

Education Among Homeless Children and Youth in the United States: a Policy Analysis

Jiyue Li

Institute for Empirical Social Science Research, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an 710049, China

Abstract

The growth of youth homelessness in the United States signifies equitable social welfare and social policy concerns. This paper studies the policy process, identifies the issue as bottom-up agenda-setting, and analyzes the socioeconomic and political aspects that contribute to homelessness from evidenced-based research. This article assesses the equality, effectiveness, and unintended consequences of two initiatives, the Basic Center Program and the Education for Homeless Kids and Children Program, which aim to provide educational resources to homeless youth and children. This study presents four policy alternatives and makes policy recommendations for enhanced crime intervention, increased mental health services, and strengthened accountability systems using the five-step policy evaluation framework.

Keywords

Homeless; Children and youth; Policy evaluation.

1. Introduction

Homeless children and youth (HCY) are defined by the Department of Education as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” [1]. Homelessness affects 1.3 million children and the scope of homeless youth continues to rise with rural homelessness increasing by 11% in the U.S. [2]. By estimate, one in every 45 children is homeless in the wealthiest economy in the world [3]. They have spread beyond metropolitan areas and lack the means to be properly protected, educated, and fed. It’s a growing concern in social policy that reflects the equity issue that the allocation of resources is not equitable enough, as well as in social welfare that the system has not covered all vulnerable teenagers and reached out to assist them in education and housing, ending up with the intensification of the Matthew Effect and the marginalization and stigmatization of the group [4–6]. The dramatic rise and diversity of the population in the past decades illustrate the seriousness of the problem and failures in the safety net nationwide [7].

Homelessness harms the personality shaping, socialization process, and physical and mental health of children and youth for a long period. HCY make up 25% of US crime victims and 66% of sex offence victims [3]. Life on the streets is related to poverty, delinquency, developmental delays, behavioral disturbances, early pregnancy, poor academic performance, early school leaving, and psychological illness for youth and children at high risk [8-10]. Due to the deficiency of social support, proper education, affordable housing, and survival guarantees, they constantly suffer from unemployment, discrimination, substance addiction, and depression, and their low educational level is usually associated with low-paying jobs [11]. Homelessness has a long-term adverse influence that their adversity could lead to higher premature mortality and further victimization, including social exclusion, sexual exploitation, physical abuse, and life-long violence [12].

The issue has long-standing calls to policymakers and researchers as it’s an ongoing problem in society under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and constant regional conflicts.

One view is that homelessness is caused by adolescents who have abused their habits, abandon themselves, and voluntarily leave their homes, while a controversial opinion is that domestic violence, indifference, and neglect have led young people to run away from home [4]. But an increasing number of researches have emphasized societal factors that structural barriers caused by poverty [13]. In addition, racial patterns and other disproportionate minorities indicating the formation and perpetuation of homelessness are the results of social structure solidification [14]. In consequence, it's important to recognize the resilience and strengths and remove obstacles to let HCY enjoy more equitable educational resources as the social pursuits of equity and human rights.

The research will define the problem of HCY from the perspective of evidence-based practice, which follows the positivist views of the real world as objective, and affirms that knowledge is based on positive and empirical evidence that needs to be empirically verified with scientific observation and measurement [15,16].

The research aims to make a policy analysis of education programs on HCY by analyzing the extent of the problem, the policy process, and the cost-effectiveness of the current programs. By establishing the policy evaluation criteria of symbolic impact, equitable access, political feasibility, technical feasibility, and institutional capacity, the research demonstrates the current policy landscape and applies the 5-step-policy-evaluation scheme, intending to draw a practical conclusion.

2. The Extent of Homeless Children and Youth

2.1. Causes and Key Factors

Socioeconomic factors. Economic hardship is the main cause of homelessness. With decades of economic constriction, parents are facing a great rate of unemployment and the rising prices of living/renting are unable to support children [17]. Therefore, low-income families are faced with situational forces, such as a shortage of employment opportunities and social networks, to make a vicious circle of intergenerational poverty. Young people have witnessed and/or experienced domestic violence and child maltreatment. They are deliberately abandoned by their caretakers and forced to leave their family dwelling, ending up homeless with limited financial ability to afford residential facilities [18].

