigator must have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, whether this is a theoretical or policy orientation, even if it an exploratory mode. Such a grasp reduces the relevant events and information to be sought to manageable proportions. A person should be unbiased by preconceived notions, including those derived from theory. Thus, a person should be sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence. (p. 59)

The researcher used a case study to examine parents' experiences and perceptions of being homeless and receiving educational supports. The researcher gathered data from multiple participants. Based on data collected and analyzed, the researcher used participants' own words to share their stories. Additionally, qualitative studies are subject to researcher bias. The researcher created the research question used and interpreted the data gathered using codes and themes. Accuracy in reporting information was paramount. Finally, extra care was extended to ensure the conventions of qualitative research remained a top priority.

### ***3.4. Institutional Review Board***

The researcher adhered to all ethical guidelines throughout the study. The researcher requested the approval of this study by submitting an online application, along with associated documents, to the University of Michigan-Flint Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval, information about the study was shared with district administrators, the district's McKinney-Vento Liaison, local homeless shelters, and the directors of local community centers to obtain parent participants for the study.

### ***3.5. Participants***

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling means "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The participants in this study comprised of parents who were homeless at the time of the study or had been homeless within the past five years, while having school-aged children enrolled in the district included in this study. Purposeful sampling also prevented homeless parents with school-aged children attending the researcher's school at the time of the study from participating.

Homogeneous sampling is the method for selecting study participants for one-on-one semi-structured interviews. According to Palinkas et al. (2015) homogeneity allows the researcher to focus on a specific subgroup in-depth, focus on interviewing, on decreasing variation, and to simplify analysis. Upon completing the surveys, the researcher selected ten participants to participate in one-on-one interviews through purposeful sampling. Each of these parent participants had students attending the school district during their time of homelessness.

As an incentive for parents participating in this study, the researcher offered 20 parents who completed the survey a \$10 gift card if they provided their contact information. Fourteen



participants completed the online survey. Twelve of them provided their contact information. The researcher contacted all 12 about the possibility of participating in the one-on-one interviews; ten participants remained interested. Parents who agreed to participate in the one-on-one interviews were given a \$35 gift card for their full participation. The gift cards were available for use at a local store that sells clothing, groceries, toiletries, and other products. The store was selected due to its proximity to the community center and the number of store chains located in neighboring areas.

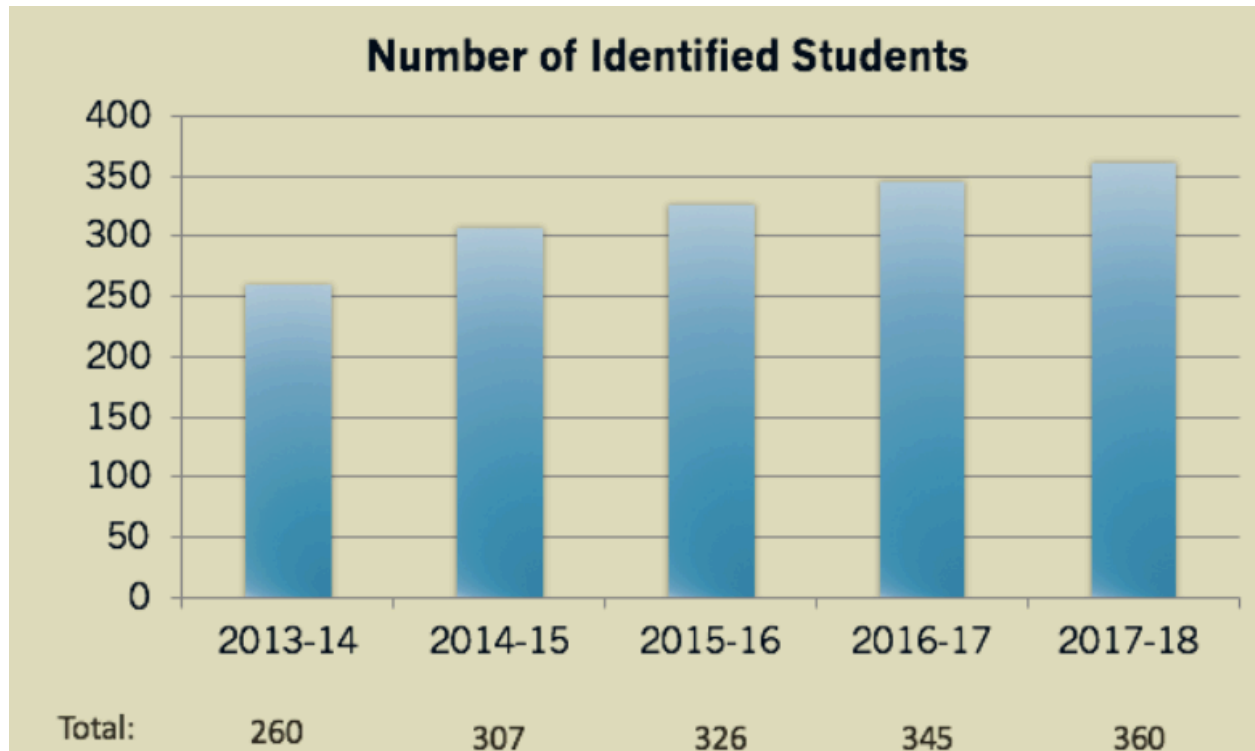
### ***3.6. Setting***

The county where the research took place is in Southeastern Michigan. According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), the population for this county was approximately 369,208. The city where the research took place is the largest city within the county and the fifth-largest city in the state of Michigan (World Population Review, 2019). The public-school district in this city provides school-related services to three preschools, 20 elementary, two K-8, five middle, three comprehensive high and three alternative high schools, one virtual academy, and one adult education program. The school district is one of the largest in the state of Michigan.

The county's intermediate school district works closely with schools and oversees the county's education project. The purpose of the education project is to ensure students who are homeless are successful in school. According to the intermediate school district, there were 1,200 school-aged children declared homeless in the county during the 2015–2016 school year (Washtenaw ISD, 2019). The number of homeless school-aged children within the school district as of May 2018 was 360. This number was higher than previous years. The chart in Figure 1 was created by the district's McKinney-Vento Liaison to highlight the 5-year end-of-year (EOY) data trends regarding the number of homeless students enrolled in the district. At the time of this study,

the district had not updated the number of homeless students attending its school for the years following the 2017–2018 school year.

*Figure 1: Number of Identified Homeless Students in the School District*



The school district involved in this research has one McKinney-Vento Liaison who works closely with the intermediate school district in supporting school-aged homeless children. Additionally, the school district adopted a board policy on student homelessness. The policy has been reauthorized three times since 2003 and reiterates the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act for students who meet the federal definition of homelessness. The policy also details the purpose of the district's homeless liaison.

The district allocates funding for homeless families once Title funds are received from the state. However, the needs of families could potentially be much greater than the amount of

funding provided. The possible lack of funding is especially so in cash-strapped school districts or districts where there are many homeless families. Below is a table with figures that provides funding amount for the district included in this study. The funding listed was allocated for homeless families enrolled in the district in the last five school years. It is important to note that the amounts listed may not be actual spending and may not represent the total cost for transportation.

*Table 1: Funding for Homeless Families (within the district included in this study)*

**Funding for Homeless Families**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Funding/ Purpose</b>	<b>Transportation</b>
2020	\$10,000 for student support	\$30,000 for transportation
2019	\$10,000 for student support	\$30,000 for transportation
2018	\$10,000 for student support	\$30,000 for transportation
2017	\$35,000- no separation for transportation	N/A
2016	\$35,000- no separation for transportation	N/A

**3.6.1. Enrollment**

Families enrolled in the school district being studied must complete required enrollment forms. A pre-enrollment form provides the district with general information (parent and student names, contact information, and street address). The application to register is not complete until all required documentation (identification, student birth certificate, immunization, and proof of residency) are provided. Families who declare they are homeless and reside with family members or live temporarily at a shelter are contacted by the district's liaison for additional information and

to begin the process of additional supports. For homeless families, schools may enroll students without parents having the required documentation needed.

### ***3.7. Study Participants***

The study participants were scheduled to be interviewed in a setting which they are familiar with – the local community center. The community center is in the lower part of Southeastern Michigan and is within the largest city in its county. The community center is in the city where the study took place. The researcher had planned to hold semi-structured one-on-one interviews at the community center. This location was selected to ensure the comfort of the study participants – not all parents are comfortable in the school setting and some parents have had negative interactions with school personnel. The local community center is the city's hub where parents who are living in poverty can go for resources and support. According to the Community Action Network, 75% of the 260+ households served at the community center have low income.

The community center provides free food, training, student tutorial assistance, and other familial resources for families. Additionally, the community center's director works closely with the schools to try and meet the needs of its students. The researcher is familiar with the inner workings of the community center. Furthermore, the researcher has volunteered time and attended community events at this location.

### ***3.8. Parent Survey***

The electronic link to the parent survey was sent to the district's McKinney-Vento Liaison, building administrators, directors of area shelters, and the local community centers for distribution. Additionally, the link to the parent survey and information about the study were given to building administrators to include in parent bulletins. The primary purpose of the parent survey was to gather background information on parents and to identify participants for the one-on-one

interviews. Information from the surveys was used to inform the study and share background information about parents who participated in the interviews.

### ***3.9. Interview Protocol***

Participants in qualitative studies are interviewed to discover what they are thinking and feeling (Patton, 1990). Bogdan and Biklen (2016) report interviewing in qualitative studies begins with the understanding that gathering information from others is significant, purposeful, and can be straightforward and precise. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used to extract the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children. Castillo-Montoya (2016) reports that interviews give researchers “rich and detailed qualitative data for understanding participants’ experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences” (p. 811). The researcher chose interviews to bring to life the experiences and perceptions of the parents participating in this study.

Rabionet (2011) outlines six stages to conducting semi-structured interviews: “selecting the type of interview; establishing ethical guidelines, crafting the interview protocol; conducting and recording the interview; analyzing and summarizing the interview; and reporting the findings” (p. 563). The researcher utilized these six stages during the interview process. Ethical guidelines included having informed consent from all participants. Additional ethical guidelines included informing each participant of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time, protecting participants’ confidentiality by using pseudonyms, and following all Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols for human subject applications according to the University of Michigan-Flint.

According to Yeono, R. Ismail, N.H. Ismail, and Hamzah (2018), establishing reliable interview protocols are essential when gathering qualitative data because the “interview protocol increases the effectiveness of an interview process by ensuring comprehensive information is

obtained within the allocated time” (p. 270). During the interview process, the researcher began with introductions, thanked the participants for their time, reiterated the purpose of the study, provided an overview of the interview process (including asking for permission to record interviews), and answered any questions. After reviewing the protocol and answering questions from the participants, the researcher asked the questions constructed for the interview (see Appendix G).

