

FINAL DELIVERABLE

Title Policy Recommendations for Combating
Child Homelessness in Keokuk, Iowa

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Public Policy & Persuasion

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Community Partners Keokuk Chamber of Commerce,
Keokuk Community School District

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Date: December 10, 2019
To: Superintendent Christine Barnes
From: Jackson Guilford, Lauren Heidewald, Rylie Niebuhr, Annie Topp, Emily Wangen
Cc: Principal Adam Magliari, Keokuk School Board
Re: Child Homelessness in Keokuk, Iowa
Appendix: Attached

SUMMARY

The Keokuk School district should become equipped to deal with child homelessness. The school district is the main mechanism for detection and assistance of child homelessness. The high school principal is the current McKinney-Vento homelessness liaison, making it difficult for homeless students to receive individualized attention from the district due to the principal's many responsibilities. Additionally, the district should improve preventive and proactive measures for combating childhood homelessness.

BACKGROUND

A lack of baseline data makes it difficult to quantify the issue of child homelessness in Keokuk. The high school has ten self-reported cases of child homelessness; however, we suspect this is but a fraction of the number of actual cases in the district due to child homelessness rarely being self-reported. In Keokuk, 25% of families fall below the poverty line and 75% of students receive free or reduced lunch. In Iowa, 14% of families fall below the poverty line and 40% of students receive free or reduced lunch. Poverty and economic instability are both risk factors for child homelessness, and Keokuk has a disproportionately large population of children falling into both categories.

In the school district itself, there are few measures in place to prevent child homelessness. The McKinney Vento Act of 1987 requires school districts to have a homelessness liaison, and Keokuk's is the high school principal. This makes it difficult to monitor student homelessness in Keokuk's other schools. Currently, the only detection method is self-reporting. There are no screening methods to seek out students who need assistance. Finally, teachers do not receive any training on detecting child homelessness in their students, nor do they know how to serve students experiencing homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations take a three-pronged approach with the first component focusing on data collection, followed by staff training, and lastly enhancing educational resources for families. These recommendations are relatively inexpensive yet have been effective in other communities in Iowa and the United States.

Data Collection

In order to better serve children experiencing homelessness, the school district must obtain baseline data to have a complete understanding of the population they are serving.

1. We recommend that the school district implement a screening tool that is given to all students at the beginning of the year. See Figure 1 in the Appendix for an example of a screening tool from the Ohio Department of Education.
2. We recommend a language change to the handbooks of students, with the new language specifying Principal Magliari as the McKinney-Vento homelessness liaison, and identifying the sub-liaison for that school. This will show children and families experiencing homelessness that they have an advocate at the school. (See recommendation 1 under “Training” for information regarding sub-liaisons.)

Training

In order to equip school staff with knowledge of how to handle child homelessness, the school district must provide training to its staff on detecting and handling child homelessness.

1. We recommend that sub-liaisons are designated and trained to be the McKinney-Vento homelessness liaison at the elementary, middle, and high schools. These individuals will have fewer student cases, and will allow for a personalized action plan. This model has been implemented in Iowa City and has been very effective.
2. We recommend that teachers receive training on how to detect child homelessness in their classrooms. This will allow for more students to be identified and therefore gain access to resources available to them.

Education

In order to inform students and families experiencing homelessness of the resources available to them, the school district must be proactive in sending home information with students.

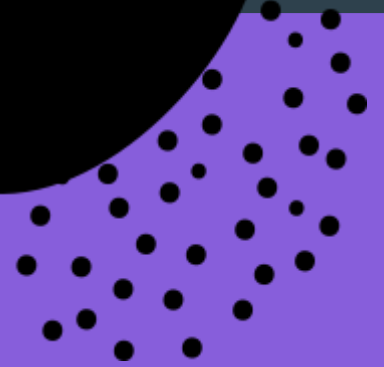
1. We recommend expanding the Weekend Backpack Program to include pamphlets on the following resources: mental health, housing instability, weekend/community activities, and job placement opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

- The superintendent should propose that the screening tool be implemented at the next school board meeting. She should stress the importance of being proactive in detecting child homelessness and present Ohio’s screening tool.
- The superintendent should propose a language change to all handbooks in the district at the next school board meeting.
- The principal should form a committee to initiate the process of designating sub-liaisons. This committee will also be responsible for ensuring implementation of policy recommendations and next steps.
- At the next teacher in-service training, show the National Center for Homelessness Education “McKinney Vento 101: Understanding the Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness” and at the subsequent in-service show “Supporting the Education of Students Experiencing Homelessness.” See Figure 2 in the appendix for links to training videos.
- See Figures 3 and 4 in the appendix for examples of pamphlets from the Iowa City community and make them Keokuk-specific. Begin sending informational pamphlets home with students in the Weekend Backpack Program.