Political factors. Public housing assistance and subsidies are not valid for the qualified population. By estimation, 1.6-2 million homeless youth live in temporary accommodations per night. According to National Low-Income Housing Coalition, people can't afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment with minimum wage anywhere in the U.S., and evidence shows that among low-income families who qualify for housing vouchers funded by the government, only about 25% can get access to a voucher or housing subsidies [19]. Affordable low-cost housing also can't meet the demands of the population, with eight million units in short supply, putting children and youth at particularly severe risk for homelessness [19].

2.2. Seriousness

Homelessness affects a historic and growing population. Homeless students grew by 70% during the 2010s in New York State and some states even experienced a shocking growth of over 100% [2]. To further complicate matters, homelessness also adds complex problems and concerns to the communities by increasing welfare costs and doing harm to public safety, yielding market failure of negative externalities. Street youth are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases and commit crimes, putting strains on social agencies and running up significant costs on hospitalization, police intervention, incarceration, and social welfare programs.

HCY generates a large financial cost for the federal and state government for the connection with poverty and unhealthy status. A homeless person will cost \$2,444 more on healthy and medical treatment annually than a normal person [20]. With investment in education, the government may reduce the expenditure on social security and medical expense. From Garrett's business case, healthcare costs, emergency department costs, and inpatient hospitalization would be reduced by 59%, 61%, and 77% accordingly when HCY are provided with the appropriate aid [20]. Therefore, addressing the problem is of great significance to improve the efficient use of financial resources.

2.3. Characteristics of the Population Most Affected

Demographic and economic characteristics. Gender is almost equally distributed in homeless youth, and a majority (68%) are 15-17 years old [21]. Minorities are overrepresented among homeless youth, and African Americans make up 40% of the homeless population and they are regularly exposed to rental housing discrimination [22]. The disproportionate distribution of ethnicity illustrates the results of prejudice and perpetuates disparities in health care, criminal justice, and housing. Teenagers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT+) account for a third of the population and they experience excessive school mobility and academic failures, so homeless is usually linked to ultra/moderate poverty and a higher unemployment rate in the future [23].

Other characteristics. Homeless youth and children are at high risk for infectious diseases, diabetes, and dental problems. HIV rates for homeless youth are 3 to 9 times higher than normal [24,25]. They are more likely to have consistent and prevalent substance use, emotional distress, self-abasement, psychosis, and lack of regular health care.

3. Policy Process

3.1. The Prominence of Homeless Policy

The history of homeless youth can be traced back to the colonial period when poor adolescent immigrants wandered and sought work opportunities, living in overcrowding slums with infectious diseases [26]. During urbanization and industrialization, homeless youth were widespread because they were unwanted in the workforce for scarce professional skills. After the Great Depression, the rate of HCY increased rapidly, but it didn't draw much attention because a large population also experienced homelessness around the nation.

3.1.1. Agenda Setting

The issue of HCY is bottom-up in agenda-setting. Before the 1970s, the federal policy provided limited services to homeless youth only through child welfare agencies and the juvenile justice system. Shortly after the deinstitutionalization of mental illness, the responsibilities of the state and city were separated by delineating whether homelessness is a mental illness or a welfare issue [27]. Then, policy goals were set by the conservatives to provide alternatives such as food and shelter, instead of addressing more complex and long-term troubles such as housing shortage, unemployment, and education problems in the process of policy formulation.

3.1.2. Policy Formulation and Policy Legitimation

With the emergence of sociological models and research to explain the cause of adolescent antisocial behavior, Congress increasingly focused on homeless youth and enacted the Runaway Youth Act of 1974 to define and decriminalize runaway behavior and authorize funding for services. Later in 1980, the issue became prominent when attorney Robert Hays took legal action to request New York City provide shelters for the homeless, which was supported by direct political action locally [28]. Notably, it was after news about homeless youth freezing to death that the issue was brought to the massive public consciousness through media effects. Since then, Congress and the President expanded available services to assist

homeless youth and enacted the 1987 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (H. R.558). The purpose of this Act is to establish administrative, legal, and social foundations in a more coordinated manner to respond to the homeless demands, with special emphasis to provide formal education services for the HCY and assign duties to liaisons to coordinate with the public schools.

