

Webster University

Doctoral Digital Portfolio

Advocating for Trauma-informed Instructional Strategies for Engaging Homeless Students in
Urban K-12 schools

By

Sarah Vernier

A Doctoral Digital Portfolio to the School of Education of Webster University, Webster Groves
Campus, St. Louis, MO, United States of America, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Ed.D. in Transformative Learning in the Global Community.

May, 2025

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters, Kalina and Quinn. You are my greatest inspiration and the reason behind this journey. Watching you grow, learn, and navigate the world has not only inspired me as a mother, but has also shaped me as an educator and a researcher. It was through my experiences as your mom that I found my passion for this research and my desire to advocate for students who face challenges far beyond the classroom walls.

To Mike, I am forever grateful that I had the chance to share with you, in person, the start of my doctoral journey. In moments of doubt, when I questioned my purpose or ability to finish, I could so clearly picture the excitement on your face when I told you my news. I held onto your words, how proud you were of me, and they became a quiet motivation in the hardest moments. Thank you for believing in me. Rest peacefully in heaven, my friend Michael D. Scott.

Acknowledgements

What began as a running joke about earning the title of “doctor” before my brother, who already holds the initials D.R., turned into one of the most fulfilling and transformative journeys I’ve ever taken, in ways I never could have anticipated.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Yin Lam Lee-Johnson, Director of the Doctor of Education Program at Webster University. You have created a program that not only challenged me academically but also allowed me to continuously build on my research interests with each completed course. Your thoughtful feedback and encouragement, especially when you were my professor, pushed me to improve my work and stay committed to the process.

To my readers, thank you for your time, guidance, and willingness to meet with me over this past year. Your feedback helped shape this dissertation and ensured I stayed on track.

A special thank you to my peer and soon-to-be Doctor, Andrea Drone. Your constant availability to answer questions, clarify confusion, or simply listen was invaluable. Having you to lean on throughout this process eased so many stresses and I am incredibly grateful for your support.

Of course, to my family, thank you for your continued interest in my journey and for understanding all the weekends and evenings I had to “hide away” to write. Your patience, encouragement, and love never went unnoticed.

And last, but certainly not least, to my brother Derrick ... I win!

Abstract

As the demographic of the homeless population shifts from predominantly single males to more families with children, there is a pressing need for the education system to adapt its support strategies to address the unique needs of homeless students. While homelessness has long been a significant societal issue, recent research has brought greater attention to the ways in which homelessness contributes to childhood trauma. This growing body of evidence underscores the urgent need for schools to implement trauma-informed strategies, particularly when working with homeless students who often face a range of emotional and social challenges due to their unstable living situations. As more students arrive at public schools coming from a variety of homeless situations, whether it's staying temporarily with friends or relatives (referred to as "doubling up"), living in shelters or motels, or experiencing the uncertainty of not knowing where they will sleep each night—educators must become more attuned to these students' living conditions. By understanding the context of their students' lives, teachers can adjust classroom procedures and create a more supportive learning environment for these students. This paper explores the findings from qualitative research designed to better understand the challenges and needs of homeless students in the classroom. The research utilized several qualitative methods, including teacher questionnaires aimed at identifying the specific needs of homeless students, follow-up interviews to clarify responses and gather further insights, and a researcher reflexive journal to provide a deeper understanding of the research process. The findings of this study indicate that students experiencing homelessness have heightened social-emotional needs in the school setting, which often require specialized support beyond what is typically provided in the classroom. Teachers reported feeling unprepared to address these needs, and many expressed a strong desire for trauma-informed training to help them better support homeless students in their classrooms.

Based on these findings, the study provides several key recommendations for school districts. These recommendations aim to equip educators with the tools and strategies they need to effectively support homeless students. Teachers highlighted the lack of resources and support as one of the most significant challenges they face when teaching this vulnerable population. In particular, they expressed a need for more comprehensive training on how to understand and respond to the trauma experienced by homeless students. By incorporating trauma-informed practices and providing teachers with the appropriate resources, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for homeless students, ultimately improving their educational outcomes and emotional well-being. This research offers valuable insights into the specific needs of homeless students and provides actionable recommendations that can help school districts better serve this growing population. By recognizing the unique challenges these students face and implementing the necessary support systems, educators can help mitigate the negative impacts of homelessness on their academic and emotional development.

Keywords: trauma, homeless, homelessness, trauma-informed strategies

Table of Contents

Dedication	2
Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Chapter 1:	
Statement of Problem	7
Introduction	9
Contextualization	11
Theoretical Framing	24
Chapter 2:	
Literature Review	27
Research Gap	39
Chapter 3:	
Methods	41
Researcher Positionality	47
Chapter 4:	
Findings and Discussion	52
Chapter 5:	
Conclusion	69
References	75
Appendixes	81

Chapter One

Statement of Problem

As homelessness among students continues to rise, it is crucial for educators and schools to not only address basic needs but also to recognize and support the behavioral and social challenges these students face. “Homelessness is not a choice, but rather a journey that many find themselves in” (Brown, 2008). This quote from Dr. Asa Don Brown broadens the understanding of homelessness, emphasizing that it is not a situation that occurs overnight, nor is it a problem that can be solved quickly. In the 2020–2021 school year, over one million children and youth experiencing homelessness were enrolled in public schools in the United States (NCHE, 2022). “The number of students experiencing homelessness jumped 25% between the 2020-21 and 2022-23 school years” (Arundel, 2025). As the homeless population shifts from predominantly white males to more families and students, schools must adapt their approaches to meet the growing needs of these students. Recent data suggest that approximately half of all homeless children are under the age of 6 (Anthony et al. 2017). Many schools provide social workers to assist families with securing housing, obtaining furniture, and accessing food and clothing programs. However, there remains a significant gap in addressing the behavioral and social needs of the homeless students themselves. “Homelessness also increases vulnerability to traumatic events. Individuals who are left without shelter for extended periods of time can develop a sense of helplessness, alienation, and a lack of security” (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991). Research shows that homelessness is a trauma factor that can lead to behavioral problems (Milburn et al., 2017). As homelessness becomes an increasingly prominent issue in public education, it is vital for schools to develop policies and procedures that specifically address the unique needs of homeless students. Some educators may not even be aware of their students’

housing situations, and while privacy must be protected, teachers need training to effectively support these students and address their diverse needs.

While schools provide essential physical resources for homeless students, there is a significant gap in addressing their emotional and educational needs, which could be further supported by more trauma-sensitive approaches. “The impact of homelessness on the children, especially young children, is devastating and may lead to changes in brain architecture that can interfere with learning, emotional self regulation, cognitive skills, and social relationships” (Bassuk et al. 2014). When enrolling in school, homeless families are required to fill out forms such as the McKinney-Vento intake form (see appendix A), along with district forms asking about medical and food assistance needs. The medical forms cover immunizations and eye and dental care, but they do not address the mental health needs of students. Furthermore “The health problems facing homeless persons result from various factors, including a lack of housing, racism and discrimination, barriers to health care, a lack of access to adequate food and protection, limited resources for social services, and an inadequate public health infrastructure” (Sleet and Francescutti 2021). There are also no forms to identify the specific support students might need in the educational setting. While school districts have programs to help students obtain physical items like books, clothing, shoes, and food, the distribution of these resources may not always consider the trauma these students are experiencing. When items are handed out publicly in front of peers, it can inadvertently highlight these students' needs, potentially increasing their sense of vulnerability. What other small changes can schools implement to help reduce the stress that homelessness causes for these students?

To effectively support the rising population of homeless students, more research is needed to address their social-emotional, behavioral, adaptive, and academic needs in the

classroom. How can educators ensure they are meeting all of the needs of this growing group of students? There is a significant opportunity to better address their trauma through trauma-informed educational strategies that support their overall well-being in the classroom. If more teachers were equipped with the knowledge of trauma-informed practices, they could help alleviate some of the stressors these students face in their daily lives, creating a more supportive and effective learning environment.

Introduction

The shift in homelessness from primarily male adults to a growing population of families with children has far-reaching effects on various systems, including education, and requires proactive support strategies in schools. Homelessness is not a new issue, but it has evolved from being predominantly an adult male concern to a crisis affecting families with children who did not choose this lifestyle. This shift impacts various areas, including the type of housing provided by the government, the specific assistance homeless families require, and the resources needed in public schools. According to the Federal Housing Assistance for Low-Income Households, “Currently, only about one-quarter of the eligible low-income population receives housing assistance through federal spending programs.” Numerous studies, which will be addressed in the literature review section, have shown that homelessness is a significant source of stress and trauma for young children. Public school teachers already face the challenge of addressing a wide range of academic needs, and many schools are now incorporating trauma-informed approaches to manage increased behavioral issues. Given that homelessness is recognized as a cause of trauma, can schools also be proactive in teaching coping strategies to homeless

students? Homelessness is no longer just an adult issue; it is impacting children, and we must support these children on their academic journey.

Advocating for homeless students in the classroom leads to important research questions focused on the effectiveness of trauma-informed professional development for educators. What is the difference in how teachers who have received trauma-informed professional development perceive their effectiveness in supporting homeless students compared to those who have not received such training? How does trauma-informed training impact teachers' confidence in addressing the specific needs of homeless students in the classroom? What are the perceived challenges and benefits for teachers who have received trauma-informed instruction when supporting homeless students?

It is evident from the studies found in the literature review that students experiencing homelessness require additional support to succeed academically and emotionally. Research shows that children are the fastest-growing demographic within the homeless population, and homelessness is a significant stressor that often leads to trauma for these children and their families.

This paper will examine the evolving nature of homelessness and its significant impact on students within the public school system. It will provide an in-depth review of existing research regarding the various ways homelessness affects students' academic performance, social-emotional well-being, and overall perception of self-worth. Specifically, the paper will focus on how homelessness influences students' self-esteem, academic achievement, and behavior in the classroom. By reviewing previous studies, this paper aims to highlight the specific challenges homeless students and teachers face and offer insights into how schools can better support this growing and vulnerable population.

Contextualization

Evolution of Homelessness

The term homelessness was first used in the United States in the 1870s to describe people traveling the country looking for work (Union Presbyterian Seminary, n.d.). These men were perceived to have no or loose morals as they wandered without a desire of domestic life or a home. This early perception of transient men led to a negative connotation in connection to those without a home. As this became a national issue, the solution at the time was jobs rather than housing. The American Industrial Revolution further aided the homelessness in the United States. This took men away from farm life where they lived on the land. Now they were in search of new jobs in skilled trades in big cities. The idea of earning a wage from wealthy employers drew people in as they began to travel the country in search of this type of work (Kusmer, K. L. 2002). As the country became urbanized the construction of the national railroad system also emerged. This aided in the mobility of people traveling in search of work. At this time, the majority of the homeless population was young, white men. These young men were seen as an aggressive type of homeless nicknamed tramps (DePastino, T. 2003). These tramps rode the national railroad system without paying. They often traveled in large groups together which when joined together were seen as frightening to the other travelers. Many of these penniless travelers were forced to stay overnight in shelters or police station “tramp rooms” upon arriving in the cities. At this time in history, homelessness was also often defined as a voluntary and temporary event.

The evolution of homelessness in America, particularly after World War II, reveals how the homeless population shifted and how the definition of homelessness has evolved over time. In 1939, the start of World War II gave Americans a spark to work. Over the next three decades,

the homeless population went from being young able-bodied white men to typically over 50 years old, white men who were disabled or dependent on welfare. This led to these men living in cheap hotels in the poorest cities in urban America. At the time, these men living in hotels were considered housed under the definition of homelessness by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This led to difficulties in defining and studying homelessness throughout U.S. history. During this postwar time, the mass of homeless men living in cheap hotels is the precursor to what we call skid-row today.

Over the years the government has made multiple attempts to address and aid in the homelessness situation. In 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established. The FHA was a program to finance suburban housing to minorities by creating national lending standards and access to reasonably priced mortgages. Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949 in response to the housing shortage after World War II. It was intended to assist the low income population with obtaining a decent home and living environment. Essentially the goal was to address families living in slums and provide safer housing. The Housing Act of 1949 is considered the origin of the urban renewal. The act ultimately failed as it destroyed more housing communities than it created. The next attempt to addressing the homelessness crisis was the Housing Act of 1956. This act was written to relocate payments to those individuals and families that were displaced by the process of the urban renewal.

Key legislative acts and the formation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) throughout the mid-20th century aimed to address homelessness and housing inequities, though the full implementation of these policies took decades. In 1965 the Housing and Urban Renewal Act was created as a rent supplement for low-income, disabled, and

elderly individuals. This same year saw the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) formation. The country now had an official department to address the issues of fair housing and homelessness. A few years later, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act, was written to prohibit discrimination in access to housing based on disability or family status. In 1995 discrimination based on age was added through the Housing for Older Persons Act. Unfortunately the HUD Rule on Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing which was authorized in 1968 was not published until 2016. Therefore the rule was not enforced for 50 years. Meanwhile the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 was created to assist urban development through the Housing Choice Voucher program, also known as the Section 8 program. The intent is to provide low-income housing through rental subsidies paid to the private sector. This program is still current and is the main federal housing assistance program serving families.