Questions were open-ended, allowing each participant to share their lived experiences while responding to each. Interview questions should be “carefully worded and arranged, with the intention of taking each respondent through the same questions, in the same order” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 75). All questions were asked according to the numerical order they were written in by the researcher.

Trustworthiness was an essential component of this study. Glesne (2016) explains trustworthiness focuses on the quality and accuracy of a study. In considering reliability, a researcher must consider the research and how the information was collected for the study. To ensure the integrity of the study, the researcher spent time reviewing the recorded interviews and revising the transcriptions as needed, seeking external input from the dissertation chair on the work completed, saving and organizing all documents collected as a result of the research, and engaging in a reflection on the study.

### ***3.10. Data Collection***

After receiving IRB approval from the University of Michigan-Flint, the researcher sent an email (Appendix A) to district principals and the district’s McKinney-Vento Liaison. An email (Appendix B) was also sent to local community centers and local shelters for parents. The email consisted of an introduction, flyer, and letter for study participants.

Flyers (Appendix C) outlining the study's significance were posted at local community centers and homeless shelters. Additional leaflets were shared with the district's McKinney-Vento Liaison and school administrators to disseminate to parents. Administrators were asked to post flyers in their school offices and their electronic communication to parents.

A parent letter (Appendix D) requesting participation was shared with possible study participants. The parent letter was distributed to the district's McKinney-Vento Liaison, school administrators, posted in the local community center, and emailed to participants. The letter outlined the purpose of the study, information regarding participants' confidentiality, participants' roles and expectations, and the benefits of fully participating in the study.

Yin (2009) suggests case studies authenticate data results, which increases the trustworthiness of a study. The parent survey and interviews were the primary collection tools used to inform this study. Parents who agreed to participate and who met the criteria were given the survey (Appendix E). The survey link was shared via email or by a QR code. The contents of the survey included informing participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and without any effect on existing services received. The survey also included a separate link for parents who wanted to submit their contact information to receive the \$10 for completing the survey as well as a link to leave contact information if they were interested in the one-on-one interviews.

The researcher established a research protocol for interviewing participants. Researchers institute protocols to "take notes during the interview about the responses of the interviewer. It also helps a researcher organize thoughts on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the respondent" (Creswell, 2007, p. 135). In addition to the interview protocol, the researcher was intentional in

crafting interview questions. These questions were written and refined as needed to ensure they captured the essence of the study. Yin (2003) suggests crafting and asking good questions is essential for case study researchers. The feedback from the parent surveys allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the parents' backgrounds. This feedback also assisted the researcher in modifying some of the research questions for the one-on-one interviews.

Patton (1990) affirms qualitative interviewing is designed to uncover what a person is thinking. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were completed with parents who agreed to participate in the study. The interviews were initially going to be conducted face-to-face and would have served as a follow-up method to the surveys that were completed by the research participants. The interview questions (Appendix G) were constructed and transcribed by the researcher and consisted of open-ended questions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) attest "standardized, open-ended interviews consist of a set of questions, carefully worded and arranged, with the intention of taking each respondent through the same questions, in the same order" (p. 75). During the interviews, each participant was asked the questions outlined in the interview protocol.

By early March 2020, after the study was approved, there was a global pandemic. Coronavirus (COVID-19) took captive the United States and many other parts of the world. An executive order from the Governor of Michigan ordered school buildings closed for the remainder of the 2019–2020 school year. To prevent the spread of the virus, people were ordered to remain in their homes. Sadly, many lives were lost. As a result of COVID-19, the researcher had to change the approach for conducting one-on-one interviews. The researcher contacted the twelve parents who noted on the optional parent contact form (Appendix F) that they were interested in being interviewed. Contact was made by email or phone, depending on the information they included on the contact form. Ten of the parents returned calls or replied to an email noting their continued



interest. The researcher created a schedule, including dates and times, for phone interviews with each participant.

The phone interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability and took two weeks to complete. Each meeting lasted 30–55 minutes. The process for the phone interviews included:

- A greeting, thanking the participant for participating in the study.
- The reading of the parent permission letter. The researcher asked each participant for a verbal agreement.
- The reading of the interview protocol.
- The researcher highlighting confidentiality and the participants' right to end the interview at any time.

During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked, as needed, by the researcher. Follow-up questions allowed for clarification and limited ambiguity in the participants' responses. The researcher transcribed and recorded each interview. After each interview concluded, the researcher thanked the participant and asked how he/she would like to receive the gift card. The researcher mailed gift cards to three of the participants. The gift cards for the seven remaining participants were distributed on agreed-upon days and times at the local store where the gift cards were purchased.

The researcher reviewed the information collected from the interviews and looked for common themes. Additionally, the researcher coded and categorized responses from participants. According to Saldaña (2016), in a qualitative study, coding consists of a word or word phrases that symbolizes, assigns, and captures the essence of the study. Themes that emerged from coding and

categorizing data provided more in-depth information regarding parents' experiences and perceptions of school-related services for their homeless school-aged children.

It was important to the researcher that multiple sources of evidence were collected for this study. According to Yin (2003), "multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues" (p. 98). The researcher used documentation as a method of data collection. Documentation on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 was used to understand the educational related services homeless parents should receive if they have school-aged children enrolled in public school. This document guided the researcher in understanding what the school district may or may not be providing to its homeless families.

The researcher worked to ensure the reliability of the study. Golafshani (2003) writes when stable instruments are used in a qualitative study, the results should also be firm: "a high degree of stability indicates a high degree of reliability, which means the results are repeatable" (p. 599). The researcher took meticulous notes and record-keeping and considered this paramount. Perspectives from human subjects were without researcher bias, and the researcher prioritized reporting information with accuracy.

### ***3.11. Data Analysis***

The researcher purchased the program, Dedoose© to organize the research data after the initial and secondary coding was completed. The audio from each interview was uploaded with an encrypted password set by the researcher. All themes were placed in Dedoose©, organized and charted for frequency. The audio uploaded to Dedoose© software did not include any identifiable information of the participants. The researcher transcribed and analyzed the data by looking for patterns and themes as the data was coded and categorized. Creswell (2007) suggests there are

three analysis strategies in the data analysis process: (1) preparing and organizing documents to be analyzed, (2) using coding to reduce the data into themes, and (3) characterizing the data with tables and figures. The researcher used two coding methods to analyze the data.

The first cycle coding method used in this study was *in vivo* coding. Saldaña (2016) explains *in vivo* coding “uses the direct language of participants as codes rather than research-generated words and phrases” (p. 71). This coding was crucial to the study as it relies on the participants’ perceptions and realities of their lived experiences with K-12 schools while homelessness. Elliott and Jordan (2010) suggest using this type of coding allows researchers to capture the participants’ everyday commonly used language and experiences.

Focused coding was the second cycle coding method. Focused coding looks for the most used codes to create the most important categories (Saldaña, 2016). Furthermore, Saldaña (2016) explains focused coding allows the researcher to compare codes across the groups to ensure comparability and transferability. Focused coding allowed the researcher to streamline the *in vivo* coding process and develop categories relevant to parents’ perceptions of school-related services for their school-aged children.

After summarizing the surveys and questionnaires, the researcher analyzed data for common themes. Themes resulted from coding and categorizing the data. According to Saldaña (2016), “a theme is an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 199). Furthermore, Kirkman et al. (2014) suggest “thematic analysis is an efficient and flexible means by which social researchers can organize complex qualitative data and try to find connections among the accounts of experience given by individual people” (p. 726). The researcher used themes to connect and identify categories constructed as a result of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Narrative analysis was used to present research findings. A narrative analysis allows the researcher to assemble meaning from the participants' lived experiences. It also allows the participants to narrate their own experiences (Glesne, 2016). By asking semi-structured open-ended questions, the researcher was able to collect participant narratives by transcribing and audio-recording one-on-one interview responses. To ensure generalization, themes and patterns were cross-referenced, compared, and contrasted. There were ten statements or questions for the one-on-one interviews, there were four main points designed to capture the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions. These four statements are in bold lettering.

1. While homeless, did you keep your child at the school of origin? Please explain your reasoning for keeping your child at the school of origin or enrolling your child in a different school.
- 2. Describe any supportive services the school/school district provided to you and your child because of being homeless.**
3. While homeless, please describe your experience with your child's teacher(s).
- 4. While homeless, please describe your experience with the homeless liaison, principal, secretary, and school counselor.**
- 5. Describe the most significant action the school or district took to support you and your child during your time of homelessness.**
6. Describe any school-related activities your child participated in that took place beyond the school day (i.e. sports, clubs, activities).
- 7. Describe any school-related barriers you feel hindered you or your child from participating in school activities because of being homeless.**

8. Do you feel your child's school communicated and supported you while you were homeless, yes or no? Please explain your response to this question.
9. Please describe your understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act.
10. Is there anything else you want to share or would like me to know?

The narrative analysis was beneficial in interpreting the responses of each of the participants. Patton (2002) explains "the central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings" (p. 116). Study participants had the opportunity to narrate their own unique experiences during the interviews with the researcher.

Memoranda were kept on each parent participant. These notes included interview times, notes shared from each participant that were not a part of the questions, research activities, any problems that occurred, the number of children recorded in the surveys, any information provided from the participant after the interview ended.

### **3.12. Summary**

The researcher used a qualitative case study methodological approach to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of homeless parents of school-aged children. The researcher asked interested participants who met the criteria to complete an online survey. Many of these participants responded to a request for semi-structured one-on-one interviews that were held via telephone. The information collected was analyzed and codes to develop themes. The findings were presented through narrative analysis and shared in Chapter IV.

### **Chapter IV Research Findings**

Homelessness is a perpetual crisis that continues to plague individuals and families with school-aged children. According to Swick et al. (2014), there are many stressors that homeless parents endure, including those that lead to being homeless, stressors of trying to become independent again, and the stressors of parenting while homeless.

The researcher used a qualitative case study method to examine parents' experiences and perceptions relative to the phenomenon of being homeless and receiving educational supports for their school-aged children. The primary research question for this study was the following: What are the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act?

A qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews was conducted on ten study participants who had experienced homelessness within the last five years and had children in grades Prek-12 attending the school district. To ensure the confidentiality of study participants, pseudonyms were used, participant information was stored in a secure location, and participants were aware they of their right to withdraw at any time.

Table 2 provides general information about each of the study's ten participants who completed the qualitative survey and agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The table includes pseudonyms, age, marital status, living status, and the number of children each study participant had at the time of their interview. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the participants' race.