Last three decades, the federal government has made programs and organizations as provisions of institutional resources to remove barriers to enrollment and develop transportation systems such as the National Network for Youth (NN4Y), ICPH, Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program, Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHY). State implementation varies from each other because they can choose to accept federal funds to implement the McKenny-Vento Act or not. To effectively allocate federal funding and human resources, state provisions were separated to provide housing and shelter services, provide routine medical care, improve high school graduation rates, and increase access to higher education, with the implementation of some non-educational programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Currently, empirical studies were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and the education, housing, and healthcare outcomes [24,29,30].

The prominence of the issue shows the combination of publicity, activism, and egoism. From the social research and public media, the attention on homeless youth and children raises questions about social justice and equity and is linked with larger issues of community safety and welfare costs, gaining agenda status for the issue.

3.2. Key Players and Their Influence

Executives. In the 1980s, due to the conservative nature of welfare policy by the Reagan administration, the federal government's role was reduced in aiding homeless youth. The federal budget for subsidized housing has witnessed direct reductions from \$19 billion to \$11 billion, along with a restricted eligibility process, which led to an adverse living situation for the homeless for nearly two decades [28,31]. At present, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the core of federal efforts to end youth homelessness by awarding local communities for administering housing and services.

Legislators. The enactment of the McKinney-Vento Act, which has been revised four times in 1990, 1994, 2002, and 2015 to clearly define and classify HCY, the 1980 Social Security Act, and the 2008 Fostering Connections Act illustrate the influence of legislators by initiating and formulating homeless youth policy. The overall purpose of the policy is to help HCY foster their learning abilities, learn necessary life skills, become functioning citizens, step into mainstream society, and achieve self-actualization [32].

Interest groups. In the 1980s, the coalition of the Community Services Society of New York and local businessmen of Philadelphia pushed homelessness forward as a public problem. Recently, NN4Y is a significant policy advocacy organization dedicated to the prevention of youth homelessness and protecting them from victimization and exploitation. The interest groups advocate interests and demands, contribute to rational policymaking, and present possible policy alternatives to create effective solutions to end youth homelessness.

Social science researchers and social workers. Quantitative and qualitative research has been conducted to identify the duration and impact of homelessness, with a series of interventions aiming to prevent homelessness and provide individual counseling, family strengthening, schooling, vocational training, social outreach, and service connection [33]. The Linear Approach is usually applied for HCY to transfer through various stages of social services to gain self-sufficiency, such as the "staircase model" [34] and "treatment first"[35], and the cooperation from HCY is perceived as self-improvement and de-stigmatization [19].

4. Policy Implementation: Effectiveness and Gaps

4.1. Basic Center Program (BCP)

In response to the key factor of lacking public housing assistance, BCP intends to meet the immediate shelter needs of homeless youth and children. BCP provides shelter (up to 21 days), food, crisis interventions, and community-based recreation programs for the homeless under 18 years old. It is a federal program authorized in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act with an overall objective of providing street-based services. Given that a focus on implementing a positive youth development framework to help build skills in literacy, competence, and civic engagement [36], the rationale of BCP is that when youth become homeless, they are easily rejected by the traditional law enforcement, mental health agencies, and child welfare, and if they are provided with support to develop self-assurance, they will become “problem-free” and engage more in communities and society.