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1977 marked a pivotal moment in addressing homelessness in the U.S. by providing the first federal definition of homelessness and establishing key programs to support homeless individuals. This is important because by defining homelessness provisions could be made for federal money to support homeless shelters. The McKinney act also created Health Care for Homeless (HCH) and created the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, definition of Homeless Person, according to Public Law 111-22:

- (1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided

for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;

(2) Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence;

(3) Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; or

(4) Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member.

The 1980s marked a turning point in the history of homelessness in the United States, ushering in the modern era shaped by a combination of societal, economic, and policy changes. During the 1980s, several factors contributed to the shifting landscape of homelessness, marking the beginning of what is now considered the modern era of homelessness in the U.S. Major forces that changed the complexion of homelessness in the modern era include gentrification of the inner city, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, high unemployment rate, the emergence of HIV/AIDS, an inadequate supply of affordable housing options, and deep budget cuts to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and social service agencies in response to what was then the country's worst recession since the Great Depression (Jones, 2015). The solution for homelessness shifted from the availability of jobs to the availability of affordable housing. At this time, the definition of homelessness was a flexible definition that took many different factors into account. The definition at this time considered the early era of homeless as seasonal workers who traveled for jobs. It also began to consider people who were living in the poorest cities and surviving on odd jobs and begging. Another factor was people

living with family members in order to survive. All of these groups had one thing in common though and that was the lack of a fixed structure or home.

In 2002, the Chronic Homelessness Initiative marked a significant shift in the U.S. government's approach to addressing homelessness, leading to expanded definitions and a focus on long-term solutions. In 2002, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) directed the Chronic Homelessness Initiative in which states were to create a 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness. Thanks to this initiative, new definitions of homeless, homeless person, and homeless individual were expanded. Homelessness is formally defined by the United States government as when a person “lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and if they sleep in a shelter designated for temporary living accommodations or in places not designated for human habitation”(HUD 2019). Congress also identified two main factors that influence the overall issue of homelessness which were the lack of affordable housing and housing assistance programs and the realization that homelessness is an issue that affects every community, not just the larger urban cities where it was more visible. Another change to policy came in 2003 to focus on permanent supportive housing programs.

The reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act in 2009, known as the HEARTH Act, further advanced federal efforts to address homelessness by consolidating programs and setting a goal for rapid housing solutions. The HEARTH Act worked to consolidate several existing programs and create a federal goal that individuals and families experiencing homelessness be permanently housed within 30 days. New definitions of “homeless,” “homeless person,” and “homeless individual” were outlined. This reauthorization and redefined terms were in response to congress identifying the lack of affordable housing, limited housing assistance programs, and

the realization that homelessness is an issue that affects every community. This also brought about an intake form for schools to use when enrolling homeless students (see Appendix A).

In 2010, under President Obama's administration, the U.S. government introduced a comprehensive federal strategic plan aimed at ending homelessness across the nation. This plan outlined specific and ambitious goals to address homelessness among various populations within targeted timeframes. The federal strategic plan identified four key objectives: (1) to prevent and end homelessness among veterans within five years, (2) to complete the effort of ending chronic homelessness within seven years, (3) to prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children within ten years, and (4) to establish a long-term strategy to eradicate all forms of homelessness (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2010). These goals reflect a coordinated national effort to reduce homelessness and ensure sustainable housing solutions for vulnerable groups.

Research highlights the ongoing struggles of families experiencing homelessness, showing their increased likelihood of facing continued poverty and homelessness, while also illustrating the evolving definitions and categories used to understand homelessness. Recent research indicates that families experiencing homelessness are more likely to continue to face poverty and homelessness in the future (Desmond, 2016). Over the years homelessness has been defined by different characteristics and categories. Some studies have defined homelessness by the amount of time someone does not have stable housing. The type of people identified as homeless can be broken down into three categories. The first being transient, those who had a single brief shelter stay. The second category is episodic, these are people who had repeated brief

stays at a shelter. The third category is chronic, people who spend most of their nights in a homeless shelter.

Despite evolving definitions and plans, the concept of homelessness as a temporary state is often overlooked, particularly for students in transition, whose circumstances can shift frequently, presenting unique challenges. One significant gap in the current definitions and plans for homelessness is the failure to acknowledge that homelessness can be a temporary condition. Many students who are labeled as homeless are termed “students in transition” within the school system. Their state of homelessness can change from living in a shelter to living with family members. By the current definition these are both considered a situation of homelessness but each situation comes with a different set of stressors for the child. As current homeless trends see the shift from young men to families and children as the majority of the homeless population, the definitions and government assistance programs need to adjust to this new homeless population. In *Confronting Homelessness: Poverty, Politics, and the Failure of Social Policy*, Wagner and Gilman (2012) critically examine the persistent issue of homelessness in the United States. They argue that despite various policy initiatives, homelessness remains a significant problem due to systemic failures.

The rising number of homeless students in the U.S. highlights the growing challenge faced by schools in supporting this vulnerable population, with a significant percentage living in precarious housing situations. According to data from the National Center for Homeless Education, during the 2021-2022 school year, there were 1,202,652 students enrolled in public education, spanning from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, who were identified as homeless. This substantial number highlights a significant challenge within the education system. Of these

1,202,652 homeless students, a considerable majority 75.92%, were living in what is classified as a "doubled-up" situation. This means they were staying with other families or friends due to a lack of stable housing. In addition, 8.89% of these students reported residing in temporary accommodations such as hotels or motels, which often provide only a short-term solution to their housing instability. Furthermore, 10.89% of the homeless student population was found to be living in shelters or transitional housing programs designed to provide more structured support. Meanwhile, 4.30% were categorized as unsheltered, meaning they were living in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, campgrounds, or abandoned buildings. This represents a stark contrast to more stable living conditions and underscores the severe nature of their housing situation. The statistics also indicate a concerning upward trend in the number of students identified as homeless, rising from 1,096,669 in the 2020-2021 school year. This increase reflects a growing challenge for educational institutions and social services as they strive to address the needs of this vulnerable population and work towards more effective solutions for their housing instability.

The significant number of homeless students in Missouri, with varying housing situations, highlights the urgent need for targeted classroom support and strategies for educators working with this vulnerable population. During the 2021-2022 school year in Missouri, there were 32,969 students enrolled who were identified as homeless. Among these students, a significant majority 84.40%, were living in "doubled-up" situations, meaning they resided with other families or friends due to a lack of stable housing. Additionally, 7.20% of these students were staying in hotels or motels, often a temporary solution to their housing instability. Another 5.40% were housed in shelters, which provide more structured support, while 3.00% of the students were categorized as unsheltered, residing in conditions such as cars, parks, or

abandoned buildings. This distribution of housing situations underscores the varied and challenging circumstances faced by homeless students in Missouri. Furthermore, according to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Homeless Data report, St. Louis Public Schools reported 3,068 students (20%) enrolled as homeless during the 22-23 school year. This data shows the need for classroom support and strategies for teachers who work in this district.

Trauma-Informed Care and Education

To fully grasp the importance of implementing trauma-informed strategies in the classroom, it is essential to first understand the origins and evolution of trauma-informed care, as well as how it was introduced and adapted into educational settings. This foundational knowledge provides a deeper insight into why these strategies are necessary, highlighting the growing recognition of trauma as a significant factor in student development and learning. Understanding the historical context of trauma-informed care allows educators, policymakers, and researchers to appreciate how the approach has been refined over time to better meet the needs of students who have experienced various forms of trauma, particularly in a school environment. Trauma-informed care originated in the medical field in the 1970s in dealing with the physical and mental traumas in association with veterans of the Vietnam War. It was not until the 2000s that trauma-informed care became associated with teaching strategies. Trauma is possibly the largest public health issue facing our children today (CDC, 2019). Studies have shown that roughly two-thirds of children in the United States have experienced at least one type of trauma. Traumatized students are especially prone to difficulty in self-regulation, negative thinking, being on high alert, difficulty trusting adults, and inappropriate social interactions

(Lacoe, 2013; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Moreover, homelessness is a known trauma factor which can escalate behaviors in homeless students. In their article *Creating Trauma-Informed Systems: Child Welfare, Education, First Responders, Health Care, Juvenile Justice*, Ko et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of integrating a trauma-informed perspective across various child-serving systems to enhance care for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events.

School districts are increasingly adopting trauma-informed strategies to help teachers manage classroom behavior and support students who have experienced trauma. “As a result of their regular and ongoing contact with youth, schools are in a unique position to assist young trauma survivors by helping to buffer the effects of trauma and to assist with access to appropriate care” (Martin et al., 2017). Trauma-informed care has six guiding principles to create a positive relationship between the teacher and the student. The six principles as defined by the CDC are safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment and choice, and cultural, historical and gender issues. A trauma informed classroom therefore uses these six guiding principles to create a safe environment in the classroom. The trauma-informed classroom therefore looks to use positive behavior management systems to reduce the stress or trauma the child may be experiencing.

Trauma-informed teachers are acutely aware of the profound impact that trauma can have on students' ability to function effectively in a classroom setting. They understand that trauma can disrupt a student's emotional, cognitive, and social development, making it difficult for them to focus, regulate their behavior, and engage fully in learning. In the chapter titled "*The Evolution of Trauma-Informed Schools*" from the book *Supporting and Educating Traumatized Students: A Guide for School-Based Professionals*, Eric Rossen and colleagues discuss the

growing recognition of trauma's impact on students and the necessity for schools to adapt accordingly. They emphasize that trauma-informed approaches are not merely additional programs but fundamental shifts in how schools operate. To support these students and create an environment where they can thrive, trauma-informed educators prioritize implementing a classroom atmosphere characterized by predictability and structure. This type of environment is particularly crucial for children who have experienced trauma, as it offers a sense of stability and safety that may be lacking in their personal lives. For many students, the unpredictability of their home environment can lead to heightened anxiety, stress, and difficulty concentrating. By establishing a predictable schedule with clear routines and guidelines, trauma-informed teachers help mitigate these feelings of uncertainty, providing students with a framework they can rely on. This structure not only fosters a sense of security but also enables students to focus on learning, build positive relationships, and work on personal growth. The consistency offered by a structured classroom allows trauma survivors to feel safe enough to engage academically and emotionally, which is crucial for their long-term success both inside and outside the classroom..

In a trauma-informed classroom, providing students with choices in their participation is a critical strategy that fosters a sense of empowerment and agency, which is especially important for students coming from unpredictable or chaotic home environments. For these students, their home life may have been characterized by a lack of control or consistency, leaving them feeling helpless or disempowered. By offering choices in classroom activities, teachers give students the opportunity to regain a sense of control, which can have a profound positive effect on their emotional well-being. This practice allows students to make decisions that impact their learning experience, helping them feel more secure, valued, and capable. Additionally, offering choices enables students to engage more deeply with their education, as it allows them to take ownership

of their learning and develop decision-making skills that are crucial for their personal growth and future success.

Additionally, children who come from unstable or unpredictable environments are more likely to react to challenges with heightened stress responses, such as fight-or-flight mechanisms. These responses can manifest in various ways, including social, emotional, behavioral, or academic difficulties. For example, a student might react to a seemingly minor frustration with outbursts or withdrawal, or they might struggle with tasks that seem simple to their peers. Understanding that these behaviors are often a manifestation of underlying trauma is crucial for educators. Recognizing that behavior is a form of communication is a fundamental aspect of trauma-informed teaching. For students who have experienced trauma, their actions and reactions may be a way of expressing their unmet needs, fears, or stressors. Instead of viewing challenging behaviors as deliberate disruptions, trauma-informed teachers interpret them as signals that require a compassionate and empathetic response. This perspective encourages teachers to seek out the root causes of the behavior and address the underlying issues rather than merely managing the symptoms.

Another characteristic of a trauma-informed classroom is that they have an intervention plan in place. When a student has a disruptive behavior it is important for educators to have a plan in place so that they do not react in a negative way which can lead to escalating behaviors from the child. One physical element of a trauma-informed classroom is a safe space for students. A safe space can look different in the physical makeup but they all essentially have the same tools to assist a child in de-escalating behaviors. A safe space is usually a corner in the classroom, away from other students. Trauma-informed instructors often place soft items such as

a bean bag or large soft pillows for comfort. Common items in a safe space are children's books about emotions and dealing with them, fidgets or stress balls, paper and crayons for children who need to write or draw to express themselves, and feelings posters. The safe space is for a student to go to when they need a break, or their emotions are interfering with their learning. A trauma-informed educator will allow students to use the safe space as needed, monitor the space, and make themselves available to the students as needed to talk through emotions or events.