CHILD
HOMELESSNESS IN
THE KEOKUK
COMMUNITY
SCHOOL DISTRICT





CHILDREN IN POVERTY

CITY OF KEOKUK:

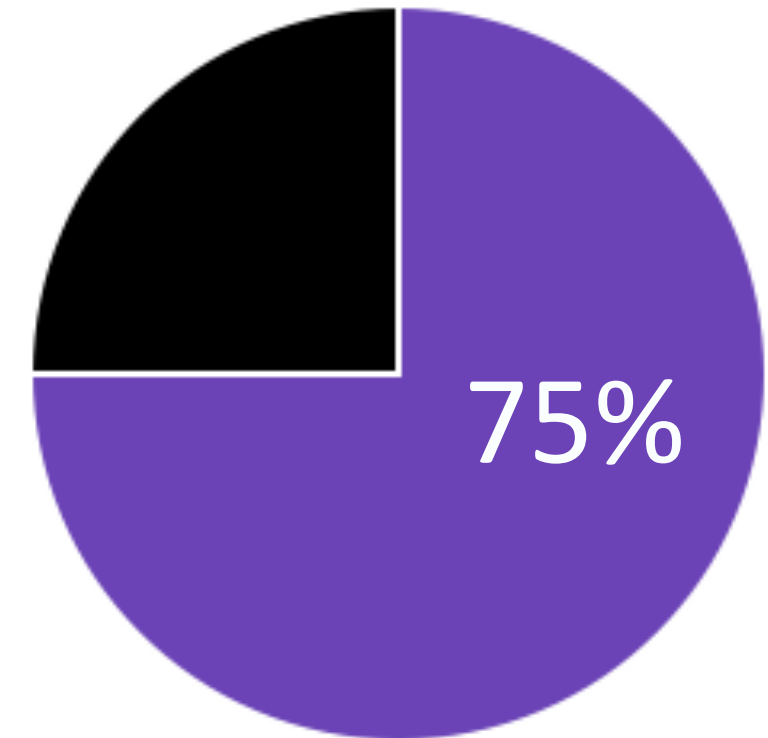


STATE OF IOWA:

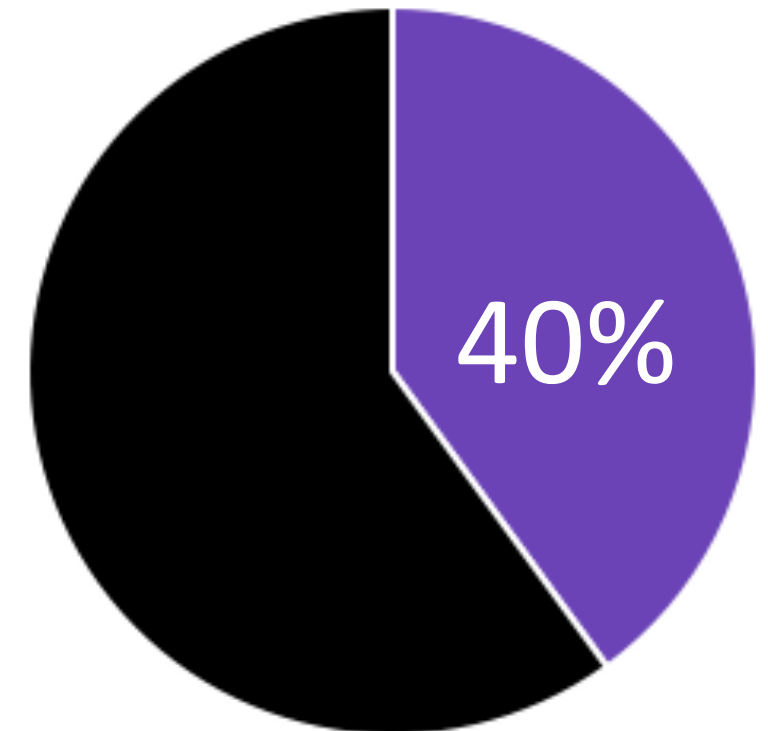


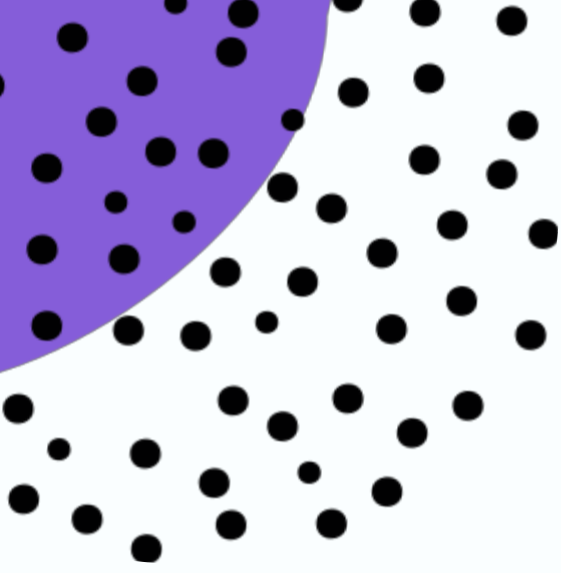
STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH

CITY OF KEOKUK:



STATE OF IOWA:





Data Shows...

Children who are housing insecure are **3-4 times** more likely to have a mental health condition

Students experiencing homelessness are **87%** more likely to drop out of high school

Children who are housing insecure are **25%** more likely to risk a serious illness or a disability