Table 2: Summary of Participants

Parent	Age	Marital Status	Living Status	Family
Barbara	31	Single	Stable Housing	Mother and four children
Harold	66	Single	Homeless	Father and three children
Heather	42	Single	Stable Housing	Mother and three children
Linda	34	Single	Stable Housing	Mother and two children
Malcolm	35	Single	Stable Housing	Father and two children
Nawra	34	Married	Homeless	Mother, Father, four children
Noel	28	Single	Homeless	Mother and three children
Stephanie	41	Single	Stable Housing	Mother and three children
Tamika	45	Single	Homeless	Grandmother and one child
Zara	64	Single	Homeless	Grandmother and one child

Figure 2: Participants' Race

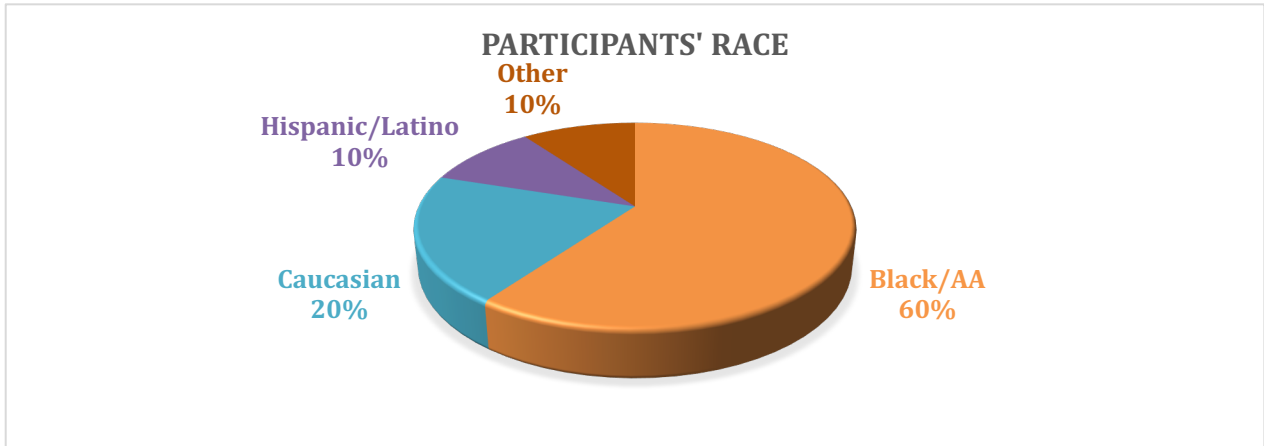
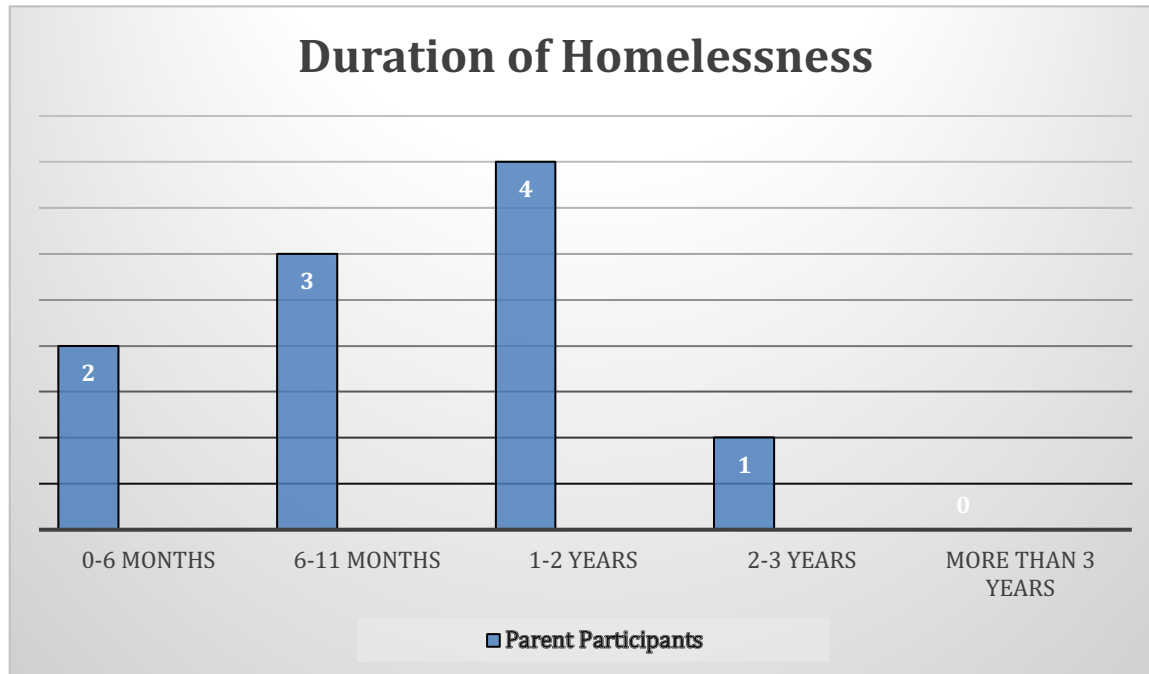


Figure 3 displays the duration each study participant experienced being homeless. Five families remained homeless at the time of the study.

*Figure 3: Duration of Homelessness of Study Participants*



The *in vivo* coding and focused coding revealed several noticeable categories: appreciation and gratitude, limitations, communication, fear, lack of knowledge, and a desire to protect their children. Themes emerged from these categories that assisted in detailing the experiences of each participant. According to DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000), a theme “brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience, and its variant manifestations” (p. 362). Themes identified from coding and categorizing the data from this study are included in Table 3.



*Table 3: Categories and Themes*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>THEMES</b>
Appreciation and gratitude	Appreciation for who or what?
Communication	Experience with school personnel
Fear	A fear of not knowing the outcome of their situation
Unknowledgeable: McK-V Act	Semi- knowledgeable of services/resources
Limitations	Barriers to participating in school-related activities/learning
Parent options	The importance of maintaining some control

#### ***4.1. Categories***

##### ***4.1.1. Appreciation and Gratitude***

The theme of gratitude was shared by nine of the ten participants, who expressed an overall appreciation of the actions that school district personnel took to provide school-related supplemental services during their time of homelessness. As mentioned in the literature review, there is a lack of information about the views of parents on the educational services provided by the school district during the time they experience homelessness. Additionally, Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, and Canfield (2016) suggest there is, “limited research has been conducted about the McKinney-Vento Act’s effectiveness, considering the importance of the policy” (p. 57). In this study, parents expressed their gratitude for services received. One participant shared, “I don’t know what me and my kids would do without this school district!” At the onset of homelessness, study participants shared that they did not have the basic necessities to provide for their children. As school personnel communicated with families and made contributions of food, shelter, transportation, clothing, and other resources and supports during this time, all the participants were grateful for what they had received. Another participant commented, “People at the school helped.

The school has been amazing with their supports.” A third participant declared, “The counselor was excellent and went above and beyond to help my family when she found out we were homeless!” The overall gratitude expressed by most participants in this study was shared with the researcher at the onset of each interview and again at the conclusion.

#### ***4.1.2. Communication***

Nine of the study participants expressed their lack of control over their living situation while facing homelessness. As the stressors of homelessness are plentiful, they are also a reality that many parents endure. A common theme for study participants was the importance of ongoing communication from their children’s schools. One participant noted, “The school liaison called me all the time.” While another participant shared, “I have people at the school who communicates with me all the time. The secretary was always very understanding. The principal was there to help maintain stability for me and my daughter.” Respectful two-way communication and relationships with the schools allowed study participants to feel important and valued. Some parents shared how school personnel consistently communicated with them, while others did not receive the same experience. One participant did not feel the school communicated with her while she was homeless, stating, “The school did not reach out nor communicate with me. However, the liaison did the best she can, but not the school.” All study participants mentioned ongoing communication with the district’s homeless liaison. Parent responses reinforced literature that highlights the importance of ongoing communication from the school. Additionally, Swick and Bailey (2004) affirm that districts must be intentional in having ongoing communication with families who are homeless concerning their needs, experiences with the school, and the educational development of their school-aged children.

#### ***4.1.3. Fear***

Seven of the participants expressed a fear of the unknown because of being homeless. One parent felt that because of being homeless, his children's maternal grandmother was working with the school district to "take my children from me." At the onset of homelessness, some parents were afraid they would have to move their children to other schools. Another participant shared, "I had initial concerns when we first became homeless and had to move further away with family. I wondered if I would have to change my kids' schools. However, the liaison told me I didn't have to." Study participants who moved into shelters or with family members outside of their school's attendance area were unsure how they were going to get their children back and forth to school. Expressions of fear about shelter, food, and school learning and activities were contributors to stress for all participants. When discussing the time at the shelter, a participant shared, "If you are not granted more extensions and have nowhere to go, the shelter will contact Child Protective Services so your kids can be taken." The literature review draws attention to the fear many homeless families face as a result of their homeless status. Shinn, Gibson-Benton, and Brown (2015) attribute the separation of families to homelessness, noting that homelessness directly increases rates of foster care placements. Additionally, the National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that 62% of homeless children looking for emergency housing are placed in the foster care program.

#### ***4.1.4. Semi-Knowledgeable of Services and Unknowledgeable of McK-V Act***

A common theme noted in the literature review and manifested in all of the participants was their semi-knowledge of services and lack of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. Most participants were able to articulate a service or resource they received from the school district. However, all study participants struggled to articulate their understanding of the McK-V Act. One

participant stated, “It helps with school supplies and transportation, and the school personnel helps families.” Another participant stated, “This is to assist people who are homeless and to provide free lunch for kids in school.” Three of the study participants did not know what the McKinney-Vento Act was. One participant replied, “I don’t know what that is.” Six of the participants responded by mentioning the district’s liaison, or resources that help families in need. There was one participant who knew what the purpose of the McK-V Act was; however, she could not elaborate on specific details. Miller (2011) asserts that a large percentage of families are unaware of the existence of the McK-V Act. As a result, these families may be unable to take advantage of its full services.

#### ***4.1.5. Limitations***

All study participants faced barriers which prevented them from accessing some school-related activities for their children. Miller (2015) emphasizes the restrictions often placed on homeless families, writing that “they are often restricted by inadequate time, resources, and understandings of how to effectively navigate social and educational systems” (p. 5). One parent tried to sign her child up for a sports team: “I had no way of getting him to the doctor for a physical.” Another participant had transportation but could not afford the gasoline that was needed for the long distance of traveling back and forth to the school. This participant received some gas cards from the district but lamented “they were not enough.” A common obstacle for all participants was transportation. In a study completed by Wynne et al. (2014), the most noted barrier for homeless families obtaining McKinney-Vento school-related services was transportation. Other restrictions included childcare, lack of finances, or work-related conflicts.