A safe space in the classroom is a valuable resource for students, and as a practicing educator, I have found it to be immensely beneficial for all learners, particularly those who experience trauma or emotional challenges. My classroom safe space is thoughtfully designed to provide both privacy and accessibility, situated in a corner away from the rest of the class, yet still within my line of sight for monitoring purposes. This allows students to take a moment away from the group while still feeling supported and safe. The space is equipped with a variety of calming tools to meet the needs of different students. For instance, I have large, soft pillows for sitting, as well as smaller pillows that some students prefer to hold or hug for comfort. To help students understand and process their emotions, I keep a basket filled with books that focus on recognizing and understanding feelings, as well as strategies for calming down or responding to distress. Additionally, I provide a child-friendly picture guide that teaches students how to practice deep breathing, fidget toys to help them manage anxiety, and small stuffed animals that some students find comforting. To encourage self-expression, I offer art supplies such as crayons, paper, and journals, giving students the opportunity to draw or write about their emotions. A sand timer is also included in the safe space to help students visualize and manage the amount of time they spend there. If a student needs more time, they can request an additional turn on the timer. By offering these tools, I create a space where students feel empowered to regulate their

emotions, practice self-care, and re-enter the classroom environment when they feel ready. This safe space fosters a sense of security and promotes emotional well-being, contributing to a positive and supportive learning environment for all students.

A trauma-informed approach necessitates that educators remain highly attuned to the intricate emotional and psychological needs of their students, recognizing that many students bring past traumas into the classroom. In order to create an environment conducive to learning, it is essential for teachers to provide structure and allow students to have choices, which can foster a sense of control and security. Understanding that behaviors often serve as a form of communication, especially for students who have experienced trauma, allows teachers to respond with empathy and patience rather than frustration or discipline. By adopting this approach, educators help students build resilience and navigate their educational experiences more successfully, despite the challenges they may face.

Theoretical Framing

Understanding the conflict theory of capitalism is crucial to examining the root causes of homelessness, as it highlights the structural inequalities and power imbalances that contribute to this societal issue. Conflict theory is a general term that describes the struggle between different groups. Conflict theories assume that all societies have structural power divisions and resource inequalities that lead to groups having conflicting interests (Wells, 1979). While there is a social structure attributed to conflict theory of capitalism many people believe homelessness is the fault of the individual. Assumptions are made that the choices homeless people make lead to the consequence of living without a permanent place to call home. “Society focuses on the individual as the cause of his or her own state of homelessness, blaming the victim rather than

focusing on the larger antecedent social and economic forces, such as unemployment, limited affordable housing, and breakdowns in kinship networks” (Belcher and DeForge 2012). There are many factors that can lead to homelessness, but in connection to the conflict theory of capitalism, one of the main factors is mal distribution of wealth and resources.

When researching and developing trauma-informed strategies for homeless students, it is essential to take into account their mental health and emotional well-being. The psychological impact of homelessness on students can be profound, significantly affecting their emotional stability and overall mental state. One theoretical framework that provides valuable insights into this issue is the Affect Theory. This theory is particularly relevant when considering how homelessness can influence students' emotional states and behaviors. Affect Theory is the idea that feelings and emotions are the primary motives for human behavior. According to Affect Theory humans are motivated by affective states which are the subjective experiences of emotions. The theory is that positive changes to mental health can be achieved when someone understands their emotions and instead of reacting to them automatically, recognizes the emotions and different affective states they have.

Silvan S. Tomkins was the first to develop the connection of affect theory. He wrote a four volume book called *Affect Imagery Consciousness* over a period of nearly 40 years. Shortly after completing his final volume he died in 1991. According to the affect theory there are three primary types of affect or emotion. The three categories include positive such as joy and excitement, neutral being only surprise, and negative such as anger, terror, and disgust. The affect theory states that mental health can be achieved by maximizing positive affects and minimizing negative affects. Therefore, behaviors are influenced by affects. The affect theory

states that to improve mental health, one must understand affects and learn how to stop the automatic responses the brain is sending when negative affects are encountered. For homeless students, who often endure significant stress and instability, the Affect Theory helps in identifying and categorizing various emotional responses that may arise from their traumatic experiences.

The Affect Theory offers valuable insight into how homelessness influences students' emotions, highlighting the various emotional states they may experience. By understanding and teaching students to regulate their emotions in a positive manner, educators can help them cope with the trauma of homelessness. Many trauma-informed strategies focus on helping students manage their emotions when faced with stressors, as trauma can cause reactions that are exaggerated or appear disconnected from the situation. The Affect Theory emphasizes the importance of recognizing and controlling the initial emotional responses, which can often be harmful if left unchecked. By integrating an understanding of emotional states and trauma-informed strategies, educators can better address the unique needs of these students, fostering a supportive environment for their emotional growth.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

As an educator working with students from various homelessness situations, my research focuses on identifying best practices to support these students in addressing their trauma, social-emotional learning, and academic progress. In my research, I discovered numerous studies highlighting the profound stress and trauma associated with homelessness. The sudden loss of a home, adjusting to life in shelters, uncertainty about where they will sleep, and concerns for their safety all contribute to significant trauma for young children. This trauma can manifest in numerous ways within the school setting, affecting students' academic progress, their ability to complete assignments, focus during lessons, and their self-esteem. It can also hinder their ability to form and maintain relationships with peers and may lead to behavioral challenges as they cope with the stress of homelessness. Additionally, the stress experienced by the caregivers often has a ripple effect, creating further challenges for the children involved.

Homelessness is increasingly recognized as a significant issue in public schools, and no one is denying its growing impact. Previous research has established that homelessness is a major stressor, often leading to trauma. Numerous studies have explored the medical conditions associated with homelessness, and there are programs designed to assist with medication and healthcare. Additionally, there is a growing body of work on trauma-informed training for educators. However, there is a notable gap in research regarding the best practices for educating homeless students within the public education system. Because many of these families are in transition, it is rare for them to remain at a single school for the entire academic year. The following ten studies explore the known challenges of homelessness, the progress made so far, and the critical areas where support and research are still lacking.

Table 1: Studies in Chronological Order

Date of Publication	Article Title	Research Focus
1991	<i>Homeless children's perspectives of whole self</i>	This research studies how homeless children perceive themselves.
1995	<i>An examination of the effectiveness of stress management training with elementary school-age children living with their families in homeless shelters</i>	This study looks at different ways to manage stress similar to the previous study, which categorized the effectiveness of coping strategies.
2001	<i>School -aged sheltered homeless children's stressors and coping strategies</i>	This study looked at the stressors affecting homeless students and the effectiveness of the coping strategies they were using.
2007	<i>Trauma Exposure and Behavioral Outcomes in Sheltered Homeless Children: The Moderating Role of Perceived Social Support</i>	This study examines the impact of trauma on children experiencing homelessness and how perceived social support can influence their behavioral outcomes.
2008	<i>Adaptation in Homeless Children: An Empirical Examination Using Cluster Analysis</i>	This study looked at whether homeless children can be grouped into subgroups of behavior problems, adaptive functioning, and achievement.
2014	<i>Asthma and Adaptive Functioning among Homeless Kindergarten-Aged Children in Emergency Housing</i>	This study looks at the elevated rates of asthma as a risk factor for other problems in children who are experiencing homelessness.
2015	<i>Characteristics of Mothers Caring for Children During Episodes of Homelessness</i>	This study looked at the physical, psychological, and substance use problems of homeless women caring for children
2016	<i>An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Social Skills Application for Children who are Homeless</i>	This study looks at learning disabilities in homeless children and the effectiveness of using the <i>Let's Be Social</i> application (Everyday Speech, 2015) to teach social skills.
2017	<i>Do Positive Parenting Practices Moderate Parental Mental Health and Child Behavior Among Homeless Families?</i>	This study looked at parent relationships as a factor in overall mental health of homeless children.
2021	<i>Exploring the Relationships Between Community Experiences and Well-Being Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness</i>	This study addressed the psychological well-being of 100 youth experiencing homelessness.

The table above organizes the studies in chronological order, highlighting that homelessness has been a long-standing issue within the public education system. The earlier studies emphasize that this challenge is not a new phenomenon, while more recent research underscores that homelessness continues to be a pressing problem that schools are still grappling with today. Through a careful review of the ten studies most relevant to my research, four central themes emerged that provide a deeper understanding of the issue: Theme 1: The Psychological and Emotional Impact of Homelessness, Theme 2: Coping Strategies and Stress Management, Theme 3: The Behavior and Academic Achievement of Homeless Children, and Theme 4: The Health Challenges and Learning Disabilities Experienced by Homeless Children. These themes reflect critical areas of concern and point to key factors that influence the well-being and academic success of homeless students.

Psychological and Emotional Impact of Homelessness

The first theme that emerged from the studies was the Psychological and Emotional Impact of Homelessness, which was explored in five relevant studies for my research. One such study, titled *Homeless Children's Perspectives of Whole Self* by Wendy McLaughlin, specifically examines how homeless children perceive themselves. Published in 1991, this study is particularly significant as it highlights the rising issue of homeless children in America, a trend that continues to be relevant today. McLaughlin's study addresses the stress that homelessness places on children, noting the behavioral manifestations of this stress, including anxiety and other stress-related symptoms. The study sought to gain insight into how homeless children view themselves amidst these challenges. It involved interviews with 20 children from five homeless shelters, gathering both demographic and physical symptom data to compare with the children's

interview responses. Results revealed that many of the children were concerned about their basic needs upon arriving at the shelters, such as food and money. In addition, when confronted with fear or stress, many children responded by avoiding the situation—through actions such as running away, sleeping, or hiding. However, McLaughlin also acknowledged the study's limitations, including the small sample size and constraints related to time and privacy while conducting research in the shelter environment. Despite these challenges, the researcher emphasized the need for further studies to understand how homeless children perceive their sense of self and how this understanding can guide future efforts to support them in addressing their trauma.

Continuing to explore the theme of the Psychological and Emotional Impact of Homelessness, I found Beryl Cowan's study, *Trauma Exposure and Behavioral Outcomes in Sheltered Homeless Children: The Moderating Role of Perceived Social Support*, to be particularly compelling. This study investigates the impact of trauma on children experiencing homelessness and examines how perceived social support might influence their behavioral outcomes. Similar to previous research, Cowan's study focuses on the stressor's homelessness places on children. The research was conducted with a sample of 81 homeless children living in a shelter, and it explored how the trauma of transitioning into a shelter environment affects these children's emotional stability and behavior. When children enter a shelter, they are required to adjust to an entirely new environment, including unfamiliar rules and routines. This transition can cause emotional imbalances and lead to negative behavioral responses. Moreover, entering a shelter often means not only adjusting to a new physical living space but also the painful possibility of being separated from family members, such as parents or siblings.

Cowan's study highlights the growing number of homeless children in the United States and underscores the importance of researching the psychological and emotional effects of homelessness on children. It argues that the stressors resulting from homelessness can contribute to emotional dysfunction within families as a whole (Cowan, 2007). The study gathered demographic information through parent interviews and found that traumatic lifetime exposures accounted for 33.3% of the variance in children's aggressive behaviors and thoughts (Cowan, 2007). This research further demonstrates the significant behavioral effects of homelessness on children, and it leads to an important next step in the field: investigating strategies to address the behaviors that stem from the trauma of homelessness.

A recent study titled *Exploring the Relationships Between Community Experiences and Well-Being Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness* by Katricia Stewart (2021) examines the psychological well-being of 100 youth experiencing homelessness. Published in 2021, this is the most recent study I came across regarding homeless children. The research begins by defining "community" from the perspective of homeless youth. They described community as a mutually supportive network of relationships. The study found that these youth placed significant value on their sense of community, with those who felt cared for by their community exhibiting higher levels of self-esteem. However, the findings also revealed that not all youth view their community experiences positively. Some youth expressed a lack of trust or connection to the communities they were part of, highlighting the complexities of their experiences. Stewart's study underscores the need for further research into how youth define well-being and understand its significance in their lives.

The next two studies, while still fitting into the overarching theme of the psychological and emotional impact of homelessness, shift the focus to the parent-child relationship and the overall well-being of parents. *Do Positive Parenting Practices Moderate Parental Mental Health and Child Behavior Among Homeless Families?* by Smith, Shardé McNeil, Holtrop, Kendal, and Reynolds, Jamila, explores the role of parent relationships as a factor in the mental health of homeless children. This study goes beyond examining the emotional state of homeless children and delves into the well-being of the parents. The purpose of the study was to determine whether non-coercive discipline, clear expectations, and the use of praise and incentives could protect children from maladjustment when parents were experiencing psychological distress and stress in their parenting roles (Smith et al., 2017). As expected, the study found that higher levels of parental psychological distress were associated with an increase in problematic behaviors in homeless children. However, the study also revealed that the use of praise and incentives, as part of positive parenting practices, had a beneficial impact on children's behavior, even in the face of parental stress. This suggests a potential strategy for educators to implement in the classroom when working with homeless students. Further research could explore the connection between positive educational practices and child behavior within the context of homelessness.

A related area of research into the impact of homelessness on families focuses on the well-being of mothers caring for children during episodes of homelessness. The study *Characteristics of Mothers Caring for Children During Episodes of Homelessness* by Melissa L. Welch-Lazoritz, Les B. Whitbeck, and Brian E. Armenta examines the physical, psychological, and substance use challenges faced by homeless women caring for children. As the research consistently shows, children are the fastest-growing homeless population, and many of these children are connected to single mothers. This demographic is crucial to understanding the

broader impact of homelessness. The study was conducted through interviews with women living in shelters and revealed significant health issues linked to homelessness, including high levels of stress, poor nutrition, and inadequate hygiene. Homeless women, unlike their housed counterparts, lack consistent access to healthcare, which exacerbates these problems. Of the women interviewed, 40 percent had attempted suicide, and alcohol use was the most prevalent substance reported. Although the study acknowledged limitations due to a small sample size, its findings highlight the severe stress and responsibilities faced by mothers living in shelters, which in turn affect their ability to care for their children.