CHILD HOMELESSNESS DATA



STATE OF IOWA

6,674 Homeless
students in 2018



IOWA CITY

224 homeless
students in 2018



CITY OF KEOKUK

No Data

Possible Actions



Data



Training

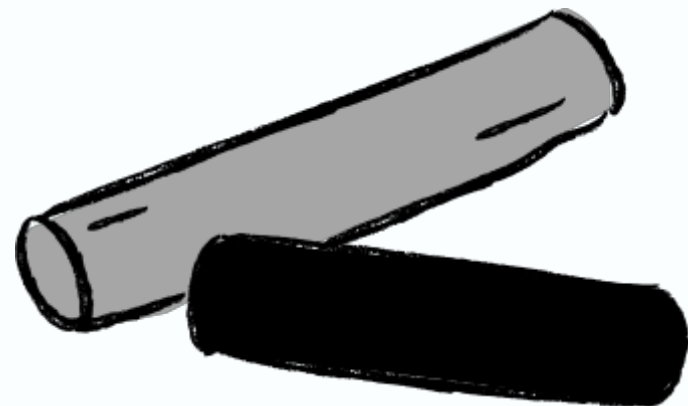


Education

Stakeholders



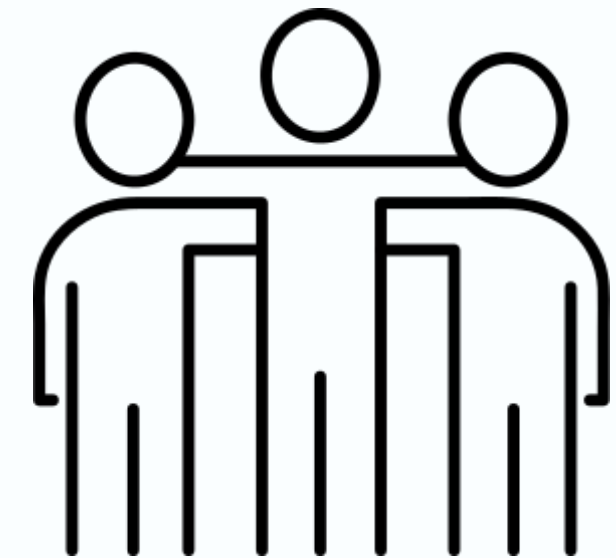
TEACHERS



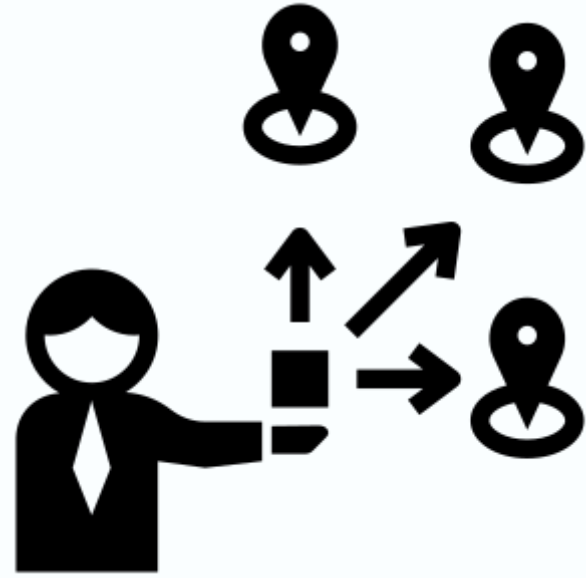
**KEOKUK
COMMUNITY SCHOOL
DISTRICT**



**KEOKUK
FAMILIES**

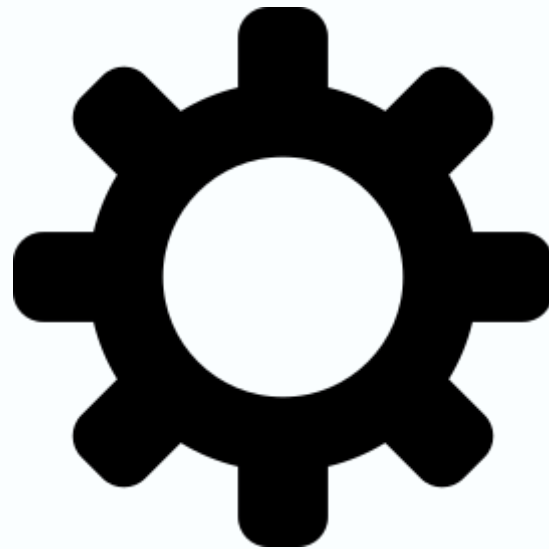


Best Practices: *Iowa City*



DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Sub-liaisons and Teachers aid in monitoring