#### ***4.1.6. Parent Options***

All study participants verbalized the need to do what they could for their children. Each parent worked to keep their children in the school of origin during the time of homelessness. One of the participants indicated, “I wanted as little change as possible. I didn’t want to keep changing the schools.” Another participant felt keeping her children in their school of origin was safe and consistent, “I wanted my children to remain in a safe, education setting- a place where they were comfortable and familiar.” As mentioned by Miller (2011), the McKinney-Vento Act requires that school-aged homeless students have the option of maintaining their enrollment status with their school of origin while homeless. During a time of stress and uncertainty, parents expressed the need to provide consistency in their children’s lives. This included participants choosing to keep their children in their school of origin, some parents signing up for school-related activities, reaching out to the district for additional resources, and one parent separating his children to ensure they all were housed and cared for.

#### ***4.2. Participant Stories***

##### ***4.2.1. Barbara’s Story***

Barbara is a 31-year-old single mother of four children. Two of her children attended the same school within the district; the youngest two were less than 3 years of age. Barbara was homeless for 1–2 years. At the time of the study, she was employed and living in permanent housing just outside of the school district.

At the onset of being homeless, Barbara chose to keep her two children in their school of origin, stating:

Initially, I was afraid to tell the school about my living situation. I didn’t know what to expect. However, one of my kids mentioned it to his teacher, then the principal reached out

to me to find out how she could support us. That's when I shared my homeless situation with her. I was happy to hear the children could remain at their school! My daughter is involved in the Girl Scouts. Both of my children made friends and like their school a lot.

Barbara also shared her appreciation of the district's liaison and the services that were provided: "She [the liaison] paid for before/after-school care for my children. She also provided gas cards so that I was able to get my children back and forth to school and purchased school supplies for them." Barbara mentioned her gratitude for the reading program that her daughter was a part of during the school day. Barbara did not seem to be aware that this program was a requirement by the district for all students who struggled in reading. Barbara seemed eager to discuss her family's adventure of being "adopted for Christmas." The school adopted her family and because of this, her children experienced a "great Christmas with lots of gifts to open."

Barbara also shared her thoughts about the communication from the school and district liaison, noting, "When the school and liaison found out about my homeless situation, they went above and beyond and would check-in with me regularly. I appreciate all they did." Barbara further mentioned that there were "no behavioral issues with my children during our time of homelessness; yet the school made great efforts to stay in contact with me." This statement from Barbara implies that her perception was that schools only reach out to parents with behavioral concerns.

Barbara was asked about school-related barriers that hindered her or her children from participating in school activities. She reported that not having gasoline for her vehicle was a huge factor. Although she received and was grateful for the gas cards provided by the district's liaison, she felt, "they were not enough as I had to drive long distances back and forth each school day." Other barriers included persistent car trouble and conflicts with her work schedule. As a result of these barriers, Barbara did not have her children participate in any after-school activities.

Barbara described her understanding of the McK-V Act as “resources, a program to help people.” However, she was not able to elaborate on specifics of the “program.” When asked to clarify, Barbara expressed her interactions with the homeless liaison and the principal who supported her: “they went above and beyond” and “the principal continues to support my family today.”

Overall, Barbara expressed how she appreciated the district supporting her and her children during their time of homelessness by providing resources so that her children could remain in their school. Unaware of what she was supposed to receive through the McK-V Act, Barbara was grateful for what was provided by the school district.

#### ***4.2.2. Harold's Story***

Harold is a 66-year-old single father of three teenagers, all attending schools in the district. As a result of being homeless, Harold and his children lived in his vehicle before temporarily living in a hotel. However, after two weeks and with no job, Harold was unable to continue to pay the hotel bill. To ensure housing, at the time of this study, Harold was separated from his children. He lived in one location while his three children lived with his family.

Harold insisted on keeping his children at their school of origin, reporting, “My kids were thriving and doing well when we were first homeless. Just because our living situation changed, don't mean their schools had to change.” During his interview, Harold expressed the fear of being homeless and the personality changes he saw in his children: “They were happy before we started going through this. Then, I saw a difference. They didn't even want to get up and go to school.” Harold also expressed his fear of not being with his children. “We are still homeless and separated. I'm afraid for my children, not being with them each day, it's the unknown.”

While Harold was appreciative of the school's counselor for connecting him to the district's homeless liaison, he expressed what he considered to be "a lack of supports" from other school personnel:

There was some interaction from the teachers relating to parent conferences, but that was all. All of their teachers knew we were homeless because the counselors told them, but they didn't reach out. But I'm really not sure how much more teachers could do! I probably seen the principal one time. The liaison was initially supportive. She put us in a hotel for two weeks. After that, I would reach out to her and I got very little response.

Harold's family is an example of the extremes some homeless families suffer because of their living conditions. Harold expressed deep gratitude for the two-week hotel stay the district provided, as it allowed him to be with his children under one roof. After Harold shared that he and his children spent the two weeks in a hotel, he expressed the following, "I had to make a decision to separate my family so that my kids had a roof over their heads."

Throughout his interview, Harold reiterated how his children's counselors were very supportive, "The counselor was excellent and went above and beyond to help my family when she found out we were homeless." He communicated how the district's liaison provided him with "three gas cards and bus cards for my children." Harold was not happy about the gas cards, stating "You have to document pick-up and drop-offs in order to get more gas cards." Harold did not feel that parents should have to worry about documenting their mileage to receive assistance.

Harold voiced concerns regarding barriers that prevented his children from participating in school-related activities after school. According to Harold, his two most significant limitations were money and transportation. "My children received a bus card and a referral to a teen center. I



wasn't comfortable with them taking the bus in the fall/winter when it got dark early." Harold expressed a yearning for the school district to do more to help his children:

It seems like the school district and the teachers view this as an everyday thing. That's just the feeling I had. I remember presenting an idea to a school worker and the response was something like they expect people to be homeless because once you're homeless, you'll be homeless again. Everybody don't want to be in this situation.

With Harold's children attending high school, he shared how they missed out on numerous high school activities because of the barriers they endured while homeless.

Harold did not have a keen understanding of the McK-V Act. When asked about this, Harold responded, "I have never heard this before." However, Harold went on to say, "The coordinator did explain this to me as best she could, but I don't know what it's about."

During the interview, Harold shared how hopeless he would often get. This feeling of hopelessness may be because of his current living conditions and not being with his children. Harold is also a veteran. Before ending our call, he shared how "more should be done to help me and my family be together."

#### ***4.2.3. Heather's Story***

Heather is a 42-year-old single mother of three school-aged children, all attending schools in the district. At the time of the interview, Heather was not employed. Heather and her family were homeless for 1–2 years. During her time of homelessness, she and her children couch-surfed with family and friends before living in a temporary shelter. She now receives government assistance and has found stable housing.

Being homeless was a time in their lives that were, according to Heather, “very scary and frustrating” for her and her family. Heather shared how she yearned for her children to experience some consistency:

I wanted my children to remain in a safe, educational setting – a place where they were comfortable and familiar. Being homeless created an abnormal experience for us. Their school provided some normalcy for them and for me. After we lost our home, their school was the only stable environment they went to, almost daily, that wasn’t taken away from them.

Heather shared how grateful she was for a school district that had been “super supportive” of her and her children by allowing them to remain in their schools while homeless. She expressed how the school cared for her children by “sending home soap, checking in on her children regularly, providing extra supports in reading and math during extended day activities.” Heather was appreciative of how the teachers reached out to the counselors and the district’s liaison to provide additional supports:

The liaison provided backpacks, school supplies, and transportation for my kids. She gave me gas cards when my car wasn’t working. She also provided a two-week hotel stay for us. When my kids struggled with reading and math, she paid for the Title I after-school reading and math class so they could receive extra help. When we first became homeless, there were days when I had to ride the bus to take my kids to school and pick them up. I was so happy when she provided the transportation service for this. The liaison was awesome! She always worked with me to find solutions for our needs.

Heather may not have been informed that there are no costs incurred when students receive Title I services. Title I opportunities that exist during and beyond the school day are provided by federal

grants based on the number of students in the district who qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch and other data measures.

Heather did have limitations in trying to attend additional school-related activities beyond the school day. When her car broke down, transportation was provided by the school district for learning and activities that took place during the school day or immediately following school hours. However, Heather had no way of getting her children to after-school events where families had to leave the school and return in the evening. “After catching the bus to get them to/from school during the school day, I did not have the energy to get back on the bus for evening activities.” Additionally, Heather worked for a brief time, and her work schedule conflicted with school-related activities.

Heather lamented how she and her friends struggled because of homelessness and lived in fear of losing their children:

Being homeless is a trying time and is very hard. At the onset of this experience, I was afraid that the school might call CPS [Child Protective Services]. I have friends in other school districts that this happened to! However, this district was so supportive, and they never judged me or my children. The office staff checked on me and the teachers never judged. They would notice when my kids were struggling, or the times they weren't happy, and they helped them. The teachers in the school are very attentive, even with all the students they teach, they focused on my kids. I love the district so much!

Heather's understanding of the McK-V Act was that “it helps with school supplies and transportation, and the school personnel helps families.” Heather was not able to provide any further explanation on what she believes the McK-V Act to mean.

#### *4.2.4. Linda's Story*

Linda is a 34-year-old single mother of two children. After being homeless for 6–11 months, Linda found stable housing in a neighboring city just outside of the school district. While homeless, Linda and her children lived with family or friends. She is currently employed.

Linda was a part of her neighborhood community for some time before becoming homeless. Her family lived in the area and she was connected to the community's resources. When she became homeless, she knew that she wanted to keep her children in their school of origin:

We lived in the community for a very long time. We had resources and we were close to our family. After becoming homeless, I yearned for consistency for my kids. I knew it would be a challenge to get them back and forth to their schools, but I was willing to take the risk. The schools care about their families and the people in the community.

Linda was eventually provided with transportation services for her children by the district's liaison. In her responses regarding school personnel, Linda spoke highly about the supports she received:

The schools and the liaison did everything for my kids. The liaison was sweet, wonderful, and hardworking. She provided transportation, toiletries, clothes, gift cards, and resources like recommending me to parenting classes. The principals, counselor and teachers were also very supportive. They would send food home with my kids and check-in on them all the time. They would contact me when they noticed issues going on with the kids, like if they were tardy a lot. Life's challenges can really beat you down, but the district was supportive and understanding. I am very appreciative of all they did for me and my kids.

While Linda appreciated the school's provision of options for parent conferences and before- and after-school childcare at the elementary level, she highlighted school-related barriers that hindered her and her children from participating in other school activities:

My kids did not participate in many after-school activities, although they wanted to. I had to work most times. If one kid wanted to sign up for an activity, what was I going to do with the other one? I had to make sure my kids were home while I was working in the evening time. There was also an issue with transportation. How were they supposed to get home from school activities? I had to make sure there were no issues with anyone calling anybody on me or my kids, so I made sure they were home when I was working.