Coping Strategies and Stress Management

The second theme that emerged from my research was coping strategies and stress management. Two studies, in particular, connected well with my research and provided valuable insights into how homeless children cope with stress. One study, *An Examination of the Effectiveness of Stress Management Training with Elementary School-Age Children Living with Their Families in Homeless Shelters* by Timothy Davey, explores the stressors faced by homeless students and investigates different stress management techniques. This study, like many others, begins by emphasizing that children are the fastest-growing homeless population, noting that while homelessness is stressful for adults, it can be especially traumatic for children. It highlights homelessness as a significant stressor, which can negatively affect children's well-being and development.

Davey's study examines various stress management techniques to determine which are most effective for children experiencing homelessness. The research looks at factors such as self-esteem, stress responses, and social behaviors, seeking to identify the best strategies for

alleviating the stress these children face. While the study addresses homelessness as a stressor and explores effective coping methods, its primary aim is to provide social workers with the tools and techniques needed to help children manage stress. Although the findings are helpful in the context of social work, this study could offer valuable insights for educators working with homeless children as well, particularly in terms of identifying and implementing stress-reduction strategies in the classroom.

This is where my research interest is once again highlighted. I am passionate about identifying the most effective strategies to support students facing challenges socially, adaptively, and academically. *School-Aged Sheltered Homeless Children's Stressors and Coping Strategies* by CY Huang published in 2001 examined the stressors affecting homeless students and evaluated the effectiveness of their coping strategies. The research followed 90 children living in shelters, categorizing their coping strategies to assess how well they worked in managing the challenges of homelessness.

The study begins by highlighting the growing number of homeless families in the United States, emphasizing that children have become the fastest-growing homeless population, surpassing the previously dominant demographic of adult males. Many of these children come from single-mother families. The study notes that most research on homeless school-aged children has focused on describing their demographic characteristics, as well as their physical, psychological, and mental health (Huang, 2001). This observation resonates with my research interest in best practices for homeless students. While there is a significant body of research exploring the effects of homelessness on children's mental health, I have found limited studies

focusing on practical strategies and approaches that can help these students reach their academic potential.

One key issue identified in the study is that much of the existing research on homeless children has been conducted through parent interviews rather than directly engaging with the children themselves. The purpose of this study was to gather more information on the stressors homeless children face and evaluate the effectiveness of the coping strategies they employ. The study found that 80% of the coping strategies used by these children were effective, opening the door for further research on how these strategies can be applied in educational settings to help homeless students thrive academically and socially.

Behavior and Achievement in Homeless Children

The third theme that emerged from my literature review focused on the behavior and achievement of homeless children. Initially, I expected to find more research related to this theme, but I encountered difficulty finding reliable studies. However, one empirical study I did find, titled *Adaptation in Homeless Children: An Empirical Examination Using Cluster Analysis*, explored whether homeless children could be grouped into subgroups based on behavior problems, adaptive functioning, and achievement. The study begins by noting the increasing number of families experiencing homelessness in the United States, shifting from the historical view of homelessness as primarily an issue affecting individuals. Family homelessness is now a growing social concern, something my own school is witnessing firsthand with an increasing number of students enrolling from a nearby shelter.

The study examined 220 families who had lived in a shelter for at least one week. The results of the cluster analysis indicated that homeless children are not a homogeneous group, as they function at varying levels and have differing needs. The study found two main subgroups: one consisting of children performing well in all areas, and another of children performing poorly. The findings suggest that homeless children either remain unaffected and perform as expected, or they struggle significantly. While this study provides valuable insight, it could have been more useful if it had explored the contrasting levels of functioning within the subgroups and their specific needs in greater detail. The study itself acknowledges that services and policies could be better targeted to address the needs of these distinct groups of children.

Health and Learning Disabilities in Homeless Children

The fourth theme that emerged from my literature review focused on the health and learning disabilities of homeless children. One study that explores this issue is *Asthma and Adaptive Functioning among Homeless Kindergarten-Aged Children in Emergency Housing* by Cutuli et al. (2014). This study examines the elevated rates of asthma in homeless children and how it may serve as a risk factor for other challenges. The findings revealed that kindergarten-aged children living in emergency homeless shelters had lifetime rates of asthma (21%) that were approximately twice the national average and more than double the state prevalence rate of 9.5% (Cutuli et al. 2014). The study also found that children with asthma faced difficulties in getting along with their peers, particularly in the early school years. However, while children in shelters were found to have higher rates of asthma, the study concluded that asthma did not have a significant impact on their academic performance.

The final study related to the fourth theme of health and learning disabilities in homeless children is *An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Social Skills Application for Children who are Homeless* by Emily Baton. This research focuses on learning disabilities in homeless children and evaluates the effectiveness of the *Let's Be Social* application (Everyday Speech, 2015) in teaching social skills. The study highlights that homeless children are twice as likely to develop learning disabilities compared to their housed peers. Additionally, these children often face significant deficits in their social skills, which can further hinder their academic and social development. The goal of this study was to assess not only the extent of these social skill deficits but also the potential of using a specific program to address and improve them. While this study focuses on a single developmental aspect, it provides valuable insights into how targeted interventions can support homeless children. The findings indicated that the use of the *Let's Be Social* application led to notable improvements in social skills, suggesting that such programs could be a promising tool for helping homeless students navigate social interactions and ultimately succeed in the classroom.

While conducting research on studies focused on homeless students, I discovered a significant gap in the literature, with a notable scarcity of research specifically addressing targeted strategies to support these students within the educational system. Among the few studies available, only one explored a particular intervention aimed at helping homeless students in schools. This lack of comprehensive research underscores a critical void in our understanding of how to effectively support this vulnerable population. Across various fields, numerous studies consistently show that students experiencing homelessness require additional support to thrive academically and emotionally. The evidence clearly demonstrates that homelessness is not just a transient condition but a profound stressor that deeply impacts both children and their families.

These children often encounter significant barriers to learning due to the trauma linked to their unstable living environments.

Research has shown that homelessness is strongly connected to various forms of trauma, which can manifest in multiple ways, such as emotional distress, behavioral issues, and struggles with academic performance. The stress associated with homelessness can hinder a child's cognitive development, social skills, and overall well-being, highlighting the urgent need to identify and implement effective strategies to alleviate these impacts.

Many studies on homelessness focus on the effects of the situation on families with children, primarily aimed at providing social workers with the necessary information to assist these families. Legislation has mainly concentrated on affordable housing and the availability of temporary shelters for families in transition. While researchers are beginning to explore the impact of homelessness on children and the effectiveness of coping strategies for stress management, there is a critical need for educators to be trained in best practices for supporting these students as they enter public school classrooms. Often, these students attend multiple schools throughout the year as their families struggle to secure stable housing, though some are fortunate enough to remain at one school for the entire year. Regardless of the circumstances, educators must be equipped with the tools to help homeless children manage the trauma they face. Research has shown that children are the fastest-growing homeless population, and as these children enter classrooms, the school system must be prepared to provide the resources and support needed for them to thrive socially, emotionally, behaviorally, adaptively, and academically.

Given the documented impacts of homelessness on children's mental health and educational outcomes, there is a clear need for more focused research on best practices for supporting homeless students as they transition into and navigate the classroom environment. Current studies indicate that while general support measures are beneficial, there is a pressing need for targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by these students. Further research should aim to develop and evaluate evidence-based strategies tailored to the needs of homeless students. This could include investigating specific programs, support structures, and pedagogical approaches designed to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Research Gap

Many studies on homelessness focus on the impact of the situation on families with children, primarily aiming to provide social workers with the information needed to assist these families. Legislation has concentrated on affordable housing and the availability of temporary housing for families in transition. Researchers are beginning to explore the stress of homelessness on children and the effectiveness of coping strategies for managing this stress. However, as educators, we must focus on identifying the best practices for educating these students as they enter our classrooms. Often, these students attend multiple schools throughout the year as their families struggle to secure stable housing, though some are fortunate enough to stay in one school for the entire year. Regardless of their circumstances, educators must be equipped to help homeless students cope with the trauma they experience. Research has shown that children are the fastest-growing homeless population, and as they enter our classrooms, we

must provide them with the tools to manage their trauma and succeed in all areas: social, emotional, behavioral, adaptive, and academic.

While there is a growing recognition of the challenges faced by homeless students, there remains a significant gap in research regarding the specific classroom support these students need, particularly beyond the support they may receive from their peers. As an educator in a school with a large homeless population, I have witnessed firsthand that these students often require additional academic and social-emotional support. My previous district, where I received training in trauma-informed classroom strategies, highlighted the importance of addressing students' emotional and psychological needs. However, the district I am currently in, which serves a high population of students who are experiencing homelessness and therefore have experienced trauma, has not provided similar professional development for its teachers. This gap in professional preparation has prompted my research question: Is there a need for trauma-informed instructional strategies in the public education classroom for homeless students? To answer this, further questions must be explored, such as whether homeless students have higher social-emotional needs and how teachers who have received trauma-informed professional development perceive their effectiveness when supporting homeless students compared to teachers who have not received such training.

Chapter Three

Method

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the specific needs of homeless students in the urban public education classroom setting. Given the challenges of conducting research in an unpredictable school environment, I initially anticipated recruiting 6-10 participants for my study. I recognized that the demands on teachers, especially those working with high-needs populations, might lead to some teachers withdrawing from participation. Ideally, I aimed to collect data from ten teachers to ensure a robust sample, but I understood the possibility of attrition during the school year. Fortunately, after receiving IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, I was able to successfully recruit and retain a full participant pool of ten educators. The participants in this study consist of ten teachers who work in urban public schools with high homeless populations, all of whom are directly engaged with students experiencing homelessness in their classrooms. As an educator in a school that serves a neighboring women and family homeless shelter, my participant pool is made up of my colleagues, teachers who are familiar with the unique challenges of working with homeless students. Their firsthand experiences and insights will provide valuable data to better understand the needs of these students and inform potential strategies for supporting them within the classroom.

Participant information was initially gathered through a questionnaire that participants completed at the start of the study. The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic information and initial insights into the teachers' experiences working with homeless students. A copy of the initial questionnaire can be found in Appendix B for further reference. Following the completion of the questionnaires, I conducted follow-up interviews with each participant. Each participant was asked to respond to the same core set of questions, ensuring consistency across

all interviews. However, based on the participants' initial responses to the questionnaire, certain alterations or follow-up questions were introduced to allow for a more tailored and in-depth exploration of their individual perspectives. These modifications were made to probe further into specific areas of interest, enabling a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and insights. As a result, while the overall structure remained consistent, each interview was adapted to address the unique responses and context provided by the participant. A copy of the follow-up interview questions can be found in Appendix C for further reference. These interviews were held via Zoom to ensure that accurate recordings could be made for thorough analysis. The use of Zoom also facilitated the ability to download transcripts of the interviews, which were then uploaded into NVivo software for further coding and identification of themes. Each Zoom interview was conducted in a private and secure environment to ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of both the researcher and the participant. To maintain the integrity of the research process and safeguard participant identities, I took several measures to ensure that sensitive information was not inadvertently shared. Prior to conducting any interviews, I emphasized the importance of confidentiality to the participants and reminded them to avoid using any identifying information related to students or other individuals. However, in the event that a participant inadvertently used a name or a descriptive element that could potentially identify a child, I took immediate steps to redact that information from the interview transcript. In order to maintain confidentiality and protect participant identities, each individual was assigned a generic code (e.g., "Teacher A," "Teacher B") that is used throughout this paper when referencing their responses.

After each interview, I reviewed the transcript carefully, removing any identifiable details such as names, locations, or other distinguishing characteristics, ensuring that the information

was anonymized before being uploaded into NVivo for analysis. This process of redaction was critical in protecting the privacy of the students discussed during the interviews and adhering to ethical standards for confidentiality in qualitative research. By carefully managing and securing the data, I was able to create a safe environment for participants to share their experiences openly, knowing that their personal and professional information would remain protected throughout the study.

Data collection involved multiple components, including the participant questionnaires, individual interviews, email correspondence, and notes from observations during the interviews. This combination of data collection methods helped to create a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' perspectives on supporting homeless students in the classroom. It also allowed for triangulation of the data to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

Throughout the study, there were no anticipated risks for participants, as the research focused on professional experiences and was conducted in a confidential manner. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to participation.

Once all the data was collected, Grounded Theory was employed to analyze the findings and identify the most significant themes and theories that could be applied to educating homeless students in the public education setting. More specifically, Grounded Theory was used to uncover patterns and insights that would offer a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by homeless students, as well as to propose strategies for better supporting them in the classroom. Grounded Theory is defined as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach allows researchers to generate theories

directly from the data collected, making it particularly useful for exploring complex social issues, such as homelessness and its impact on education.