PROACTIVE TOOLS

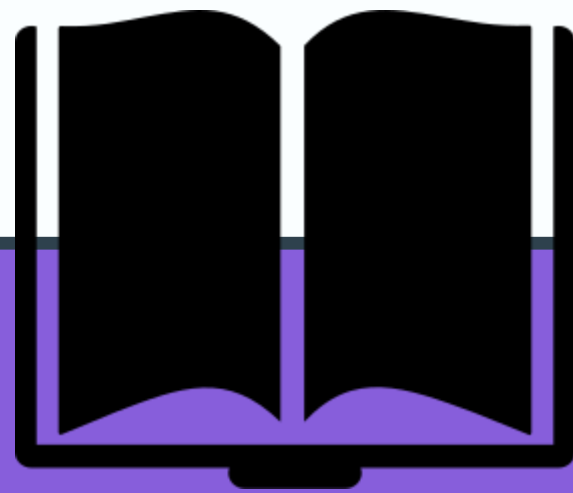
Screenings and supplemental forms



INFORMATION

Informational pamphlets and resources

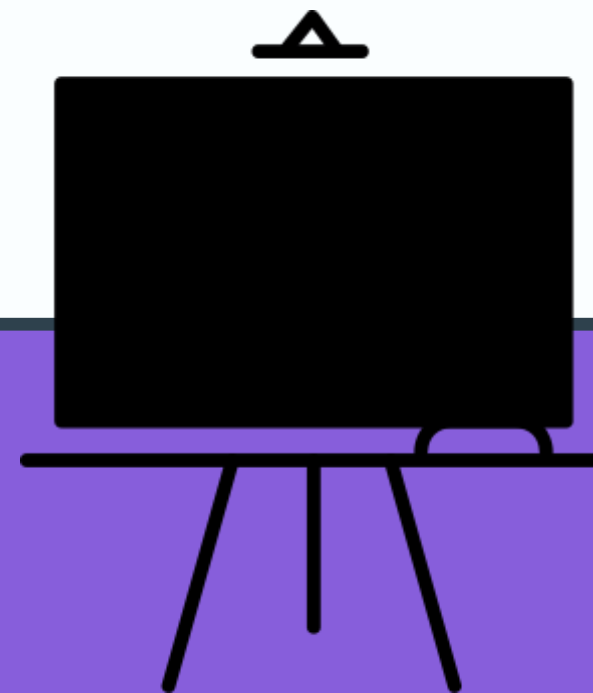
RECOMMENDATIONS



DATA COLLECTION

Screening Tool

Change of language in school
handbook



TRAINING

Sub-Liaison

Mandated teacher training
for all teachers



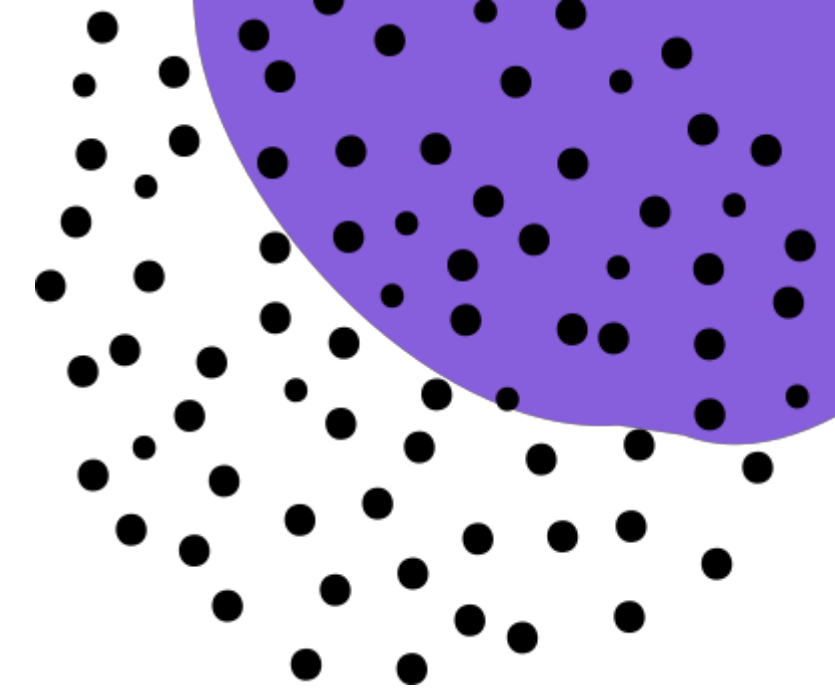
EDUCATION

Resources

For students

Next Steps

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DATA

Schedule a school board meeting to propose a screening tool

language change in school handbook



TRAINING

Principal should form a committee to initiate the process for designating sub-liaisons.



NCHE webinars
for teachers



EDUCATION

Make changes to the pamphlets in appendix to make them Keokuk-specific



Begin distributing information in the January weekend backpack

Citations



Educate Iowa. "Resources." Accessed December 10, 2019. <https://educateiowa.gov/resources/legal-resources/legal-lessons/new-rules-effective-athletics-and-homeless-students-january>

Harker, Lisa. "Chances of a lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives." England Shelter. 2006

"Homeless Kids." Committee on Temporary Shelter. 2019. <https://cotsonline.org/our-mission/homeless-prevention>

Lindsey, Kevin. "The Blog." First Focus on Children, September 24, 2014. <https://firstfocus.org/blog/child-poverty-homelessness-affect-education>.