Linda was not able to explain what the McK-V Act is. She only responded by stating, "It is amazing, the liaison is very sweet and always checked in on us."

#### ***4.2.5. Malcolm's Story***

Malcolm is a 35-year-old single father of two children. Malcolm found stable housing after being homeless for 2–3 years. Both of Malcolm's children attended the same school within the school district during their time of homelessness. When Malcolm became homeless, he moved out of the area to move in with a "girlfriend for a period of time." Malcolm would catch the bus with his children to get them to and from school before going to work when he had a job. Malcolm declared that he did not want to change schools after becoming homeless:

Well first, I didn't know that [changing schools] was even an option. But when the school found out I was homeless, the principal told me cuz [because] she saw me struggling with catching the bus and getting my kids to school on time. She saw the struggle we went through in the winters, bad weather, all that. She told me that there were supports available and I could choose to keep my kids at the school or put them in a school closer to where

were staying at the time. I wasn't having that. That school was everything to my kids. The principal and teachers always, always, always called or emailed me for anything good or bad, but it was mostly to help me and my kids.

Malcolm claimed that the children's maternal grandmother "was trying to take the children from me." Malcolm expressed fear that when he became homeless, their grandmother would work with the school district and take his children: "I did my best to provide for them. I did my best in getting them to school every day." Malcolm's voice broke and he struggled with his words as he shared this information.

According to Malcolm, the principal was very supportive and shared his information with the district's McKinney-Vento Liaison. The principal also provided his family with Thanksgiving meals, Christmas gifts, and made sure they were getting extra supports for their learning. He stated, "The principal really looked out for us." Malcolm also shared similar sentiments about the district's liaison:

She [the liaison] was very helpful, like the principal. She immediately provided me with bus cards, then my kids were set up in a taxi to take them back and forth to school. They received backpacks filled with school supplies and she got them clothes. I could tell she was there to help us.

Malcolm faced limitations in trying to involve his children in school-related activities. However, he believed for many of the school-related activities; school personnel worked with him as much as possible to ensure he and his children participated:

When it was time for conferences, the teachers would either call me on the phone or schedule my conferences as soon as school ended when I was there to pick them up. The principal and teachers have dropped materials off to where we were staying before. For

events like movie night or festivals, those started later in the evening. Sometimes I was working. Other times, I didn't have transportation to get there or any money to purchase stuff for my kids if we were to go. Like book fair night. When my kids asked me to go, I thought about how we were going to get there, and I felt some kind of way for not having money to purchase books for them.

Malcolm's voice dropped significantly when he spoke about not being able to attend activities and purchase items for his children, particularly when he talked about the book fair night at the school.

Malcolm could not explain what the McK-V Act is. He was unsure of what was shared with him about this and he was not clear if he heard about this from school personnel or the principal:

I remember the principal mentioning it to me a few times. I believe the liaison person brought it up also. I just know that it's something that allows the school to provide extra supports and resources for families who need it. I don't know more than that. I am just happy the school helped me out in the way they did.

Malcolm ended his phone interview with the researcher by cheerfully stating that he moved his children into a home they can call their own and is receiving government assistance. Although the house is not in the school district, Malcolm insisted that he had no plans for changing school districts: "I will do whatever I got to do so that my kids can graduate from this district."

#### ***4.2.6. Nawra's Story***

Nawra is a 34-year-old married mother of four children. All her children were enrolled in the school district at the time of this study. Nawra is disabled, and at the time of our phone interview, she remained homeless. Nawra was not employed. Nawra and her family have been homeless for 1–2 years. During this time, they lived in a family shelter or with family members.

Nawra chose to keep her children in the school district when they became homeless. She provided some reasons as to why she chose this option:

I had initial concerns when we first became homeless wondering if I would have to change schools. However, the liaison told me I did not have to. One of my kids has an IEP [Individualized Education Plan] and does not handle transition well. The schools know my kids and I did not want to move them around based on where we were going to live. The shelter was not too far from their school. However, there were times when we moved with family and they were further away from the schools. I just wanted what was best for them, that's all.

Nawra disclosed how she did not feel supported by her children's teachers during their time of homelessness: "They knew we were homeless, but they never reached out." When Nawra was asked how the teachers were made aware of this, she replied, "I told the teachers and everyone else at the IEP meeting." Nawra noted that the principal was also in attendance at the meeting. However, she added, "The principal never reached out to me either." Nawra did share her gratitude with the district's homeless liaison in supporting her family. In referring to her experience with the liaison, Nawra shared the following:

She is great. She provided us with gas cards, food, and transportation for the kids getting to and from school. She also gave us clothing, coats, and boots for Christmas. She calls and emails all the time. She even put us in a hotel. We only stayed in the hotel for two nights because the hotel had bed bugs so we couldn't stay there. I really think she does the best she can. Things happened with her, but not the school.

Nawra also shared that she had little experience with the school's secretary. However, when she did, she felt the secretary was "rude and mean with an I don't care attitude."



When Nawra was asked about her understanding of the McK-V Act, she replied, “I don’t know what that is,” followed by silence on the phone. When the researcher knew Nawra was not going to speak further on this topic, she asked her to explain any barriers that may have prevented her children from attending school-related activities. Nawra shared,

We don’t have transportation. I’m pregnant and I’m supposed to be on bed rest. My kids wanted to be in Science Olympiad, but I had no way of getting them there. There are also rules when you live in the shelter and you have to be in at certain times. It is all just too much.

During the phone interview, Nawra repeated several times that she was pregnant and had a chronic illness. She also mentioned that she had undergone some major surgeries. Nawra divulged, “I feel overwhelmed. My mind is blank and in a different place. I can’t function and sometimes I feel like giving up.” The researcher advised Nawra to speak with her family, a counselor, or someone at the shelter about how she was feeling.

#### *4.2.7. Noel’s Story*

Noel is a 28-year-old single mother of three children. Only one of her children was enrolled in the school district during her time of homelessness. Noel and her children were homeless for a duration of 0–6 months. During this time, they lived in a shelter. At the time of the interview with the researcher, Noel remained homeless. She was also unemployed.

When Noel became homeless, she initially moved into a local shelter. She kept her daughter at the school of origin because she “wanted to have as little change as possible for my child.” Noel also knew the shelter was only temporary:

They [the shelter] only let you stay in there for 35 days maximum. After that, it is on a weekly basis, but you must ask each week. If you are not granted more extensions and have

nowhere to go, the shelter will contact CPS [Child Protective Services] so your kids can be taken. Like many parents who are homeless, I was scared out of my mind, counting the days that led up to number 35. This is why it was important to have my daughter maintain some stability.

Noel seemed pleased with the supports she received from school personnel. She expressed her gratitude for the resources given to her, including frequent check-ins from the school. Her appreciation was extended because of the school helping her two younger children as well:

I have people at the school who communicates with me all the time. The secretary was always very understanding. The principal was there to help maintain stability for me and my daughter. He and the behavior specialist always checked in with us. Her teacher donated clothing materials. They even provided stuff for my two younger kids and they don't even go to the school. The liaison person provided a taxi service where they picked up my daughter from the shelter and from my friend's house when we had to move out the shelter. I was impressed that they allowed her to stay at the school when we moved to my friend's house because that was far away.

When Noel's extended time was up at the shelter, she had to move in with friends. The drive to this location was about an hour from her previous residence.

Some impediments prevented Noel and her daughter from participating in school-related activities. Noel spoke candidly about this during her interview:

I can't sign her up for after-school activities. I don't have transportation. She is interested in sports. I would have liked to, but with no money to pay for it and no transportation, that was not going to happen. The school had a literacy night for families that we couldn't go to because we had no vehicle. I hate that my daughter has to miss out on stuff like this.

When Noel was asked about the taxi service, she stated, “The district did this for my daughter to get to and from school during the day.” Noel did not communicate any awareness of the district’s ability to provide transportation for after-school activities.

Noel knew very little about the McK-V Act. She was not able to articulate what the McK-V Act entails and what she could receive because of the act. When asked, Noel communicated, “The liaison coordinator called me once or twice. I heard more about it at the shelter.” When asked what she heard at the shelter, Noel replied, “Just that it helps people.” Noel then shared how the district was bringing her daughter a computer because of the schools being closed due to COVID-19. She seemed to have related this action by the school to the McK-V Act. However, the two are not connected.

#### ***4.2.8. Stephanie’s Story***

Stephanie is a 41-year-old single mother of three children. Two of her children attended schools within the district during the time of the study. Stephanie was homeless for 0–6 months. At the time of the study, she was living in permanent housing outside of the school district and was employed. At the onset of being homeless, Stephanie chose to keep her two children in their schools of origin, noting, “I wanted to do this for consistency for them.” Stephanie did not elaborate further on this question.

Stephanie spoke jubilantly about the supports she received from the district. In sharing her experiences with school personnel, Stephanie explained, “The principals, social worker, teachers, and the homeless liaison were all very helpful. The liaison was actually wonderful.” Stephanie detailed the resources that were provided by the school district:

When we became homeless, the liaison provided us with temporary hotel stay for three weeks. I was desperate and really needed this. She also provided foods, funds, and she

stayed in contact with me throughout this process. The schools even paid for items for my kids. They would always give them snacks during the school day and even to bring home. Teachers were lenient with my kids as well. One of my kids has an IEP. His school knew what we were going through and understood the emotional rollercoasters my son was on. Stephanie felt the school district was “very understanding” of her homeless situation.

Stephanie did not feel there were barriers that prevented her children from attending school-related activities. When asked to describe any barriers, Stephanie replied, “Nothing. My oldest kid would walk around the neighborhood until nighttime with his friends, so I didn’t have time to participate or have my kids participate in any activities. I also did not have a babysitter.” Stephanie also felt the school communicated and supported her while she was homeless, citing, “The schools always communicated with me and so did the liaison. I felt they supported me because they provided all the things I mentioned already.”

Stephanie knew the purpose of the McK-V Act. However, she could not explain what it entails. Stephanie’s responded, “I know this is to assist people who are homeless and to provide free lunch to kids in school.” Many of Stephanie’s answers were brief and straight to the point. Her responses to questions asked focused more on her experiences with the schools, the liaison, and how they supported her and her family during their time of homelessness.

#### ***4.2.9. Tamika’s Story***

Tamika is a 45-year-old single grandmother of one child. Tamika was homeless for 6–11 months and remained homeless at the time of the study. Tamika and her grandchild were living at a local hotel when the phone interview was conducted. She had lived in temporary shelters since her time of homelessness. Tamika was not employed at the time of this study.