The primary goal of Grounded Theory is to explore relationships and uncover an underlying theme or theory that can guide future action. According to Charmaz & Thornberg (2020), “The grounded theory method not only helps researchers to synthesize data but, moreover, to move beyond description through constructing new concepts that explicate what is happening.” In the context of this study, Grounded Theory provided the framework for analyzing the data from interviews, surveys, and observations, leading to the development of a theory that would offer actionable insights for educators working with homeless students.

With over one million children and youth experiencing homelessness, there exists a significant gap in the programs and support systems designed to address the behavioral and social needs of these students within the school environment. Grounded Theory facilitated a comprehensive analysis of this issue by allowing me to synthesize the collected data, identify patterns and emerging themes, and develop a theory that can help educators better understand the specific challenges faced by homeless students. By applying this method, I was able to offer evidence-based strategies and recommendations aimed at enhancing educators' understanding of how to effectively support homeless students in the classroom, ultimately improving their academic and social outcomes.

Although Grounded Theory typically involves a smaller participant pool, I believe this research method enabled me to gather in-depth, meaningful data. The smaller sample size allowed for more focused follow-up with participants after they completed the initial questionnaire, offering an opportunity to clarify responses and obtain additional insights. In

Grounded Theory, interviews serve as the primary data collection method, and for this study, my participants were fellow educators working in a public education setting with homeless students. Drawing participants from the school district where I currently work was particularly advantageous when conducting interviews and collecting data, as I was able to gather more specific and relevant information.

Having established relationships with the participants facilitated more candid and open responses, which ultimately contributed to a richer and more comprehensive data set. The ability to obtain complete interviews and follow-up interviews ensured that I gathered detailed data for analysis. While these established relationships could have influenced how participants answered questions, I took steps to mitigate any potential biases by assuring them that all responses would remain anonymous in the data analysis process.

To further enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, I employed the technique of member checking. This process involved cross-checking the interpretations of the data with participants and asking them to confirm or clarify findings. This strategy proved invaluable in ensuring that the conclusions drawn were accurate and reflective of the participants' perspectives. Given the combination of my established relationships with the participants and the central role of interviews in data collection, I found that Grounded Theory was the most suitable research method for this study. It allowed for a deep, nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by educators working with homeless students, ensuring the findings were both credible and insightful.

While interviews serve as the primary source of data collection in Grounded Theory, other forms of data can also be incorporated to enrich the analysis. One key feature of Grounded Theory is that data collection and analysis can occur simultaneously, allowing for a more

dynamic and iterative approach. In this study, I collected data from three primary sources: participant questionnaires, participant interview transcriptions, and my researcher reflexive journal.

The use of a reflexive journal provided an additional layer of insight, as it allowed me to document my personal reflections and professional experiences teaching in a public education classroom with a significant number of students residing in a shelter each year. This journal not only helped me connect more deeply with the participant group, but also gave me the opportunity to critically examine my own biases, assumptions, and perspectives throughout the research process. By integrating these diverse sources of data, I was able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by homeless students and the strategies employed by educators to support them.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of my research, I made a conscious effort to clearly outline my researcher positionality and provide a reflexivity statement. This allowed me to openly acknowledge my personal perspective, background, and experiences, which could influence how I interpreted and analyzed the data. Reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research, as it helps ensure that the researcher's biases and assumptions are taken into account when drawing conclusions.

In addition, I employed the strategy of triangulation, which involves cross-verifying data from multiple sources, methods, and analyses to strengthen the validity of my findings. Triangulation is particularly valuable in qualitative research, as it helps provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research problem. In this study, I triangulated three key data sources: participant questionnaires, interview transcriptions, and my researcher

reflexive journal. By incorporating these different data sources, I was able to create a more robust and well-rounded picture of the experiences of homeless students and the strategies educators use to support them.

For the data analysis process, I used NVivo software, which allowed me to efficiently organize and analyze the qualitative data. NVivo's capabilities enabled me to identify themes and patterns within the data, facilitating the development of grounded theory. To ensure the security and confidentiality of the data, all collected information was stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Additionally, to safeguard against data loss, all files were regularly backed up on Webster University's OneDrive system, providing an extra layer of security and reliability. This comprehensive approach to data management and analysis helped ensure that the research process was rigorous, transparent, and ethically sound.

Researcher Positionality

As the researcher, my aim is to gather insights from my fellow teachers regarding their experiences working with homeless students. I sought to identify commonalities in their experiences and to understand whether they believe these students require additional support in the classroom. By exploring their perspectives, I hoped to uncover shared challenges and determine if there is a consensus on the need for more resources or assistance for homeless students. To analyze the data collected from the initial questionnaires and follow-up interviews without bias, it is important for me to first disclose my personal beliefs. By doing so, I can ensure transparency and acknowledge any potential influences these beliefs may have on my interpretation of the data. This step helps to maintain objectivity and integrity throughout the analysis process.

I am a white female single mother of two daughters, one is now a teenager, while the other is in elementary school. When my youngest was just one year old, I faced a difficult decision to move my daughters for their safety, relocating from our current home back to my hometown. The move happened quickly, and while I believed I had secured a new rental for us, I was informed shortly before the move that the rental needed repairs and would not be ready for a month. As a result, we had to temporarily move in with family. When the school year began, I had to enroll my oldest daughter in elementary school. Due to our living situation, which was classified as "doubled up," I completed the necessary homeless paperwork for the district, as we did not have stable housing or utilities in our name at the time. This was my first experience with the homeless paperwork, and as an educator, it was also when I began to question the process. Nowhere in the paperwork did it inquire about my child's or student's specific needs, whether academic or social-emotional. The forms only focused on whether I needed assistance with physical items, completely overlooking the broader challenges that my child might be facing. This lack of consideration for the more holistic needs of students in similar situations raised concerns for me about how the system addresses their well-being beyond just basic necessities.

The move also meant that I was working in a new school district. During my first two years in the district, I encountered many families living in doubled-up arrangements. After two years, my school was closed, and I was transferred to another school within the district. My new placement was located near a women's and family homeless shelter, which sparked my interest in my research topic. In this new role, I found myself teaching students who were staying at the nearby shelter, which led me to explore the unique challenges these students faced and the support they needed. During this first year teaching students staying at the shelter, I came to many realizations about how some of my previous strategies and daily routines might be

unintentionally causing more harm than good. This has sparked a great deal of self-reflection and prompted changes to my classroom routines.

Over the past few years, I have also adjusted my teaching strategies to better support the families we serve, particularly those staying at the shelter. Some of the small things I had been doing in my classroom were unintentionally creating challenges for these families. For example, I have always used a communication folder system, where one side is labeled "Return to School" and the other is labeled "Keep at Home." I often have a few students who never empty their folders, so I made a general reminder one day for everyone to please empty their folders over the weekend. A student came up to me afterward and explained that they wanted to keep all of their work, but they had nowhere to store it at the shelter. This was a perspective I had never considered, what happens to the papers once they leave my classroom?

This realization led me to adjust the way I use folders. Now, I only send home the essentials, such as notes from the office or information about upcoming school events. I keep all student work at school in a binder, and when each student leaves my classroom, they receive their binder with all of their completed work in it. This way, all the papers they are proud of are neatly contained in one place. I have received positive feedback from families about this new system. Many parents have expressed how much they appreciate being able to look through their child's work, knowing that it is securely stored in the binder.

Through conversations with students and families, I became more aware of the challenges they face, particularly regarding how the school assigns homework, such as worksheets and daily reading. The school regularly provides free books for students to add to their home libraries, but many of the students staying at the shelter end up leaving these books in

the classroom or their backpacks. The school also requires daily reading of at least twenty minutes for homework. For students at the shelter, this often means reading the same few books they have stored in their backpacks.

While some worksheets only require a pencil, I am aware that many kindergarten math assignments also require crayons, scissors, and glue. Families shared with me that when specific supplies are needed for homework, they often cannot complete the assignments due to a lack of resources. Over the past year, I have had several conversations with our school social worker about ways to help make these supplies more accessible to the shelter families. We have brainstormed ideas like creating homework kits or setting up a physical space, such as a tub or shelf filled with supplies at the shelter. I often find myself wondering what more I can do to support families staying at the shelter throughout the school year.

Additionally, throughout the school year, students receive bags of food through a food program to take home. I often witnessed students refusing the bags or leaving them on the school grounds after exiting the building. Initially, I thought these actions reflected ingratitude, especially since the school was only trying to help. However, I will never forget the day an older student, whose younger sibling was in my class, explained to me why they sometimes left the food behind. They told me that they often didn't have the means to open the cans or warm the food. Some of the bags even contained baking mixes, which they couldn't use either. For this student, it was easier to leave the bag of food on the ground than to take it back to the shelter where they had no way of preparing or eating it.

These conversations with students and their families have given me valuable insight into their needs and the expectations they have for the public school system. It has become clear that

school systems must work more closely with these families to provide the necessary educational and logistical support, ensuring that every student, regardless of their living situation, has access to the resources they need to succeed.

Over the next few years, I became more mindful of my own practices in the classroom, as well as the systems in place within the school and district, realizing that some of these might be inadvertently causing more harm than intended for homeless students. I started to observe and reflect on the unique needs of these students, noticing patterns in their behavior, particularly in terms of social-emotional challenges, such as difficulty connecting with their peers. I also observed academic delays, which seemed to be linked to their unstable living situations. These insights prompted me to reconsider how the existing systems and my teaching strategies could be better aligned to support these students' well-being and success.

In the past, I've had one-on-one conversations with the families of students on my roster, but I wanted to gather more first-hand insight from other families about how teachers and the school could better support their students year-round. As I began to develop my research focus, I wanted to ensure that I was collecting data without influencing the outcome. Since I had already made observations in my own classroom, I was careful not to share my personal experiences while interviewing other educators. To maintain objectivity, I first completed the questionnaire and interview questions myself, allowing me to reflect on my own experiences without allowing them to shape or influence the responses of others. As I began my research and conducted interviews, I kept a journal to reflect on each interview. In this journal, I noted any shared experiences or other thoughts that arose, ensuring that they were kept separate from the data I was collecting. This allowed me to maintain clarity and objectivity throughout the research process.

Chapter Four

Findings and Discussion

As I began my research, I was hopeful that my study would provide valuable insights into the strategies needed to improve classroom procedures and support for homeless students. Therefore, also providing evidence for more student-based research on assistance for homeless students. It could also potentially provide evidence of the need for trauma-informed strategies for teachers who educate homeless students. As a public-school educator, I have witnessed firsthand the increasing number of homeless students entering our schools. Over the past few years, I have observed a shift, with more of my students now living in shelter environments, as opposed to my earlier experiences with students in doubled up living situations.

Before analyzing the data on working with homeless students, it is essential to provide background information on the participant pool. Among the ten participating educators, the average teaching experience is 18.8 years, with a minimum of 13 years and a maximum of 27 years. Furthermore, the participants had an average of 17 years of experience teaching in a public education setting with homeless students, with a minimum of 6 years and a maximum of 17 years. This highlights the expertise of the participant pool. Notably, among the ten participants, 50% reported encountering students experiencing homelessness often, while the remaining 50% indicated they encounter them sometimes. Refer to Figure 1 below, which also illustrates that none of the interviewed educators reported never or rarely encountering students experiencing homelessness.

Figure 1

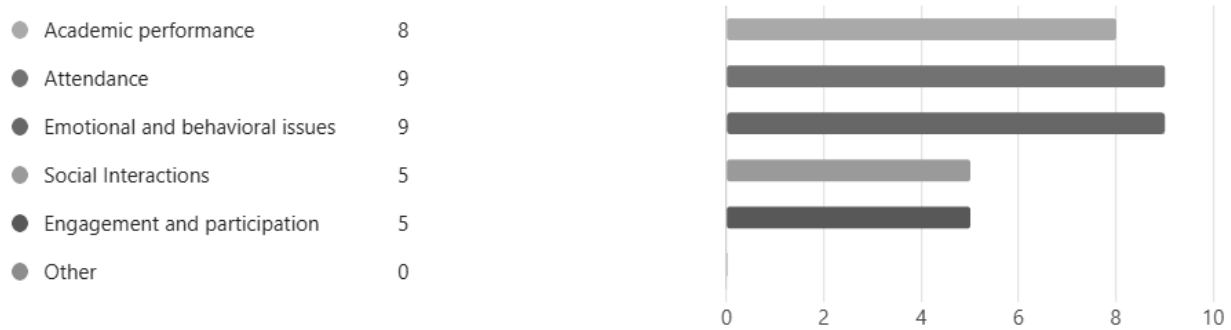
How often do you encounter students in your classroom who are experiencing homelessness?



Following the collection of background information through the initial questionnaire, the next section focused on gathering more detailed data on the challenges and experiences educators faced while working with students experiencing homelessness. As shown in Figure 2 below, participants identified attendance and emotional and behavioral issues as the most significant challenges for homeless students. These findings are similar to the results of another study conducted on teachers’ perceptions of students’ challenging behavior by Alter et. al (2013) which explored the types of behaviors most commonly observed and reported by educators in a general public-school setting. In the study off-task behavior was perceived by teachers as the most common and challenging behavior in the classroom. In contrast, isolation or lack of social interaction was identified as the least prevalent and least problematic behavior reported by teachers. Teachers in that study viewed isolation as less disruptive to classroom functioning, and therefore, it was not considered as significant of a challenge when compared to more outward behaviors like being off-task. Academic performance was noted as the next major challenge, followed by difficulties in social interactions, engagement, and participation.