BCP supports about 31,000 minors in all 50 states every year [37] and meets the basic needs of youth and children who have a transient or episodic stay in shelters. Of the short-term homeless youth BCP helped in 2015, 94% exited to a safer environment and two-thirds reconciled with their family [38]. However, it doesn't show evidence for BCP to address the problem of long-term homelessness, nor to deal with the root problems of insecure housing, which is also a weakness of the program. Due to limited available beds in shelters, over 2,000 youth are turned away each year. As for adolescents who received immediate services, their stay is too short and brief to get educational support. In FY 2004, \$44.4 million was available to fund 345 Basic Centers around the country [37], which was relatively inadequate. With restricted funding, BCP only serves a small scope and it's tough for BCP staff to allocate safe and structured places for youth to get mental health treatment and counseling and “graduate” from homelessness. HCY merely age out of the programs with no significance to their development. The anticipated result is more youth apply for Medicaid to get health care when eligible with the help of BCP [38].

4.2. Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY)

In comparison, the EHCY program administrated by the U. S. Department of Education and founded by Subtitle VII-B of The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has a relatively effective response to address the problem. The administrative structure of the program at the federal level is to provide national technological assistance, the state level is to ensure that the implementation of the policy complies with the McKinney-Vento Act, and the local level is to monitor execution details and supervise the liaison's work.

4.2.1. Purpose

The EHCY program is intended to ensure that homeless youth can have access to education and achieve academic success as the population is facing the following problems.

Unstable enrollment. In the 1980s, only about half of homeless children had enrolled in school [39]. Among enrolled homeless students, only about 77% of homeless students attend school regularly [39]. More than half of homeless students experienced high mobility and transferred schools twice or more [39].

Mental health problems. In school, more than four-fifths of homeless youth experience depression, aggression, anxiety, separation anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), etc., and nearly half of them have had suicidal thoughts or attempted to commit suicide [3].

Precarious accommodations. Recent data shows that the majority of HCY (76%) shared a home with others because of economic recession, housing loss, or similar reasons. 14% of homeless students rely on shelters to live and 7% of them live in hotels or motels [40].

4.2.2. Equity

Funded more than 98% by Congress in the McKinney-Vento Acts, EHCY distributes subgrants to a quarter of public-school districts to facilitate the enrollment of HCY [40]. With the implementation, the total U. S. homeless student enrollment in the SY 2011-2012 was 1,168,354, greatly exceeding the number in the 1980s. The enrollment in the SY 2018-2019 was 1,387,573, with an 18.76% increase overall. The EHCY program provides equitable educational opportunities for the vulnerable population, so more and more homeless youth can have equal rights in enrollment. For detailed numbers, see Appendix A.

4.2.3. Efficiency

EHCY has great coverage over the HCY than many other programs. The enrollment of homeless youth continues to rise and make significant progress. At the beginning of the 21st century, the EHCY program increased the enrollment rate by 17% and 87% of them started schooling [41]. HCY enrolled in public schools in the school year 2015-2016 was 1,304,803, comparatively, Early Head Start and Head Start, two similar programs only served 52,078 homeless children in the school year of 2015-2016 [40], indicating the EHCY program functioning effectively.

EHCY requires more and more public schools to offer services and choices. 16,440 public schools reported enrolled homeless students in the school year of 2015-2016 [40] and the schools are requested to legally perform administrative functions and provide educational services for the public good.

EHCY narrows the learning gap between homeless students and other normal students. The federal report shows that about a third (31%) of homeless students have achieved academic proficiency in reading and a quarter of them have academic proficiency in mathematics [40]. Also, corporations among EHCY, medical, and housing programs promote the general welfare of the HCY. However, there is still controversy on whether EHCY has authentically improved students' capacity. Masten and colleagues [30] used the administrative data from the Minneapolis public school system to track the educational process of the homeless and highly mobile students, revealing that there were significant disparities in reading and mathematics between normal students and homeless students and the gap is to continue widening after the second grade.

4.2.4. Unintended Consequences

The actual implementation of EHCY demonstrates obvious class and/or racial stratification. A qualitative study found that HCY who were African American encountered racialized treatment when seeking help from institutions [42]. Black students are hesitant to participate in school activities as they experience hostile racial violence from peers or school staff [43]. HCY also present various degrees of willingness to attend a school that some of them are actively seeking educational opportunities and eager for knowledge, while some may be indifferent and skeptical about authoritative assistance.