Tamika's grandchild had an IEP and Tamika wanted to ensure the "least bit of disruption." To that end, she kept her in the school of origin for consistency purposes: "She has been at the school for 3 years. I didn't want to change that." Tamika also had a great relationship with the principal of the school and her granddaughter's classroom teacher:

The principal calls all the time. He makes sure our needs are met. He checks in and even called on the weekend when we had moved into the shelter. He partnered us up with a mission group and they came and took my granddaughter shopping for clothes. He was just on top of everything. He knows the situation with my daughter, my granddaughter's mom, and he has been very supportive. The teacher came to the hotel to visit us during parent-teacher conference time. She knew I couldn't get to her and she called and arranged a meeting with me at the hotel. She has always been very accommodating and understanding.

Tamika detailed her experience with the district's homeless liaison and the supports she received from her:

The liaison put us up in a hotel for three weeks after we had to leave the shelter. She gave us food and snacks, provided me with names of non-profit agencies that assisted us, and provided transportation for my granddaughter. She even came to the hotel to drop off some food items. She paid for my storage where I had all of my furniture and my granddaughter's bedroom set and toys. The district also tried to help me when I was in my home, but my place was beyond repair.

Tamika also appreciated the liaison for covering the Recreation and Education (Rec & Ed) cost for her daughter to attend after-school activities, "they looked out and provided her with a scholarship so she could participate." However, Tamika was not without barriers to other school-related activities, stating, "The liaison was going to pay for my granddaughter to stay at the after-

school childcare, but they were full.” She also explained, “I couldn’t attend parent activities at the school, like the Playground Planning, because I did not have transportation.”

When Tamika was asked to share her understanding of the McK-V Act, she replied, “The liaison helped with gift cards and food. I also know they provide transportation for students to remain in the same school.” Tamika then expressed concerns she had about helping other parents in need:

Once parents get on their feet, how can we help others by paying it forward? I didn’t know these things were provided by the school when I didn’t need the services. The district should let people know what’s available so they [people who are struggling with homelessness] don’t have to get to their wit’s end before getting help. There were many families in the shelter and hotel with me. Although I was not aware of all the services because I didn’t need them, I’m sure some of the other families could’ve benefited from these additional school services for their children.

Tamika ended her conversation with the researcher by reiterating her appreciation of the supports received from the school district.

#### ***4.2.10. Zarah’s Story***

Zarah is an unemployed 64-year-old single grandmother of one child. Zarah was homeless for 1–2 years and remained homeless at the time of the interview. At the onset of being homeless, Zarah kept her grandchild in the school of origin. Zarah felt her granddaughter “enjoys school and has lots of friends. Education is good for her.”

Zarah spoke openly about the supports she received because of her homeless status:

There was no communication from the school. I really felt they shunned my grandson.

They knew I was homeless because I told them. The teachers were aware that I was

homeless, but there was no contact from them. I also did not hear anything from the principal of the school. I did speak to the counselor a few times and the liaison was very helpful.

When asked by the researcher to share her experience with the liaison, Zarah shared:

She provided us with a hotel room, food, clothes for my grandchild and she had a computer delivered when the schools closed. I am a 64-year-old woman, they could've done more for me and been more supportive. The school could've called to check on me and help me with trying to get social security for my disabled grandchild. The school needs to work hand-and-hand with the liaison.

Zarah noted that the only limitation that prevented her grandson from participating in school-related activities was lacking transportation: "My grandson wanted to sign up for baseball, but I had no way of getting him to the doctor for a physical." In the district included in this study, physicals are required before a student can try out for athletics.

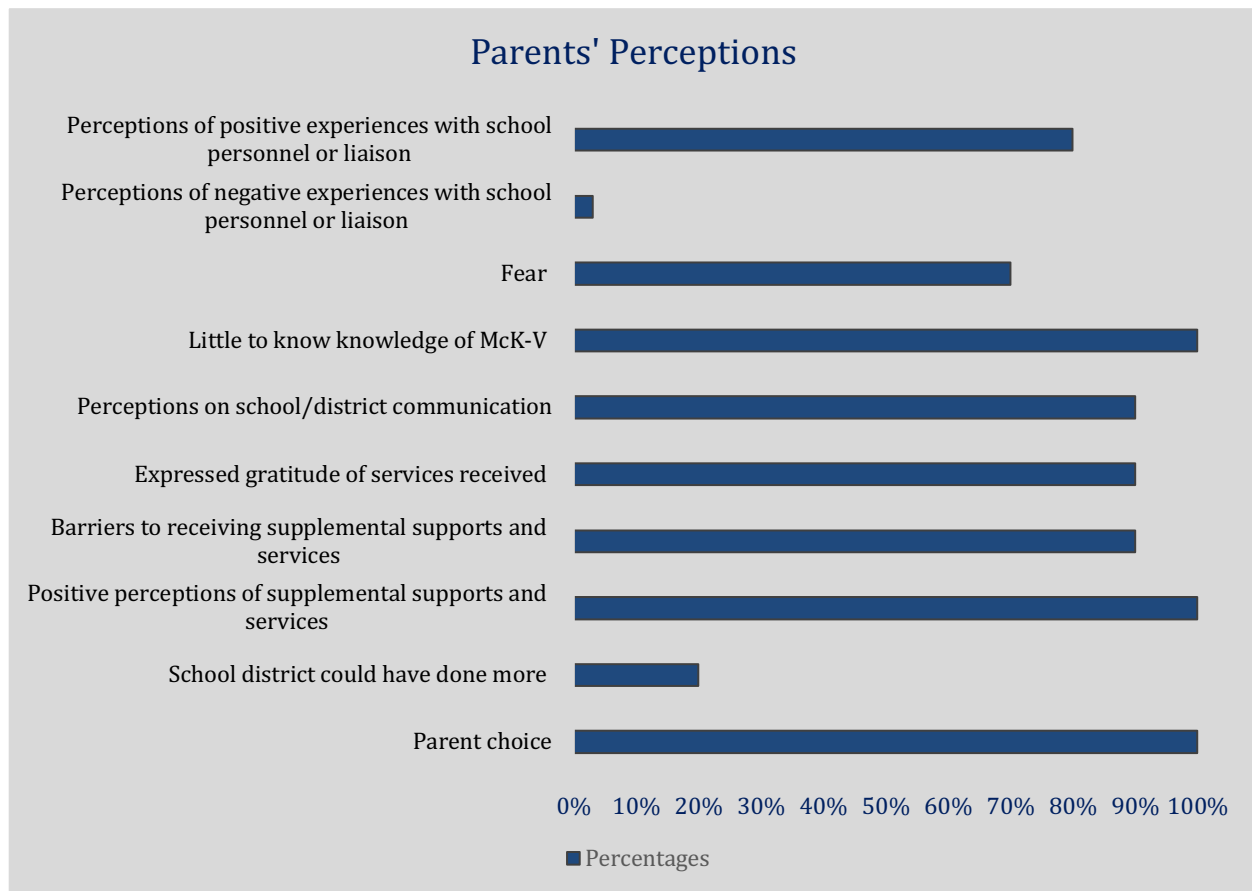
Zarah was not clear on what the McK-V Act is. Her response to this question was, "I read about it." Zarah did not explain any further and, based on her requests for supports, she may not have known what the McK-V Act entails. Zarah shared her frustration with the lack of resources she received for her grandson.

#### ***4.3. Summary***

Each family participating in this study had their own unique experiences. They each had an opportunity to share their realities of being homeless and their perceptions of receiving school-related supplemental supports for their children. The participants shared their experiences of school personnel, supports received, barriers they faced, and their knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. All the study participants struggled with barriers. Many of them communicated having

good experiences with school personnel. All of the participants shared some type of appreciation for supports and/or resources received. The following figure represents the salient themes shared in the narrative analysis. While this is a qualitative study, it is important to provide a visual of the data that emerged from this study.

*Figure 4: Parents' Perceptions*



Through the collection of the study participants' personal stories and lived experiences with a local school district, important themes emerged. Each family received some supports from the school district during their time of homelessness, and they were appreciative of the resources that were provided. This study draws attention to what districts can do to further support families experiencing homelessness. This information is highlighted in Chapter V.



## Chapter V Conclusion

### *5.1. Introduction*

When people visualize homeless individuals, they may not envision children living on the streets, in shelters, or doubled-up with family with no bed or space of their own. However, according to the American Institute for Research (2020), there are 2.5 million homeless children in America, which equates to one in every 30 children. According to the National Center on Family Homelessness (2014), 94% of homeless school-aged youth attend schools. However, the attendance rate among homeless children is high, with more than 50% of homeless school-aged children missing two or more weeks during a school year (Sulkowski & Kaczor, 2014). The literature included in this research study shows that the increasing prevalence of homelessness is a pervasive issue for families living in poverty. When a family becomes homeless, they are in dire need of resources and supports. This is also true for school-aged children who are impacted by homelessness. According to the National Center for Homeless Education (2017), “the loss of a home can be traumatic, leaving children and youth with tumultuous feelings that can impact their social and intellectual wellbeing. Limited access to food, medical care, and basic school supplies can also impact performance in the classroom” (p. 3). Families who are homeless must have access to resources that are designed to support them and their school-aged children and help them to be successful.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act. Parent participants had the opportunity to share their lived experiences, including resources and supports received from the school district, communication with district personnel during their time of homelessness, and their understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act.

The primary research question for this study was the following: What are the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act?

By collecting and reviewing the literature and legislation, the researcher conveyed how the McKinney-Vento Act was designed to reduce school-related barriers by providing supports for school-aged children facing homelessness. Information regarding criteria, definitions and the purpose of the McK-V Act was shared in Chapter 1.

Literature and data from this study also conveyed the importance of understanding the experiences of homeless parents as it relates to their school-aged children's education. During a time that is uncertain for so many homeless families, parents must have a voice in the education of their children. It is equally paramount for parents to know their rights associated with the McKinney-Vento Act and what this act entails. However, there is a lack of information about the views and experiences of parents on the educational services provided by school districts during the time they experience homelessness. Additionally, although the number of homeless families with school-aged children has increased in the last decade, studies exploring if these families are receiving McKinney-Vento services are conspicuously lacking. Moreover, few have examined the perceptions of homeless parents and how they feel about school-related services for their children. Ensuring homeless parents know and understand their rights could provide a sense of agency for families as they become more cognizant of the services the McK-V Act provides.

The researcher selected a qualitative case study as a way of understanding the perceptions of homeless parents through their lived experiences with their school-aged children's school district. Yin (2009) asserts case studies allow for human behaviors such as emotions, personalities, and thoughts to be examined and discovered using research. The participants were parents who

were homeless at the time of the study or who had been homeless within the past five years, while having school-aged children enrolled in the district. Incentives were given to parents who participated in the study. *In vivo* coding and focused coding were the data analysis methods used. The researcher extrapolated the direct language of the study participants and compared codes across categories. Narrative analysis was used to share the results of this study.

The results of this study allowed for homeless parents of school-aged children to share their personal experiences. These results can ultimately assist school districts in understanding how to best support families who struggle with homelessness while raising school-aged children. Additionally, the results can benefit the school district included in this study and serve as a basis for other school districts to study this phenomenon.