Figure 2

What are the primary challenges you observe in homeless students within the classroom? (Select all that apply)



Although the previous question indicated that teachers identified attendance and social-emotional and behavioral issues as the primary challenges, the initial questionnaire also collected data on the impact of homelessness on academic performance. The follow-up interviews will further explore the challenges reported by teachers. Regarding the impact of homelessness on academic performance, 50% of teachers reported a moderate impact, while the other 50% reported a significant impact. As illustrated in Figure 3, none of the teachers reported no impact or only a minimal impact.

Figure 3

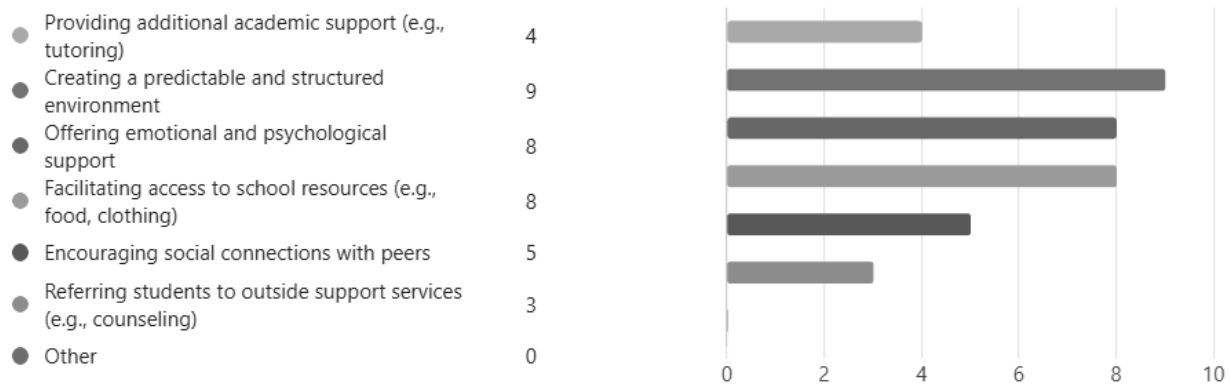
What impact does homelessness have on the academic performance of your students?



After identifying the challenges teachers observe in homeless students within the classroom, I examined the strategies educators currently implement to support these students. Please refer to Figure 4 for a detailed visual representation. The most reported strategy, used by nine out of the ten teachers, is creating a predictable and structured environment. Additionally, eight out of ten teachers provide emotional and psychological support while also facilitating access to essential school resources such as food and clothing. Furthermore, five teachers encourage social connections among peers as a supportive strategy. Four teachers offer additional academic support, such as tutoring, and three educators reported referring students to external support services, including counseling.

Figure 4

What strategies do you currently use to support homeless students in your classroom? (Select all that apply)



The next section of the questionnaire focused on assessing teachers' confidence levels when working with homeless students. This portion aimed to understand how well teachers feel prepared to identify and address the unique needs of this student population. Among the ten teachers surveyed, four reported feeling moderately confident in their ability to support homeless students, while three indicated that they were slightly confident. Two teachers expressed a high

level of confidence, stating that they felt very confident in their ability to assist these students effectively. Only one teacher reported feeling extremely confident in identifying and addressing the needs of homeless students. These findings highlight varying levels of preparedness among educators, suggesting potential areas for additional training and support. For a visual representation of these responses, refer to Figure 5 below.

Figure 5

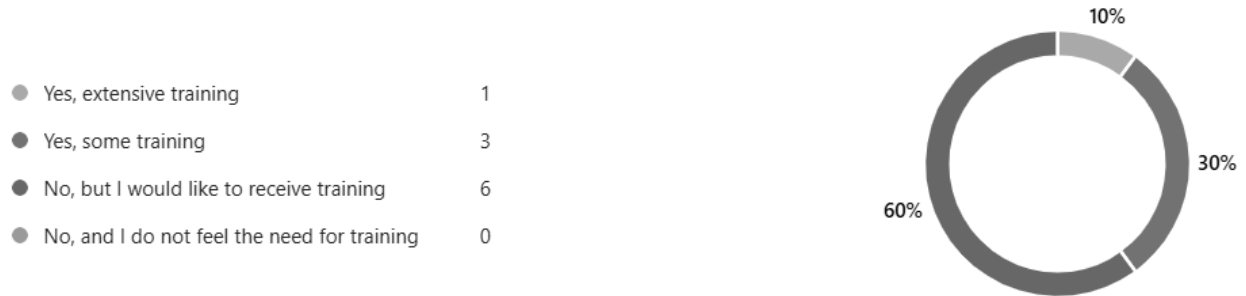
How confident are you in your ability to identify and address the needs of homeless students?



After identifying the challenges and strategies teachers use when working with homeless students, as well as assessing their confidence levels in identifying and addressing their needs, the questionnaire next explored the amount of training teachers who work with homeless students have received regarding this issue. Most notably, the questionnaire revealed that 60% of these teachers have never received any specific training, though they expressed a desire to do so. Additionally, 30% reported having received some training, while only 10%, or one teacher, indicated having received extensive training. See figure 6 below.

Figure 6

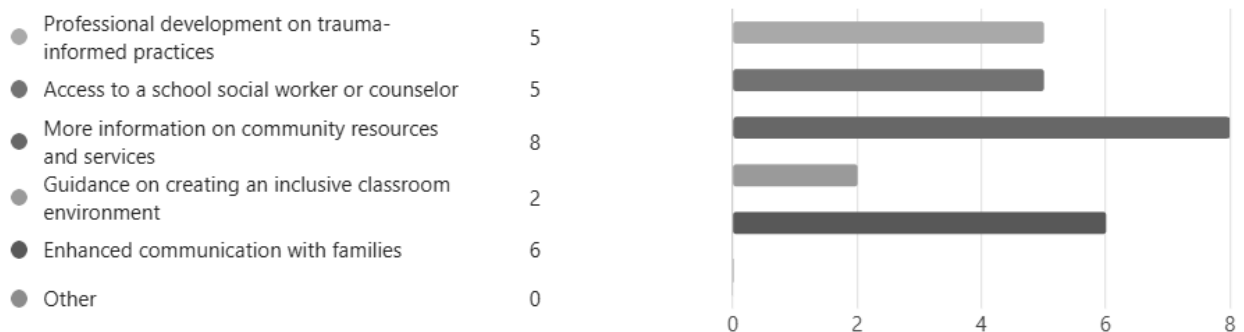
Have you received any specific training on working with homeless students?



In addition to gathering information on the amount of training and teachers' interest in receiving further training, I also collected data on which additional resources or support, if any, would help teachers better assist homeless students in the classroom. Figure 7 provides a visual representation of this data. The majority of teachers expressed an interest in receiving more information on community resources and services. Over half of the teachers indicated that enhanced communication with families would be beneficial. Half of the teachers reported that professional development on trauma-informed practices and access to a school social worker or counselor would better support them. Additionally, two teachers felt that guidance on creating an inclusive classroom environment would be beneficial.

Figure 7

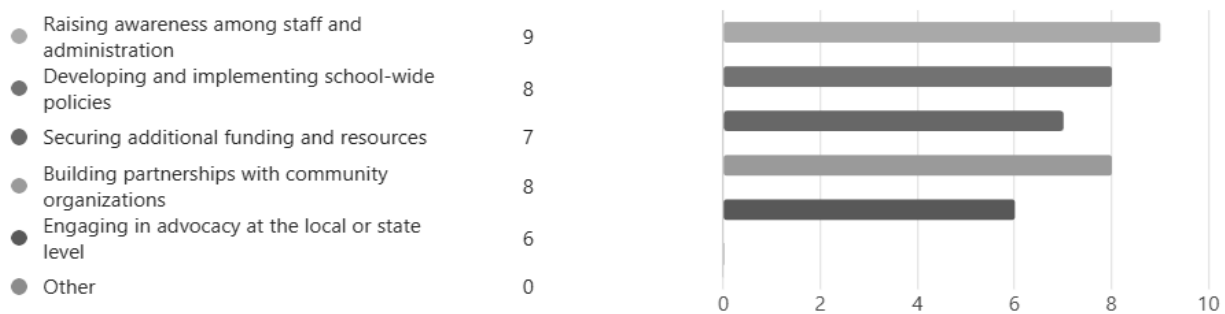
What additional resources or support would help you better assist homeless students? (Select all that apply)



After identifying the resources and support teachers felt they needed, the next question focused on the most effective ways to advocate for the needs of homeless students. See figure 8 below for a visual representation. Nine out of ten teachers identified raising awareness among staff and administration as the most effective advocacy approach. Eight teachers selected developing and implementing school-wide policies, as well as building partnerships with community organizations. Seven teachers indicated that securing additional funding and resources would be beneficial. Lastly, six teachers emphasized the importance of engaging in advocacy at the local or state level.

Figure 8

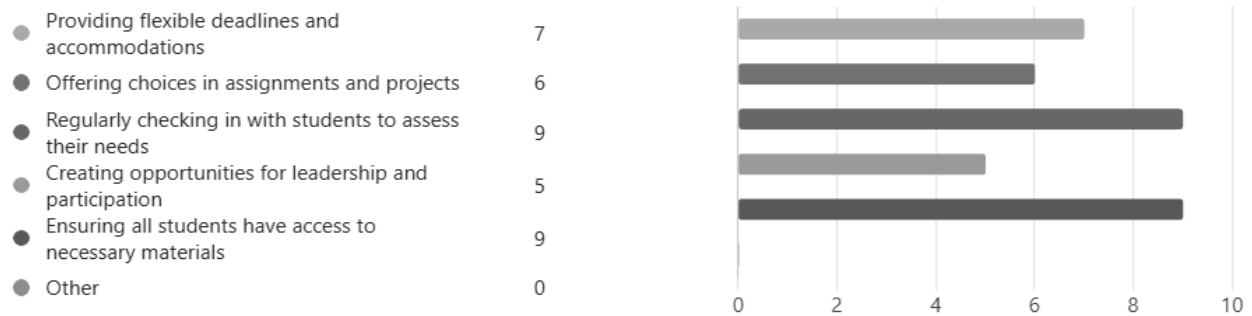
In your opinion, what are the most effective ways to advocate for the needs of homeless students within your school or district? (Select all that apply)



In addition to advocating for homeless students, I gathered data on how teachers promote their inclusion in classroom activities. All but one teacher reported regularly checking in with students to assess their needs and ensuring that all students have access to necessary materials. Seven teachers provide flexible deadlines and accommodations, while six offer choices in assignments and projects. Additionally, half of the teachers create opportunities for leadership and active participation. See figure 9 below.

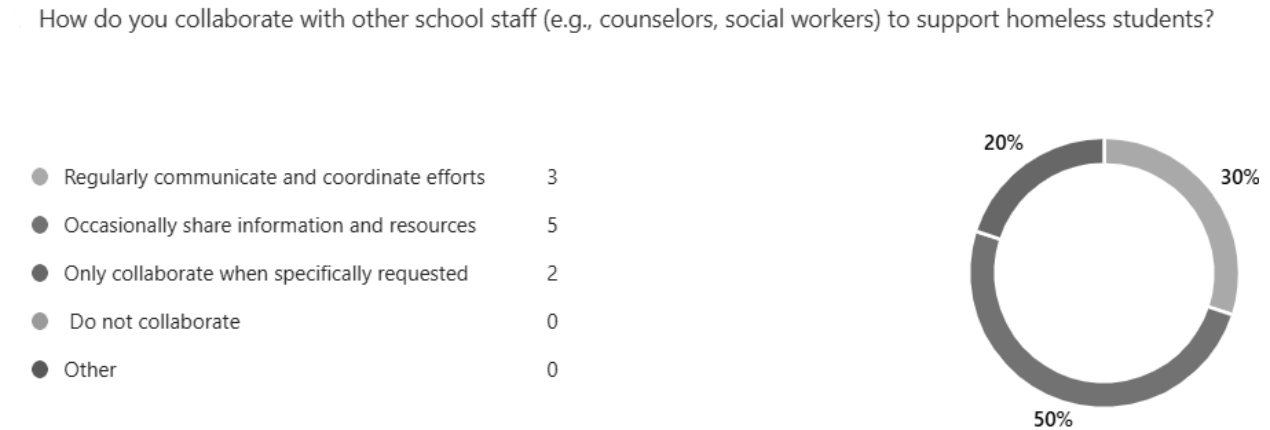
Figure 9

How do you involve homeless students in classroom activities and ensure their inclusion? (Select all that apply)



The final question on the questionnaire examined how teachers collaborate with other school staff, such as counselors and social workers, to support homeless students. The survey results indicated that 50% of teachers reported occasionally sharing information and resources with counselors and social workers to better support homeless students. Additionally, 30% of teachers stated that they regularly communicate and coordinate efforts with these professionals to provide more comprehensive support. Meanwhile, 20% of teachers mentioned that they only engage in collaboration when specifically requested or when a particular need arises. Notably, none of the teachers reported that they do not collaborate at all as seen in Figure 10 below. This finding highlights the proactive steps that teachers are taking to support homeless students in the classroom, even if the frequency and depth of collaboration vary. The responses suggest that while some teachers actively engage in ongoing partnerships with school staff, others may benefit from additional encouragement or structured opportunities to enhance collaboration. Strengthening these connections could further improve the support systems available for homeless students.