Leopold, Josh and Gold, Amanda. "The Costs and Potential Savings of Supportive Housing for Child Welfare–Involved Families." The Urban Institute, May 2019

United States Department of Education. Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program. July 2004, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>

Child Homelessness in the Keokuk Community School District

The University of Iowa Department of Political Science
December 10, 2019

Jackson Guilford, Lauren Heidewald, Rylie Niebuhr, Annie Topp, Emily Wangen

Executive Summary:

Child and family homelessness is a crisis that has become increasingly worse over time in the city of Keokuk, Iowa. In 2018, an estimated 60% of Keokuk children were in a low socioeconomic-income household. In the state of Iowa, 1 in 7 children live in poverty compared to Keokuk's 1 out of every 4. Due to a lack of data, child homelessness is under reported in the city, making it impossible to tell how many children are homeless at a given time. Keokuk High School Principal, Adam Magliari, is the designated McKinney Vento homelessness liaison. While these numbers could provide a snapshot into the scope of child and family homelessness and housing insecurity, it is evident that changes need to be made regarding child and family homelessness in the Keokuk community and the school district to determine the scale of issue and its underlying causes to find a solution.

Background and Relevance:

According to city officials and community members, families with children are a substantial proportion of the homeless population in Keokuk; however, a lack of baseline data is preventing solutions from being established. Without an appropriate measurement tool, new policy implementations have no benchmark to gauge success. Additionally, there is no consistent reporting system for youth homelessness in schools; currently, students must self report their living situations and with whom they live. According to the Iowa Department of Education, students are considered to be homeless if they have run away or were forced to leave home, share housing with others, live in a hotel/motel/camping grounds, live in emergency shelter or live in a car/abandoned building--all of which make it difficult for proper and effective detection.¹

Principal Adam Magliari serves as the federally-mandated liaison for homeless students, and is the only individual in the district to complete the National Center for Homeless Education online

¹ educateiowa.gov. Accessed December 10, 2019. <https://educateiowa.gov/resources/legal-resources/legal-lessons/new-rules-effective-athletics-and-homeless-students-january>.

training program. As stated in the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, Principle Magliari is the primary contact between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers and other service providers. Furthermore, the liaison must ensure that homeless youth and their families are informed of education, health and transportation services available to them.²

Keokuk parents are not being given the proper tools and resources to apply for state aid or information on how to improve their living situation, and a lack of trained homeless liaison staff within the schools are to blame. There are federal grants that the district has not applied for due to a lack of reporting. Grants and resources will not be connected to families, and child homelessness will continue to go unreported without substantial intervention.

The severity of the long lasting impacts on children experiencing housing instability cannot be understated. Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to have lower standardized test scores, more likely to miss school, and 87% more likely to drop out of school altogether.³ Child homelessness has been linked to an increased likelihood of mental health issues by 3-4 times, which manifests itself into poor academic performance, difficulty maintaining healthy relationships, and a variety of other complications. This type of trauma during the most formative years of life has repercussions lasting well into adulthood. One study suggests half of young people who had experienced homelessness.⁴ Physically, the outlook for children experiencing homelessness is even more grim. There is a 25% higher risk of severe illness and disability, 4 times as many respiratory infections, 5 times as many stomach

² United States Department of Education. *Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program*. July 2004, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>

³ Lindsey, Kevin. “The Blog.” First Focus on Children, September 24, 2014. <https://firstfocus.org/blog/child-poverty-homelessness-affect-education>.

⁴ Harker, Lisa. “Chances of a lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children’s lives.” England Shelter. 2006

and diarrhoeal infections, and twice as many emergency hospitalizations, to name just a few examples⁵. Preventative measures and early detection are imperative to ending the systemic issue of homelessness, and the cost of helping youth and families without housing only increases the longer it goes undetected. A study from the Urban Institute found that the costs of providing housing and services in the demonstration's first year averaged between \$20,000 and \$31,000 per family.⁶ It is not financially infeasible for the City of Keokuk to allocate such funds to every homeless family in their community; thus, we have formulated our recommendations around early detection and prevention in order to offer practical and inexpensive solutions.