### ***5.2. Summary of Findings***

Swick (2008) asserts a significant determinant of how parents function is the way others view them as individuals and as parents. The objective of this study was to explore the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act. The study included a survey and one-on-one semi-structured phone interviews. Each participant shared their personal experiences with their child's school while experiencing homelessness. The data collection and analysis revealed the following themes: appreciation and gratitude, communication, limitations, fear, lack of knowledge, and a desire to protect their children.

The parents who participated in this study displayed a sense of appreciation and gratitude for their resources provided by district personnel. Eight of the study participants were grateful for the liaison, who assisted them in their time of need. They expressed gratitude for resources like food, clothing, housing accommodations, transportation services for their children, shelter, and

schools showing care. It is important to note there is no literature on the gratitude expressed by homeless parents relative to services received by the McK-V Act. The lack of research speaks to the significance of this study and the possibility of completing studies like this.

The literature review included in this study emphasizes the importance of schools building authentic relationships and providing ongoing communication with homeless families. According to Quint (1994), communicating with homeless families is essential. Additionally, Swick (2004) emphasizes the need for educators to strengthen school-parent dialogue. In this study, school personnel or the district's liaison communicated with all the participants. Yon and Sebastien-Kadie (1994) affirm schools must work to provide safety and security for homeless students, stating, "it was a safe haven from the vulnerability created by life in temporary housing or on the streets" (p. 71). However, when it comes to their children's education, homeless parents often have the following concerns, being unable to communicate with school personnel regarding their needs and their child's needs. This study outlined the consistent communication from the district's liaison but highlighted the inconsistent communication from school personnel. 90% of the participants expressed their experienced in communicating with the district's liaison or other school personnel. While thirty-percent of the study participants did not feel their child's teachers effectively communicated with them during their time of homelessness.

Families who are homeless may experience considerable limitations. The literature review sheds light on many barriers that homeless families frequently encounter, such as mental and health issues, lack of resources such as transportation, students underperforming their non-homeless counterparts, and barriers preventing homeless school-aged children from participating in school activities. The participants included in this study shared their experiences and barriers they faced while homelessness prevented them and their children from participating in school-related

activities. Pine (2000) suggests it is essential for homeless parents to engage in supportive experiences to create a sense of agency, to learn, and to build their confidence. One-hundred percent of the study participants had a semi understanding of the resources they were to receive under the McKinney-Vento Act. In a study examining the experiences of homeless families, Miller (2015) asserts the families studied were unaware of the options provided by the federal and local government. As such, these families were disassociated from opportunities from the McKinney-Vento Act and other systems that were designed to assist families in need. Participants in this study experienced limitations in participating in school-related activities. Barriers included a lack of awareness, issues with transportation, and not having the money to participate or get to/from the school. As a result, parents felt this precluded them from attending school-related events. Other restrictions included work-related conflicts, childcare, and the inability to get physicals for participation in athletics.

Nine of the study participants expressed concerns about losing their children as a result of being homeless. Parents who participated in this study faced many of the same fears included in the literature review. According to Zlotnick, Kronstadt, and Klee (1998), the more families face homelessness, the more children enter the foster care system. In an interview with McLoughlin (2018), a state McKinney-Vento liaison affirmed that there is disgrace attached to homelessness. Parents are often fearful that their homeless status will be referred to the state's Children and Family Services Department, and their children will be taken away. Some of the participants in this study expressed concerns that their child's school would alert the municipalities and their children would be taken. One participant expressed that her friends experienced these same fears. Another felt his children's maternal grandmother was working with the school system to take his children away. One participant did not allow her children to attend evening activities at the school

without her as she did not want her kids wandering the neighborhood while she was away and was afraid someone would want “to call” Children and Family Services on her. Shinn, Gibson-Benton, and Brown (2015) attribute the separation of families to homelessness, noting that homelessness directly increases rates of foster care placements. Additionally, the National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that 62% of homeless children looking for emergency housing are placed in the foster care program. None of the participants in this study had experienced the school district contacting Children and Family Services because of their homeless status. However, the thought of this happening produced concerns among some of the participants.

As disclosed in chapter 4, the participants included in this study were semi-knowledgeable of the services received due to the McK-V Act. Still, they did not clearly understand the McK-V Act's provisions, including its purpose, terms, or funding. Each participant had very little or no knowledge of the details of the McK-V Act. There were six participants who knew the McK-V Act was designed to provide resources to families in need, like shelter, clothes, and transportation. However, some thought other resources were included, like free lunch, or laptops given by the district because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, some participants were unable to explain any provisions of the McK-V Act. All were simply grateful they received some type of help from the school district. Miller (2011) asserts that a large percentage of families are unaware of the existence of the act. As a result, these families may be unable to take advantage of its full services.

Every study participant disclosed reasons for keeping their children in the school of origin when they became homeless. This was an important factor in the literature shared in chapter 3. As families become homeless, parents with school-aged children need consistency in the education of their children (Yon & Sebastien-Kadie, 1994). According to Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) students have the right to attend their school of origin, no matter where they live as a result of their

homeless status. Not all participants included in this study were aware that this was a choice as a result of the McKinney-Vento Act. Some participants did not immediately report to the school district they were homeless. Instead, some shared their experience in making sacrifices to get their children to and from school by taking public transportation. All study participants wanted some level of consistency and a sense of normalcy for their children. A study completed by Yon and Sebastein-Kadie (1994) presents the need for parents to go to “extremes to preserve the continuity of their children’s schooling” (p. 71). In the study, parents facing desperate times chose to allow their children to live with family members so they could finish the school year in their current school. One of the study participants in this study also had his children live with other family members as a result of his homeless status.

### ***5.3. Implications for Practice***

Creating a sense of safety and community is vital for all families, particularly families who are homeless. Some of the participants in this study shared their experience of feeling dismissed, disrespected, or degraded by someone in their child’s school. Kozol (1998) asserts demeaning attitudes toward homeless families are linked to our biased perceptions of homelessness being the responsibility of the individual adult. Bronfenbrenner (2005) suggests creating a compassionate and harmonic environment helps parents who are homeless to feel appreciated, welcomed, and a part of the school community. It is essential for families facing homelessness to know they can share their experiences with school personnel, without being judged negatively or fearing that they will lose their children. Families should also be able to receive necessary supports to provide their children with an adequate education. Swick (2005) emphasizes the need to have welcoming schools and other supports in place to help homeless families feel safe. Settings like this can help

to reassure families that they are not being judged for their living status and that schools are a resource for supporting homeless families, not reporting them to children services.

The results of this study indicate a need for awareness, consistency in communication and practice, and collaborative efforts initiated by the school district. All parent participants displayed some level of appreciation for the resources received by the school district. However, the type of supports was inconsistent among families. Families who are homeless must have equal access to school-related resources. Schools must educate families on the McKinney-Vento Act, including resources that are available because of the act. Brochures with information about the McKinney-Vento Act and other supports offered by the school district should be placed in all school offices. Swick (2000) reports a critical way to support families is by the school personnel providing supports that offer hope and faith in parents and students. Supports can include after-school homework tutoring, holding conferences with families at shelters, providing transportation that bring parents to the school for activities and events, and recruiting parents to lead school activities and to serve on school and community committees.

Having some level of consistency across schools allow families to experience supportive and engaging school personnel no matter which school their children attend. Additionally, this can help families to know what to expect from teachers, the district's homeless liaison, school administrators, and other school personnel. This study displays a need for a more robust communication system within the school district.

Consistency in district communication practices can help to eliminate negative perceptions of parents experiencing homelessness. In this study, some of the participants shared their positive experiences with the liaison and not necessarily with school personnel. At the time of the study, it was unclear if school personnel, such as teachers, social workers, and office professionals, were



aware of their homeless students. Grothaus et al. (2011) suggest an important step toward building collaborative relationships with homeless families is to enhance communication with them. Establishing and refining practices that can allow for better communication, the sharing of resources, and parent-school check-ins may help build collaborative efforts. It is also important to define role responsibilities for school personnel. In addition to the principal, school personnel such as teachers, office professionals, and social workers should know about families who are homeless. Schools must consider the role of the principal, the school secretary, the liaison, the teachers, and the counselors, and what the minimum responsibility is for each of these service providers when working with families who are homeless.

It is also crucial for school districts to provide annual training on student and family homelessness to all school personnel. Swick (2006) asserts that school personnel have mistaken ideas of homeless families derived from conventional descriptors of what and who homeless people are. Training school staff to welcome and support homeless families could help eliminate some of the parents' negative perceptions of school personnel included in this study. Homeless parents want a sense of community and agency in their children's schools. Grothaus et al. (2011) state it is essential for school personnel to eliminate biases so that parents who are homeless can increase their involvement in school-related activities. School personnel must receive sensitivity and implicit bias training on how to connect and respond to families' who experience homelessness and families who are different from them. Professional development training can include ways to eliminate biases, recommendations for working with families who are homeless, and practices to employ so that families feel supported and welcomed in the school setting.

Collaborating with local agencies is paramount. Districts must work together to ensure homeless families receive proper resources and supports. Districts can work with local agencies

such as food banks, clothing stores, hotel or motels, mental health facilities, tutoring agencies, and shelters to provide packets of information to parents who are homeless. Providing particulars of this nature can help to create a sense of agency in families who are otherwise struggling to make ends meet.

#### ***5.4. Recommendations for Future Research***

This study sheds light on parents' experiences of the supplemental educational services provided through the McKinney-Vento Act in a particular school district. Further research is needed to understand the experiences of students who are homeless and their perceptions of how their schools are or are not supporting them while homeless. Future research could consist of a study involving school personnel to solicit their input on family homelessness. A study that employs teachers could analyze if there are teacher biases related to homeless students as well as their understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act. A study could also involve teacher interactions with parents who are homeless. Additionally, a study that includes principals, counselors, and homeless liaisons can shed light on their perceptions of the McKinney-Vento Act and how well they perceive their district is supporting families who are homeless. Having a study on parents' perceptions from multiple school districts could provide insight as to how various districts are working with and supporting homeless families. Lastly, there is a critical need for a study on the McKinney-Vento Act and how well it is supporting homeless families.

#### ***5.5. Conclusion***

This study examined the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act. The results of this study indicated that parent participants had similarities in some of their school-related experiences during their time of homelessness, while other experiences varied. Parent participants

were grateful for the resources received. Most parents were extremely pleased with the experiences they encountered when interacting with the district's liaison. Furthermore, some parents were pleased with the supports received by their children's principal, secretary, counselor, or teacher.

The data analysis formulated themes from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

These themes were the following:

- 1) Appreciation for people and provision,
- 2) Experience with school personnel,
- 3) Fear of not knowing the outcome of their situation,
- 4) Lack in knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act,
- 5) Barriers to participating in school-related activities or learning, and
- 6) Parental options.