The slackness of primary-level staff. At the state level, EHCY is not implemented as planned. When liaisons contact the socially marginal group, they are not using some professional or appropriate skills [42]. Part of that is because of the lack of relevant knowledge or abilities and a lack of motivation. In the Chicago public school system, officials refuse to fulfill their obligation to serve homeless youth, or they use vague standards to identify homeless adolescents, which undermines their educational rights and opportunities [44]. Although the program stipulates the specific work content and other norms of liaisons and officials, the time and effect of their work cannot be directly quantified, recorded, and put into the evaluation system due to the absence of strong supervision. Overall, the binding force is weak. The ineffective administration results in a situation where schools and communities do not alleviate the educational predicament of homeless youth.

Irresponsible guardianship may increase. Since the local government, public schools, and communities have an obligation to guarantee enrollment and provide subsidies, some families may choose to not perform their custody obligations and push responsibility back to the public, causing more teenagers to become homeless, turning into the Moral Hazard.

To remove barriers to education, the EHCY program develops from the rationale that providing educational services for homeless youth can help decrease social and economic costs because increasing educational opportunities will prevent them from drug, substance use, and crimes. EHCY expands the scale of public schools to provide service and meet the educational needs of HCY by ensuring their enrollment and helping with transportation and accommodations. EHCY has anticipated results to create a long-term impact on homeless youth to help them become self-sufficient, nevertheless, the restrictive eligibility standards may prevent students' access to fundamental resources for higher education.

5. Policy Evaluation

Clemons and McBeth [16] formulated a 5-step scheme of policy evaluation to make the evaluation evaluative, focusing on the deficits and excess of policies. It's an analytical method to avoid common pitfalls and value judgment. The first step is problem definition, which defines the content and scope of the problem. Next is criteria establishment, with some common metrics such as efficiency, equity, community, legality, political acceptability, and others that apply to this research topic. The third step is policy alternatives generation to present policy options. The fourth step is policy evaluation and selection, leading to the final step of adopted policy evaluation.

Step 1: Define the Problem

From the evidence discussed previously, the federal policy and programs fail to address youth and children homelessness issues when the total number of homeless youth and children accounted for one-third of the whole homeless population and has increased steadily over the years. Because of limited and dysfunctional grants, a loose accountability system for administrative staff, and social stereotypes of homelessness, policy, and programs for homeless youth only serve a small range and focus on providing immediate materials and arranging homeless youth in shelters or schools, ignoring whether they acquire knowledge and skills or not. In addition, mental health services and counseling are not accessible to every eligible applicant, substance use, sexual abuse, and mental illnesses are hazardous factors influencing their reintegration.

Step 2: Establish Criteria

Reduction of youth homelessness. It measures the extent to which the proposed policy will attain the objectives to decrease the rate of homeless youth and increase their educational levels and housing availability to escape from homelessness.

Equitable access. It's important to evaluate a policy on whether homeless youth could have equitable access, instead of receiving confusing guidelines and potential discrimination for different races, ethnicity, and gender preference. Above is a public question that asks about the allocation of benefits and social resources to help the homeless.

Feasibility of necessary resources. It evaluates competencies to implement projects. It also questions whether there are tests and/or experiments that can be conducted at a required level of reliability to adequately measure the effectiveness of interventions.

Political viability. Political criteria influence whether a policy alternative will be acceptable to relevant stakeholders such as decision-makers, legislators, taxpayers, and the common public.

Step 3: Generate Policy Alternatives

Youth Permanent Supportive Housing. Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is an existing intervention model by integrating “low-barrier affordable housing and supportive services” to build independent living skills and develop employment services for homeless people.

Coordinate with communities to implement programs to prevent sexual abuse and domestic violence. In response to the fact that one-third of homeless youth suffered from physical and sexual abuse and domestic violence before their homelessness, precautionary community-based programs are implemented currently to emphasize families’ responsibilities, help youth be aware of their legal rights, and expand access in case they seek help, as the status quo.

Strengthen crime prevention education for homeless youth in school. Currently, the federal EHCY program doesn’t cover legal services for homeless youth. Strengthening crime prevention could help homeless youth understand social norms, behavioral standards, and individual costs of crime more deeply, thus reducing their socially deviant behavior.