Options and Analysis:

There are a variety of ways the Keokuk school district can address homelessness in the student population. In order to increase services and programs that support students who are homeless in the district, Keokuk must seek additional funding. The McKinney-Vento sub grant of up to \$10,000 per year is funded through the State's Department of Education, and would allow for the Keokuk School District to acquire the necessary means to implement progressive policy. In order to qualify for the sub-grant, the district must identify and report at minimum 25 cases of homelessness in the school district. The current protocol of students self-reporting homelessness to the McKinney-Vento homelessness liaison must be changed to a form that all students are required to fill out and turn in once a year. This will help alleviate any shame to homeless students' in addition to getting them immediate assistance. Another low-cost option for the school district is to immediately provide a list of community services and resources to the family after homelessness is detected. Additionally, it would be proactive to add the list of

⁵ "Homeless Kids." Committee on Temporary Shelter. 2019. <https://cotsonline.org/our-mission/homeless-prevention>

⁶ Leopold, Josh and Gold, Amanda. "The Costs and Potential Savings of Supportive Housing for Child Welfare–Involved Families." The Urban Institute, May 2019

community resources to the weekend backpack meal service program currently in place at the schools. By including this information in the weekend backpacks, students and their families will be more knowledgeable about the resources in place to support them.

One of the ways we analyzed the feasibility and effectiveness of our proposals is by comparing and contrasting the Iowa City Community School District child homelessness policy with Keokuk's. Through interviews with the homelessness liaison at each respective school, we were able to grasp a greater understanding of specific practices that translate to success. The Iowa City Community School District serves more than 13,000 students, compared to Keokuk's 1,872 students. Although there is quite a discrepancy between the two populations, we felt if we could identify best practices being done at a large scale, then surely they can be implemented on a smaller scale as well. Joan VandenBerg is the McKinney Vento mandated liaison for Iowa City. According to her, their single most valuable tool in both the identification of students facing housing instability and dispersing resources was a screening process. We were unable to obtain the specific screening form utilized, but have attached similar forms from various school districts in the appendix of our policy memo. A key part of this screening tool is expanding the traditional definition of "homeless" to meet a variety of situations that signify housing instability. Some examples are doubling or tripling up, couch surfing, squatting, and more. By making this definition more inclusive, a wider variety of people will fall under it and receive the resources they need. Adam Magliari, the Keokuk School District liaison, acknowledged that there is no screening tool currently in place. All cases of children facing homelessness are either self reported, or brought to his attention by other students or teachers. This method helps explain the lack of data that the Keokuk School District currently has. By implementing a screening tool

modeled after Iowa City's, the goal is to ensure that no family facing housing instability goes undetected and slips through the cracks.

Joan VandenBerg cited one of the biggest challenges as Iowa City's liaison to be spending a disproportionate amount of time focusing on transportation related issues. Per the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987, children experiencing homelessness are entitled to stay enrolled in the same school regardless of wherever they may "move" throughout the district. This is done at the expense of the school district, and Joan says a majority of her time is spent figuring out logistics related to this. This prevents her from spending more time speaking with families, improving identification tactics, and more components related to her job. After speaking with Adam Magliari, he complained of a similar problem. Because his role as homelessness liaison is accompanied by his pre-existing role as high school principal, he is naturally juggling many tasks of equal importance. After recognizing this problem in both Iowa City and Keokuk, we were led to proposing that sub-liaisons and committees be formed as a way to lighten the load of Principal Magliari. This will lead to better, more attentive assistance to children and families, as well as an increase in productivity if tasks are delegated properly.

Recommendations:

For our policy recommendations, we propose a three-pronged approach that will ultimately assist the Keokuk School District in addressing child and family homelessness. Our recommendations are low-cost and practical, and will greatly benefit the City of Keokuk and its community members. The first component of our recommendations include improving data collection methods. By collecting data, the city will be better equipped to handle the issue. The second component consists of recommendations for training school district personnel on

identifying and assisting child homelessness. While Keokuk has a designated McKinney-Vento homelessness liaison, we believe our recommendations will make the process more efficient. Finally, the last component of our recommendations deals with informing the community on resources available to them. By sending resources to families, a proactive measure is taken in combating child homelessness at a relatively low expense.

Data Collection

1. Keokuk must implement a screening tool that is given to every child at the beginning of the school year.

This screening tool will be filled out by parents. Questions will include things such as “Are you living doubled up?” and “Do you have stable housing?”. This model screening tool is based off of the one used by the Iowa City Community School District. According to their McKinney Vento homelessness liaison, this screening tool is an important part of identifying students experiencing homelessness. Figure 1 in the appendix of the Memo shows the Iowa City School District’s screening tool. We recommend that Keokuk use a similar format and questions when creating their own.