Each theme is significant as it highlights the efforts of the district in supporting its families. Additionally, the research findings offer suggestions for additional steps the district can employ to improve upon its relationships with families who are homeless.

The research findings suggest that parents are receiving some supports from the school district because of the McKinney-Vento Act. Some of the provisions of the McK-V Act provide resources, including temporary shelter and transportation for families. Schools allowed parents to keep their children in the school of while homeless. Each parent participant elaborated on why this was important to them and their school-aged children. The district's McKinney-Vento Liaison was also an instrumental figure in providing resources for families. Many families shared their appreciation of her and the support she provided. This study focused on homeless families located in one school district. The information gleaned from this study should also encourage other school districts to review their policies and to provide more resources for families experiencing

homelessness. As a proactive measure, school districts must consider how they can continue to assist families with school-aged children who are experiencing homelessness.

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## Appendix A

### Email to Colleagues (Principals & Homeless Liaison)

Greetings, colleagues.

I would like to request your assistance with my district approved research study.

As a doctoral candidate, I am working on my research study, entitled “Homeless Parents' Perceptions of School-Related Supplemental Services (McKinney-Vento) For Their School-Aged Children”

Parents who are or have been homeless in the last five years and have or had children in the Ann Arbor Public School district during their time of homelessness are eligible to participate. Parent participation in this study is strictly voluntary and parents may withdraw at any time. Additionally, all personal and identifiable information will remain strictly confidential.

There are two parts to this study.

**Part One:** A 3–5-minute survey consisting of 11 questions. Parents can access this survey by clicking on the QR code on the flyer or by emailing me using the email address listed in the flyer. The survey will be sent to them.

The first 20 participants to complete the survey, provide contact information, and meet the aforementioned requirements will receive a \$10 gift card (per family) to a local grocery store. Parents who complete part one of the study will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. Note: Parent respondents do not have to participate in part two to be considered for the \$10 gift card.

**Part Two:** One-on-one interviews with the researcher and the homeless parent(s). During this hour, additional questions regarding experiences and services received from the school district

while homeless will be asked. For parents' full participation in the one-on-one interviews, \$35 gift cards will be given (per family). All identifiable information will remain strictly confidential.

I would appreciate if you would share the attached flyer in your parent communication this week. Feel free to email me with any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and efforts. Enjoy your week!

## Appendix B

### Email to Local Community Centers and Shelters

Greetings,

My name is Roberta Heyward and I am a student at the University of Michigan-Flint. I am also a principal for the AAPS school district. I would like to request your assistance with my district approved research study.

As a doctoral candidate, I am working on my research study, entitled “Homeless Parents’ Perceptions of School-Related Supplemental Services (McKinney-Vento) For Their School-Aged Children.”

Parents who are or have been homeless in the last five years and have or had children in the Ann Arbor Public School district during their time of homelessness are eligible to participate. Parent participation in this study is strictly voluntary and parents may withdraw at any time. Additionally, all personal and identifiable information will remain strictly confidential.

There are two parts to this study.

**Part One:** A 3–5-minute survey consisting of 11 questions. Parents can access this survey by clicking on the QR code on the flyer or by emailing me using the email address listed in the flyer. The survey will be sent to them.

The first 20 participants who complete the survey, provide contact information, and meet the aforementioned requirements will receive a \$10 gift card (per family) to a local grocery store. Parents who complete part one of the study will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. Note: Parent respondents do not have to participate in part two to be considered for the \$10 gift card.

Part Two: One-on-one interviews with the researcher and the homeless parent(s). During this hour, additional questions regarding experiences and services received from the school district while homeless will be asked. For parents' full participation in the one-on-one interviews, \$35 gift cards will be given (per family). All identifiable information will remain strictly confidential.

I would appreciate it if you would share the attached flyer in your parent communication and post in your buildings. Feel free to email me with any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and efforts!

## Appendix C

## Flyer

**PARENTS ARE PARTNERS!**

A study on homeless parents' perceptions of the AAPS school district's educational services for their school-aged children



**As a parent with school-aged children, have you experienced homelessness in the last five years? If so, this is your opportunity to share your viewpoint on the services that were provided by the school district and your child's school.**

To participate in this study, you must be 18 years or older with a child enrolled in the AAPS school district during the time of homelessness.

If interested in this study and to learn more, please scan the QR code above and/or contact the researcher for more information:

[ParentsAREPartners@gmail.com](mailto:ParentsAREPartners@gmail.com)

**Please note:** Due to a conflict of interest, parents from Tappan Middle School will be ineligible for one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and participants can withdraw **at any time**. All names and contact information will be held to the highest level of confidentiality.

**Volunteers could receive up to \$45 in gift cards for their participation in the study.**



## **Appendix D**

### **Parental Permission Letter for Participants**

Dear Parents,

My name is Roberta Heyward. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan-Flint. I hope you will consider participating in my research study. The research I am conducting involves examining the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under McKinney-Vento. To understand their experiences, I will be obtaining feedback from parents of school-aged children who are or have been homeless.

For my study, I will be asking questions about the services you received from your child's school because of being homeless. Information from this study may help to inform the school district's practices with families who are impacted by homelessness.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. Additionally, all personal information will remain strictly confidential. There will be no identifiable language regarding personal names or school information that will be added to this study.

There are two parts to this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a parent survey. The survey consists of 11 questions. Gift cards of \$10 will be given to the first 20 participants who complete and return the survey to the researcher. Gift cards are one per family.

The second part of this research study includes one-on-one interviews. Parents who complete part one of the study will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. During this hour, additional questions regarding your experience and services received from your child's school while you were homeless will be asked. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. For your full participation in the one-on-one interview, you will receive

a \$35 gift card per family at the conclusion of the interview. To be eligible for a gift card, participants in the interviews must be present from the beginning and remain for the duration of the interview.

**Please note:** Due to a conflict of interest, parents from Tappan Middle School will be ineligible for the one-on-one parent interviews with the researcher.

**Contact for Questions Regarding this Study**

If you have any questions about this study, please email [ParentsAREPartners@gmail.com](mailto:ParentsAREPartners@gmail.com)

**Confidentiality and Access to this Study**

The University of Michigan-Flint may publish the results of this study. Names of participants will not be published in any results or reports. The University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight. The study team will maintain confidentiality and remain in compliance with the privacy of all participants.

If you would like to continue as a participant in this research study, please sign below.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Printed Name of Participant

Date

---

Contact Number of Participant

Email of Participant (PRINT)

## Appendix E

### Parent Survey

As a parent with school-aged children, have you experienced homelessness in the last five years? If so, this is your opportunity to share your viewpoint on the services that were provided by the school district and your child's school.

Please take a few moments and respond to the following questions. Information shared will be used in the research study. As a thank you for your time, the first 20 participants who meet the requirements and complete the survey will be given a \$10 gift card.

To participate, you must be 18 years or older with a child enrolled in the AAPS school district during the time of homelessness.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time. If provided, all names and contact information will be strictly confidential.

#### Please print legibly

1. What is your ethnicity/race?
  - a. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black/African American
  - d. Caucasian/White
  - e. Hispanic or Latino
  - f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - g. Other
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Are you married or single? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the number of people in your household? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the number of children you have in PreK-12 education? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Please list the ages/grades of your children?

- a. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you currently employed? \_\_\_\_\_
- a. If so, how long have you been at your current job? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How long have you been homeless?
- a. 0–6 months
  - b. 6–11 months
  - c. 1–2 years
  - d. 2–3 years
  - e. More than 3 years
9. What is your level of education completed?
- a. Elementary school
  - b. Middle school
  - c. High school
  - d. Some college
  - e. Bachelor's degree
  - f. Advanced degree
10. While homeless, did you live:
- a.  In A Hotel/Motel
  - b.  In a Shelter

- c.  In a Vehicle
- d.  Outside (park, etc.)
- e.  With family/friends
- f.  Other

11. \* Are you willing to participate in a follow-up one-on-one interview (approximately 1 hour) with the researcher about your experiences in receiving educational supports during your time of homelessness? Participants selected to participate in an interview with the researcher will receive a \$35 gift card for their full participation. All participant names will always remain private!

12. Please click on the link below to include your contact information (name, email, & phone) to be considered eligible for the \$10 gift card after the completion of this survey. Please also use this link to inform the researcher if you are interested in participating in a one-on-one interview. Link, [here](#)

\*Participants selected to participate in an interview with the researcher will receive a \$35 gift card for their full participation.

**Appendix F****Parents Are Partners *Optional* Contact Information Form**

Participants should ONLY complete this section if he/she A.) completed the parent survey, and B.) would like to be considered for the \$10 gift card. Participants should also complete this section if they would like to be considered for a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Participants selected for one-on-one interviews will receive a \$35 gift card at the conclusion of the interview. Reminder: Parents from Tappan Middle School are ineligible to participate in the one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

Please add your name and contact information if you would like to be considered for the \$10 gift card AFTER completing the parent survey.

Would you like for the researcher to contact you to schedule a one-on-one interview?  
Participants selected for one-on-one interviews will receive a \$35 gift card.

## Appendix G

### Parent Interview Protocol

Greeting, introductions, thank participants for their time, reiterate the purpose of the study, provide an overview of the interview process, including recordings that will be used, discuss confidentiality, remind participants they can withdraw from the interview at any time, and answer any questions from participants before beginning the interview.

**Purpose of Study:** This qualitative case study will examine the experiences of homeless parents receiving supplemental educational supports for their school-aged children under the McKinney-Vento Act.

**Confidentiality:** Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. Additionally, all personal information will remain strictly confidential. Names of participants will not be published in any results or reports.

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**Time of Interview:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewee's Name:**

11. While homeless, did you keep your child at the school of origin? Please explain your reasoning for keeping your child at the school of origin or enrolling your child in a different school.

**The following questions will ask you about your child's schools, district, counselors, and teachers. In your responses, please do not include the names of schools, districts, or the names of any school personnel.**

12. Describe any supportive services the school/school district provided to you and your child because of being homeless.
13. While homeless, please describe your experience with your child's teacher(s).
14. While homeless, please describe your experience with the homeless liaison, principal, secretary, and school counselor.
15. Describe the most significant action the school or district took to support you and your child during your time of homelessness.
16. Describe any school-related activities your child participated in that took place beyond the school day (i.e. sports, clubs, activities).
17. Describe any school-related barriers you feel hindered you or your child from participating in school activities because of being homeless.
18. Do you feel your child's school communicated and supported you while you were homeless, yes or no? Please explain your response to this question.
19. Please describe your understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act.
20. Is there anything else you want to share or would like me to know?

After the interview is completed, the researcher will thank the participant for their time, give them a gift card and reiterate the confidentiality agreement.