Provide special academic advisors and resource centers for homeless youth in school. Instead of just focusing on increasing homeless enrollment, academic advisors will assess the capacity, stability, and psychological status of the homeless youth in school with the help of school social workers to ensure the homeless can achieve academic improvement.

Step 4: Evaluate Practice and Select Policies

Youth permanent supportive housing deals with the primary cause of homelessness. Youth PSH has affordable access as it could remove barriers to housing for disadvantaged groups and help them maintain housing stability and build independent living skills. There is evidence showing its effectiveness to lower administrative costs related to crisis expenses such as hospitals, jails, shelters, and prisons from a cost-effective solution, that, investments for permanent supportive housing have decreased 26% of chronically homeless individuals since 2007 [45]. But some officials wonder whether the long-term investments to build youth PSH will be allocated to other aspects and create more potential benefits rather than help the homeless youth. Also, it may raise controversy on technical and political feasibility because it requires affordable housing and increased grants or taxes, which may influence the local housing market. Real estate companies and landlords would argue for their benefits if more housing is provided at a low price.

Programs aiming to prevent sexual abuse and domestic violence avail the consequences of the policy. While it could decrease the rate of homeless youth by combining community and family efforts to establish a suitable and safe living environment, the policy alternative has a limited influence on improving equity because it can only decrease a few risk factors of youth becoming homeless. Also, in communities, the disadvantaged group usually can’t get reasonable access to services because they might be willing to stay socially invisible or be forced to conceal their living status. It’s technically and politically feasible because current programs already build collaboration with communities to provide psychological treatment and communities have resources to reach out to families.

Strengthening crime prevention education doesn’t aim at the root cause. It will not contribute much to reducing homelessness, but it may increase the effectiveness of the program because it better addresses the negative externalities of committing crimes by homeless youth and reduces the cost of public security. It also ensures equitable access to receive service and will promote equity, because it may enable them to enter the labor market more equally with decent records. The alternative is feasible technically and it can use existing resources because schools pay a lot of attention to teaching knowledge about legal rights and obligations. It will gain much political viability because it accords with the requirement of citizenship development.

Similar to the former alternative, providing academic advisors can’t reduce homelessness. It intends to provide professional assistance to stimulate homeless students to acquire skill development in literacy and communication. If implemented well, it would reinforce

relationships with mentors and teachers. It will increase the administrative cost of school, and some stakeholders may argue whether it's equitable to serve only homeless students rather than all students with poor academic performance. It's uncertain if the school grants support for an academic resource center to follow up on the academic improvement of homeless students.

Step 5: Evaluate Adopted Policies

Above all, the third alternative is selected considering all the criteria. With crime prevention, staff in programs to end homelessness will collaborate with schools to reduce the potential threat from homeless students. In a long term, homeless students can be taught to live independently within the social structure of laws and regulations. But schools might increase expenditure on training teachers and coaching students on crime intervention. Some homeless students may dislike being treated differently if they are the only group to receive legal education, which will have a negative impact on their school engagement and mental health.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis, although the current policy for education among HCY has made improvements in increasing enrollment and targeted correcting market failure of externalities, it doesn't effectively reduce youth homelessness nor help them achieve substantial academic achievement. The overall direction that's needed for amelioration is to increase the supply of crucial services and lift the program's cost-effectiveness by specifying staff's responsibility.

Recommendation 1: Increase Crime Intervention and Mental Health Services for Homeless Youth.

It demands cooperation and collaboration among schools and other social welfare agencies such as the juvenile court, child welfare, foster care, child abuse, and neglect organizations to increase integrated crime intervention education and mental health services for HCY in school. The tangible costs will be the materials and equipment used in education. For instance, a community can provide legal knowledge manuals for homeless youth and arrange crime intervention lectures for them with the help of the local police department. The input human resource is a typical and significant intangible cost in the services. With services aiming to solve the mental problems caused by depression, aggression, and anxiety, children and youth will gradually form a positive attitude to receive education and achieve self-actualization, which will bring more economic value to their community even overweigh the costs.