2. In order to increase self-reporting of child homelessness, the Keokuk school handbook needs to change its language to specify the designated McKinney Vento homelessness liaison.

As it stands, the Keokuk school handbook simply says to contact the high school principal if a family is experiencing homelessness. This can be intimidating for a family to contact the principal about serious issues. The language change in the handbook should include designating the principal as the McKinney Vento homelessness liaison and describe what that means. It

should also discuss who the sub-liaison is for the school (see first recommendation under *Training* for information on sub-liaisons).

Training

1. The school district should designate McKinney Vento sub-liaisons at the school-level order to better distribute the work associated with monitoring child homelessness.

The high school principal is responsible for many things besides monitoring homelessness. By designating sub-liaisons, the school district would be able to have an individual that is focused on a smaller group of people and therefore better equipped to monitor the homelessness. The sub-liaisons would still report to the principal, however they would be doing most of the day-to-day work in identifying and handling child homelessness. This model is also based on the Iowa City School District. The elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools all have a sub-liaison that is responsible for monitoring child homelessness in their school. We recommend that a guidance counselor in each school should be asked to be a sub-liaison because guidance counselors often already interact with the kids experiencing unstable housing.

2. The school district should train each teacher on identifying child homelessness.

By ensuring each teacher is trained on potential signs of homelessness, the district will be able to reach out to students that might not voluntarily come forward. Teachers will also be better equipped with knowing how to support the education of students experiencing homelessness, since their needs often differ from other students. The Iowa City School District trains each teacher on homelessness detection.

Education

1. Keokuk should expand the Weekend Backpack Program to include pamphlets on the following community resources: mental health, housing instability, weekend activities, and job placement.

The Weekend Backpack Program is a program for children receiving free or reduced lunch to also receive a backpack of food on the weekends. Since this resource is already sent home with kids, the school district is missing an opportunity to inform families of other resources available to them. The students receiving these backpacks are often the students who are most at-risk for experiencing homelessness. The Iowa City School district sends out informational pamphlets to its students, but we believe this targeted effort aimed at those most likely to be affected makes the most sense. The pamphlets could later be extended to everyone in the school district should the district find it necessary.

Next Steps:

These Next Steps are action-driven steps aimed at implementing the recommendations. We believe they are feasible and can be achieved quickly in order to start helping the problem immediately.

Data Collection

1. The superintendent should propose that the screening tool be implemented at the next school board meeting. She should stress the importance of being proactive in detecting child homelessness and present Iowa City's screening tool.
2. The superintendent should propose a language change at the next school board meeting, as this is the official way to make a change in the handbook.

Training

1. The principal should form a committee to initiate the process of designating sub-liaisons. This committee will also be responsible for ensuring implementation of policy recommendations and next steps.
2. At the next teacher in-service training, the National Center for Homelessness Education video “McKinney Vento 101: Understanding the Rights of Students Experiencing Homelessness” and at the subsequent in-service show “Supporting the Education of Students Experiencing Homelessness.” See Figure 2 in the appendix of the Memo for links to the training videos.

Education

1. See Figure 3 in the appendix of the Memo for examples of pamphlets from other communities and make them Keokuk-specific. Begin sending the information pamphlets home with students in the Weekend Backpack Program.

Looking Forward

After these recommendations have been implemented, the Keokuk community will have more data and a better sense of the gravity of child homelessness. The first thing Keokuk should consider is applying for the McKinney Vento Grant. To be eligible, the district must have identified 25 cases of child homelessness. With the current number being ten in the high school alone according to the high school principal, it is likely that the district will be eligible. This grant could provide the district with more funding and resources to further aid the homeless students.

Additionally, the district will be equipped with a lot of data to educate the community on the state of child homelessness. If the issue is as serious as we expect it to be, the district could

use the data to argue for solutions such as more affordable housing developments or even a youth shelter. The district will also be able to raise awareness and garner public support for the issue.

These policy recommendations serve as an excellent first step in assisting children experiencing homelessness in Keokuk. They can be implemented quickly, efficiently, and at a low cost. The impact of these policy changes has been proven effective in other school districts such as Iowa City and we believe will have a big impact on Keokuk as well.