Figure 10



After thoroughly analyzing the data collected from the initial questionnaire, I proceeded with conducting follow-up interviews with each participant. The purpose of these interviews was to delve deeper into their responses, clarify any ambiguities, and gather additional insights. The follow-up questions, which are provided in Appendix C, were carefully designed to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. Specifically, these questions aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their interactions with and support for homeless students, allowing them to share personal anecdotes, challenges, and strategies they have employed in their professional roles.

Using NVivo software to analyze and code the interview transcripts allows for a systematic identification and categorization of the key topics discussed by the participants. This process involves carefully reviewing the text to highlight significant themes and recurring patterns. The coding and analysis process led to the identification of four key themes that emerged from the interview transcripts: (a) the challenges faced by students, (b) the support systems available to them, (c) their teaching experiences, and (d) their emotional responses.

These themes reflect the core aspects of the participants' academic and personal journeys, offering a comprehensive view of the factors that shape their overall experiences.

The first major theme that emerged from the analysis was the challenges faced by homeless students. The initial questionnaire revealed several key areas where homeless students commonly struggle, including attendance, emotional and behavioral issues, academic performance, social interactions, and engagement and participation in school activities. These challenges were consistently highlighted by both the questionnaire responses and interview discussions with teachers. Several educators noted that, in their experience, many homeless students face significant behavioral issues in the classroom. These issues often manifest as difficulties in remaining focused on tasks, staying engaged with lessons, and interacting appropriately with peers. Teacher A shared, “It seems like everything that goes on at the shelter (student) doesn’t like and he just back and forth arguing with the kids in the class.” Such behavioral challenges can disrupt the learning environment and hinder the student's academic progress.

Many teachers described various strategies they have used in the classroom to support homeless students facing academic difficulties. Teacher C shared this about a homeless student:

“Academic wise, I take time because (student) is really low. I filled out paperwork for them to get tested and I am already doing modifications for them. They actually sits up here with me closely because they are easily distracted.”

Teacher G recalled working with a homeless student when they were in attendance on basic skills, “(student) wasn’t really able to write their name except for the first letter.”

In addition to the classroom challenges, teachers of older students reported another pressing concern: personal hygiene. This issue not only affects the students' self-esteem but also impacts their social interactions with peers. Teachers observed that students who struggled with maintaining personal hygiene often faced social isolation or were subjected to negative peer interactions, further exacerbating their emotional and psychological stress. Teacher B shared "I had one student who would come in every day and go to the burse to get deodorant, brush their teeth, and all of that before they would come to class." This challenge highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of homelessness, where students' basic needs are not always met, affecting their overall well-being and ability to function effectively in a school setting. Teacher I shared about a student who "would come to school with clothes that are way too big and not smelling too fresh." Teachers expressed deep concern for these students, as the difficulties they face in both academic and social spheres can create a cycle of disadvantages that is difficult to overcome without adequate support.

The second prominent theme that emerged from the analysis was the support systems available to both students and teachers. The interviews revealed that the level of support provided to educators and homeless students varied significantly, with some teachers feeling that they had access to sufficient resources, while others expressed a need for additional assistance. Many teachers acknowledged the support provided by school counselors and social workers, highlighting the value of these professionals in helping to address the needs of homeless students. Teacher B felt, "I collaborate with the nurse and social worker and counselor and we've got a pretty good support system." However, not all educators felt that this support was comprehensive or readily available. Some teachers noted that while they could rely on the counselor and social worker to a certain extent, there were instances when the support fell short,

particularly when addressing the ongoing and complex needs of homeless students. Teacher E reported, “I want the counselor to be able to work with the student.” Along with teacher H who shared “The social worker and counselor are so overworked and when you see them you want to grab them but they are always headed somewhere.”

Moreover, the level of confidence teachers had in their ability to support homeless students also varied. Some educators felt well-equipped and confident in their ability to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment for homeless students, drawing on their own experience and training. These teachers believed they could effectively assist these students within the classroom setting, despite the challenges they faced. Teacher F shared, “Even though they are homeless I make them feel like they belong and that then makes me feel confident.” However, other teachers, although capable of providing day-to-day support in the classroom, expressed a desire for more resources and assistance from external sources. They recognized that the difficulties faced by homeless students often extended beyond the classroom and were tied to broader social and emotional issues that required more specialized intervention. Teacher D shared, “I try to ask and talk to them a little but I know they don’t want to tell me all their business.” These teachers felt that additional support, whether in the form of outside counseling, community resources, or more targeted professional development, would greatly enhance their ability to meet the needs of homeless students and provide a more holistic approach to their education and well-being. A qualitative study by Eva Alisic found that “Even though some teachers expressed confidence in working with children after traumatic exposure and many referred to a supportive atmosphere within the school, the most prominent themes in the participants’ narratives reflected uncertainty about, or a struggle with, providing optimal support to children”. This theme highlighted the variability in available support and the need for more

consistent, robust systems to help both students and teachers navigate the challenges posed by homelessness.

The third theme that emerged from the interviews was the participants' teaching experiences, particularly in relation to their encounters with homeless students. The interviews provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their careers and share personal stories about the homeless students they have worked with over the years. When prompted to recount an experience involving a homeless student, nearly every participant was able to immediately recall a specific student who left a lasting impression. These stories highlighted the unique and often challenging experiences that teachers face when working with homeless students, and they underscored the significant impact that homelessness can have on a student's academic journey.

What stood out most during these conversations was the consistency with which teachers shared these experiences, further emphasizing the prevalence of homelessness in the classroom. These stories ranged from heartbreaking accounts of students struggling to meet basic needs to inspiring tales of resilience and determination. In each case, it became evident that homeless students, regardless of their individual strengths or academic needs, require additional support in the classroom to thrive. Teacher H shared, "I try not to get too involved, I don't want to step on anybody's toes but I want to make sure each child has access to what they need." Teachers noted that these students often face barriers that go beyond traditional academic challenges, barriers that affect their emotional well-being, their ability to focus on learning, and their sense of belonging in the school community.

The fact that teachers could readily reflect on memorable homeless students reinforces the notion that homelessness is not just a temporary or isolated issue, but a persistent challenge

that requires ongoing attention and intervention. It also highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to supporting these students, one that takes into account their diverse needs, both academic and personal. Teacher J discussed transportation as challenge, “I had a student who I didn’t realize was homeless until it was like every time it rained or inclement weather and they would be absent and that’s when I found out they were living in a shelter and didn’t have access to a way beside walking to school.” The teacher went on to share how they attempted to get them resources such as a bus pass but the family did not want any help. This theme serves as a reminder that while each student may present unique strengths, homeless students as a group require tailored support to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control.

Closely connected to the previous theme, the final theme that emerged during the coding of the interview transcripts was the emotional responses expressed by the participants. As previously mentioned, each teacher was able to recall a specific homeless student who had left a lasting impact on them. However, beyond simply recounting these experiences, the way in which they spoke about these students revealed a deep emotional connection and investment in their well-being. As teachers shared the challenges they and their students faced in the classroom, there was a noticeable layer of emotion embedded in their stories, ranging from frustration and helplessness to deep compassion and a strong desire to do more for these vulnerable students.

Many teachers expressed feelings of sadness and concern when discussing the hardships that homeless students endure, particularly when they described situations in which they felt limited in their ability to help. Teacher A shared, “I just wanna make sure it's stable for him. I can see he’s happy sticking to a routine.” Some participants shared moments of frustration, not with

the students themselves, but with the systemic barriers that prevented these children from receiving the stability and support they needed. Others conveyed a sense of admiration for the resilience displayed by their homeless students, marveling at their ability to persevere despite immense personal struggles.

Furthermore, as participants recounted their experiences, it became increasingly clear just how much they cared about these students. Their tone of voice, choice of words, and even moments of visible emotion, such as pausing to collect their thoughts or expressing regret about not being able to do more, demonstrated the profound impact these students had on them. Several teachers described how these encounters shaped their teaching philosophies, making them more empathetic educators and reinforcing their commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

This theme underscores the reality that homelessness does not only affect the students experiencing it; it also leaves a lasting impression on the educators who work with them. The emotional responses from participants serve as a testament to the meaningful relationships that develop between teachers and students, as well as the need for additional support systems to help educators navigate the complex and often heart-wrenching challenges associated with teaching homeless students.

While analyzing the data from the interviews, a new overarching theme emerged from the four identified themes, the impact of homelessness on the education experience. This theme encapsulates the interconnected nature of the challenges faced by homeless students, the support systems available to both students and teachers, the teaching experiences of educators working with this population, and the emotional responses elicited by these experiences. It highlights how

homelessness influences not only the academic performance and social interactions of students but also the professional and emotional experiences of the teachers who support them.

The struggles homeless students face, including attendance issues, behavioral challenges, and social isolation, underscore the necessity of strong support systems. However, the availability and effectiveness of these resources vary, leaving some teachers feeling well-equipped while others express a need for additional assistance. Teachers' direct experiences with homeless students reveal the deep impact these encounters have on their professional growth and personal perspectives, reinforcing the idea that addressing student homelessness requires more than just classroom interventions, it demands a systemic, emotionally aware, and well-supported approach.

After a thorough analysis of the themes using the principles of Grounded Theory, a new conceptual framework emerged, the Theory of Reciprocal Educational Resilience. This theory was developed by systematically examining the interconnected nature of the challenges faced by homeless students, the support systems available to them, the teaching experiences of educators, and the emotional responses elicited from these interactions. Through this iterative process of coding, categorizing, and refining the data, it became evident that the relationship between students and educators in the context of homelessness is not one-directional but rather a reciprocal dynamic, where both parties influence and shape each other's experiences, resilience, and ability to navigate challenges within the educational system.

The concept of Reciprocal Educational Resilience has been explored by various scholars to describe the mutual relationship between students and educators. While no one person is said to have created the term, Elena Aguilar has been said to develop a deeper understanding of the

concept through her work, *Onward: Cultivating emotional resilience in educators* (Aguilar, E. 2018).

The Theory of Reciprocal Educational Resilience posits that the academic success and emotional well-being of homeless students are deeply intertwined with the support and preparedness of their teachers. Educators who receive adequate institutional and emotional support are better equipped to provide the necessary stability, guidance, and advocacy for homeless students, thereby fostering an environment in which these students are more likely to thrive. Simultaneously, teachers are profoundly affected by their experiences working with homeless students, and their emotional investment in these students' success can shape their teaching philosophies, professional growth, and long-term commitment to educational equity.

This emerging theory underscores the importance of a holistic, multi-layered approach to addressing student homelessness, one that not only prioritizes interventions for students but also ensures that teachers receive the necessary training, resources, and emotional support to sustain their efforts. Without a well-supported teaching workforce, the ability to provide meaningful assistance to homeless students may be compromised, reinforcing systemic inequities. Conversely, when teachers are empowered with the tools and resources to effectively support these students, the positive effects extend beyond the individual classroom, creating a cycle of resilience and advocacy that strengthens the broader educational system as a whole.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As I embarked on my research journey and developed my dissertation topic, my primary focus was on the impact of providing increased support for homeless students within the public education system. These students face significant disadvantages due to a multitude of underlying factors that hinder their academic success and overall well-being. Unfortunately, many public schools lack the necessary structures and resources to adequately support homeless students, leaving them without the assistance they desperately need. My goal was to shed light on this critical issue, highlighting the gaps in educational support and advocating for procedural changes that would better serve this vulnerable population.

My passion for this topic stems from a personal connection to teaching students who reside in a homeless shelter. Through this experience, I have gained valuable insight into the unique challenges these students face, particularly in meeting their social-emotional needs within the classroom environment. This background knowledge has shaped my perspective on the urgent need for comprehensive support systems that go beyond academics, ensuring that homeless students receive the emotional and psychological support necessary for their personal and educational growth.

While reviewing existing studies on homeless students, I found that only one focused on a specific strategy to support these students within schools. Although numerous studies highlight the challenges faced by homeless students, there is a noticeable gap in research exploring targeted interventions and best practices to address their needs. It is widely documented that

students experiencing homelessness require additional support to succeed academically and emotionally.

Research indicates that children represent the fastest-growing demographic within the homeless population. The instability and uncertainty associated with homelessness have been identified as significant stressors, not only for these children but also for their families. As a result, homelessness is frequently linked to trauma, which can have lasting effects on a child's emotional well-being, behavior, and academic performance. Given these findings, it is evident that more research is needed to develop and implement effective strategies that support homeless students as they navigate the educational system. Despite this, there is a pressing need for more research to identify best practices for supporting these students in the classroom. For instructional strategies to be truly effective, educators must recognize the trauma associated with homelessness and understand how it impacts students' social-emotional, academic, and behavioral development. Homelessness is a form of trauma that profoundly affects young learners, making it essential for schools to provide trauma-informed training for teachers. By equipping educators with the necessary tools and knowledge, schools can better support homeless students and foster a more conducive learning environment for them.