The recommendation requires time and money input, but it's not arduous to implement because, with adjustments in the current education and community service system to concentrate more on legal knowledge education, the situation of HCY will be improved. Yet what might go wrong is that underlying risks still exist that the civil rights of HCY might be violated when confidentiality issues occur in the implementation.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the Accountability System for Administrative Staff.

To achieve the goal, state governments need to execute specific regulations on work hours and the number of HCY the liaisons should take charge of. It also needs policy modification to add restrictions and link liaisons' work effects directly to the reward and punishment assessment, sequentially enhancing their sense of job responsibility and elevating institutional capacity.

Perceiving a strong social stereotype of homelessness, staff are far from completely motivated to fulfill their duties. So, the state education department, housing department, public schools, and local community providing homeless services should undertake the due obligations to instruct and supervise the administrative work. Some NGOs might use independent third-party evaluation agencies to assess the assignment and separation of duties.

Administrative costs would be increased to be used to expand services or labor force costs, such as staff salaries. In some communities, they might need to conduct evaluations on the

performance of liaisons’ work first to clarify the problems, meanwhile taking the cost of instructing, coaching, and training staff into consideration if the previous work has little effectiveness. If staff work in a small community with many other services to provide for citizens, there will be an opportunity cost that other potential populations might benefit from the investment for training staff to deal with HCY. The main benefits will be a reduction in the criminal system and social security administration instead of increasing social productivity. With the improvement of the effectiveness of the accountability system, social benefits will be increased so that more HCY will stay away from the street and enroll in school. From a long-term perspective, benefits will justify costs when HCY graduate from high school or college and get good jobs to support themselves and become productive, tax-paying citizens.

Liaisons are required to have related experience in policy, education, or homelessness with knowledge of social work and the sensibility of ethical issues. They are supervised by state coordinators, trained to apply more skills in identifying and communicating with the homeless and expected to attend annual meetings to report students’ living conditions. Also, the information-sharing system between school social workers and liaisons should be strengthened. Practically, some states have already reformed accountability systems, but with limited funding, there could be flaws that the gap between expectations and reality will expand. This policy analysis has two limitations and leaves room for additional research and further study. One limitation is that this paper is not a systematic review nor a meta-analysis so it might face the error of omission from methodological challenges. Another is that this policy analysis did not compare similar policies and regulations internationally, making it vague to estimate the strengths and weaknesses of practice in the United States. More in-depth and cross-culture analysis should be proceeded to make a comprehensive policy evaluation.

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Appendix

The number of homeless youth enrolling in schools is increasing. Data is retrieved from Federal Data Summary School Years 2016-17 through 2018-19: Education for Homeless Children and Youth.

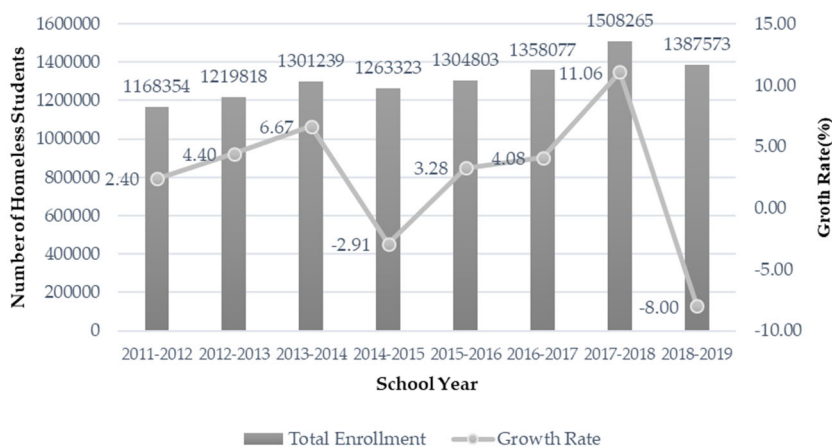


Figure 1. Enrollment of HCY and The Grow Rate with School Years.

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