Homelessness is not a new societal issue, but its demographics have shifted significantly over time. While it was once primarily associated with single adult males, often perceived as having chosen this lifestyle, the fastest-growing homeless population today consists of families, including young children, who have no control over their living situation. This shift has far-reaching implications, affecting government housing policies, the types of assistance required to meet the needs of homeless families, and, importantly, the public education system.

Numerous studies have shown that homelessness is a major stressor for children and is closely linked to trauma, which can have lasting effects on their emotional well-being, behavior, and academic performance. Public school teachers are already balancing multiple responsibilities, including supporting students with a wide range of academic and behavioral challenges. In response to the growing recognition of trauma's impact on learning and behavior, many schools have begun incorporating trauma-informed approaches to better support students. Given that homelessness is a well-documented cause of trauma, the question arises: Can schools take a proactive role in teaching homeless students coping strategies to help them navigate their unique challenges?

We often hear that children are our future, yet policies and procedures in public schools have not fully adapted to meet the needs of homeless students. If we are committed to ensuring a productive future for all children, regardless of their living situation, we must take intentional steps to support homeless students in their academic journey. Homelessness is no longer just an issue affecting adults; it is an urgent crisis impacting our children. Schools must play a critical role in providing stability, resources, and emotional support to help these students succeed despite the immense challenges they face.

I am deeply passionate about supporting homeless students and dedicated to exploring ways to improve their educational experiences. Understanding the unique challenges faced by homeless students, such as frequent mobility, lack of stable housing, and emotional trauma, has driven me to advocate for tailored educational practices that address these specific issues. My research has examined various interventions, from implementing trauma-informed teaching strategies to creating structured and predictable classroom environments. By analyzing these

practices, I aim to provide educators with practical tools and insights that can help them better support homeless students and promote their academic and emotional well-being.

As I began conducting my research, my initial focus was on identifying the specific supports needed within the classroom to better serve homeless students. My primary goal was to explore how schools could create more inclusive and accommodating environments to address the unique academic and social-emotional challenges these students face. However, as I delved deeper into the topic, another critical aspect of support emerged, the need for resources and assistance for teachers who work with homeless students. This realization expanded the scope of my research, shifting my perspective to consider not only the students' needs but also the essential role that educators play in fostering stability and resilience in these students' lives.

Although I had a personal connection to this topic, given my own experiences teaching students residing in homeless shelters, I was not fully prepared for the profound emotional responses I received from other educators during the interview process. Many teachers shared deeply personal and heartfelt accounts of their experiences working with homeless students, revealing the significant emotional toll these encounters had on them. Their stories reflected not only the challenges and frustrations they faced but also their deep commitment to supporting these vulnerable students, even in the absence of adequate resources.

As I reflected on the themes that emerged from my data and compared them to the observations recorded in my researcher reflexive journal, I was struck by a realization I had not initially anticipated, the existence of a reciprocal relationship between students and educators in the context of homelessness. Looking back, I am surprised that I did not recognize this connection sooner. The data clearly demonstrated that while teachers provide essential guidance and stability for homeless students, these students also have a profound impact on their

educators, shaping their teaching philosophies, emotional resilience, and professional growth. This revelation became a pivotal moment in my research, reinforcing the need for a dual-focus approach, one that not only prioritizes direct interventions for homeless students but also acknowledges and strengthens the support systems available to the teachers who serve them.

Advocating for homeless students is not just a professional interest but a personal commitment. I believe that every child, regardless of their housing situation, deserves the opportunity to succeed in their education and to feel valued and supported within the school environment. This advocacy is rooted in a recognition of the profound impact that stability and support can have on a student's ability to thrive academically and personally.

Through my research and advocacy efforts, I strive to raise awareness about the pressing needs of homeless students and to encourage the adoption of effective practices that can make a tangible difference in their lives. My goal is to contribute to a more equitable and compassionate educational system that recognizes and addresses the unique challenges faced by homeless students, ultimately ensuring that they have the resources and support necessary to reach their full potential.

Moving forward, my research highlights the pressing need for further studies on the impact of homelessness within the public education system, particularly in identifying and evaluating the supports that schools and districts can implement to better serve this vulnerable population. While existing research acknowledges the challenges faced by homeless students, there is still much to uncover regarding the most effective strategies to meet their social-emotional, behavioral, adaptive, and academic needs within the classroom environment.

A crucial question that arises from this research is: How can educators ensure they are effectively addressing all the needs of this growing population? With homelessness among children on the rise, schools must take a proactive approach in equipping teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to support these students. One key area of focus should be trauma-informed educational strategies, as trauma is a common experience among homeless students and can significantly impact their ability to learn, regulate emotions, and engage in the classroom.

I strongly believe that there is so much more we can and should be doing to address the trauma these students face. If more educators were trained in trauma-informed practices, we could help mitigate some of the daily stressors that homeless students encounter, providing them with the stability, understanding, and support they need to succeed. Investing in professional development for teachers, implementing school-wide trauma-responsive policies, and fostering a culture of awareness and empathy could make a profound difference in the educational experiences and overall well-being of homeless students. It is essential that we continue advocating for research-driven solutions that not only improve academic outcomes but also foster resilience and emotional security for this underserved student population.

References

- Aguilar, E. (2018). *Onward: Cultivating emotional resilience in educators*. Jossey-Bass.
- Alisic, E. (2012). Teachers' perspectives on providing support to children after trauma: A qualitative study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 27(1), 51–59.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028590>
- Alter, P., Walker, J., & Landers, E. (2013). Teachers' perceptions of students' challenging behavior and the impact of teacher demographics. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 36(4), 51–69.
- Anthony, E. R., Vincent, A., & Shin, Y. (2017). Parenting and child experiences in shelter: A qualitative study exploring the effect of homelessness on the parent-child relationship. *Child and Family Social Work*, 23(1), 8–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12376>
- Arundel, K. (2025, February 4). 25% uptick in student homelessness highlights the demand for school resources. *K-12 Dive*. <https://www.k12dive.com/news/increase-student-homelessness-poverty-school-resource/739045/>
- Bassuk, E. L., DeCandia, C. J., Beach, C. A., & Berman, F. (2014). *America's youngest outcasts: A report card on child homelessness*. The National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research.
- Baton, E. (2016). *An evaluation of the effectiveness of a social skills application for children who are homeless* (Publication No. 10107788) [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest One Academic]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Belcher, J. R., & DeForge, B. R. (2012). Social stigma and homelessness: The limits of social change. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 22(8), 929–946.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2012.707941>

Brown, A. D. (2008, April). *The effects of childhood trauma on adult perception and worldview* [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest LLC]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Adverse childhood experiences*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>

Charmaz, K., & Thornberg, R. (2020). The pursuit of quality in grounded theory. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18*(3), 305–327.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1780357>

Congressional Budget Office. (2015). *Federal housing assistance for low-income households*.

<https://www.cbo.gov/publication/50782>

Congressional Research Service. (2004). *A chronology of housing legislation and selected executive actions, 1892–2003*. <https://financialservices.house.gov/media/pdf/108-d.pdf>

Cowan, B. A. (2007). *Trauma exposure and behavioral outcomes in sheltered homeless children: The moderating role of perceived social support* (Publication No. 3293818) [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest One Academic]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., Lafavor, T. L., Ahumada, S. M., Masten, A. S., & Oberg, C. N.

(2014). Asthma and adaptive functioning among homeless kindergarten-aged children in emergency housing. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 25*(2), 717–730. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2014.0099>

Davey, T. L. (1995). *An examination of the effectiveness of stress management training with elementary school-age children living with their families in homeless shelters*

(Publication No. 9517963) [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest One Academic]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Demos, E. (1995). An affect revolution: Silvan Tomkins's affect theory. In E. Demos (Ed.), *Exploring affect: The selected writings of Silvan S. Tomkins* (pp. 17–24). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511663994.005>

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. Crown.

Everyday Speech. (2015). *Let's be social* [Mobile application software].

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lets-be-socialsocial-skills/id772244049?mt=8>

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine de Gruyter.

Goodman, L., Saxe, L., & Harvey, M. (1991). Homelessness as psychological trauma: Broadening perspectives. *American Psychologist*, 46(11), 1219–1225.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.46.11.1219>

Huang, C. (2001). *School-aged sheltered homeless children's stressors and coping strategies* (Publication No. 3011074) [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest One Academic]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Huntington, N., Buckner, J. C., & Bassuk, E. L. (2008). Adaptation in homeless children: An empirical examination using cluster analysis. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(6), 737–755. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207311985>

HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). (n.d.). *HUD's definition of homelessness: Resources and guidance*. HUD Exchange. Retrieved October 9, 2022, from <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/huds-definition-of-homelessness-resources-and-guidance/>

- HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). (2007a). *Defining chronic homelessness: A technical guide for HUD programs*.
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/DefiningChronicHomeless.pdf>
- Jones, M. M. (2015). Creating a science of homelessness during the Reagan era. *Milbank Quarterly*, 93(1), 139–178. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12107>
- Khan, M. (2012, September 6). *Beyond The Vernal Mind*. Xlibris.
- Ko, S. J., Ford, J. D., Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz, S. J., Wilson, C., Wong, M., Brymer, M. J., & Layne, C. M. (2008). Creating trauma-informed systems: Child welfare, education, first responders, health care, juvenile justice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(4), 396–404. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.39.4.396>
- Kusmer, K. L. (2002). *Down and Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History*. Oxford University Press.
- Lacoe, J. (2013). *Too scared to learn? The academic consequences of feeling unsafe at school* (Working Paper No. 02–13). Institute for Education and Social Policy.
- MacLaughlin, W. W. (1991). *Homeless children's perspectives of whole self* (Publication No. 1345216) [Master's thesis, ProQuest One Academic]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Martin, S. L., Ashley, O. S., White, L., Axelson, S., Clark, M., & Burrus, B. (2017). Incorporating trauma-informed care into school-based programs. *Journal of School Health*, 87(12), 958–967. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12568>
- Mik-Meyer, N. (2021). Sensitizing concepts in studies of homelessness and disability. In K. Jacobsson & J. Gubrium (Eds.), *Doing human service ethnography* (pp. 67–83). Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1sfsdm3.9>
- Milburn, N. G., Stein, J. A., Lopez, S. A., Hilberg, A. M., Veprinsky, A., Arnold, E. M.,

- Desmond, K. A., Branson, K., Lee, A., Bath, E., Amani, B., & Comulada, W. S. (2017). Trauma, Family Factors and the Mental Health of Homeless Adolescents. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 12(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-017-0157-9>
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2023). Homeless children and youth. Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. <https://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/student-support-services/homeless-children-youth>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Permanent supportive housing: Evaluating the evidence for improving health outcomes among people experiencing chronic homelessness* (1st ed.). National Academies Press.
- National Center for Homeless Education. (2022) *Student homelessness in America: School years 2018–19 and 2020–21*. <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Student-Homelessness-in-America2022.pdf>
- National Center for Homeless Education. (2022.). Consolidated state profile. <https://profiles.nche.seiservices.com/ConsolidatedStateProfile.aspx>
- Rossen, E. (2020). The evolution of trauma-informed schools. In E. Rossen (Ed.), *Supporting and educating traumatized students: A guide for school-based professionals* (2nd ed., Chapter 1). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med-psych/9780190052737.003.0001>
- Sleet, D. A., & Francescutti, L. H. (2021). *Homelessness and public health: A focus on strategies and solutions*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(21), 11660. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111660>

- Stewart, K. (2021). *Exploring the relationships between community experiences and well-being among youth experiencing homelessness* (Publication No. 28322822) [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest One Academic]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Smith, S. M., Holtrop, K., & Reynolds, J. (2015). *Do positive parenting practices moderate parental mental health and child behavior among homeless families?* *Family Relations*, 64(5), 606-620. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12166>
- Terrasi, S., & de Galarce, P. C. (2017). *Trauma and learning in America's classrooms*. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(6), 35–41.
- Tomkins, S. S. (1984). *Affect theory*. In K. R. Scherer & P. Ekman (Eds.), *Approaches to emotion* (pp. 163–195). Erlbaum.
- Union Presbyterian Seminary. (n.d.). *A history of homelessness*. Retrieved March 5, 2025
<https://www.upsem.edu/justact/a-history-of-homelessness/>
- USICH. *U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2016). United States Interagency Council on Homelessness historical overview*.
https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_History_2016.pdf
- U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2010). *Opening doors: Federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness*. <https://www.usich.gov/>
- Wagner, D., & Gilman, J. B. (2010). *Confronting Homelessness: Poverty, Politics, and the Failure of Social Policy*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Welch-lazoritz, M., Whitbeck, L. B., & Armenta, B. E. (2015). *Characteristics of mothers caring for children during episodes of homelessness*. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 51(8), 913-920. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-014-9794-8>
- Wells, A. (1979). *Conflict theory and functionalism: Introductory sociology textbooks, 1928 1976*. *Teaching Sociology*, 6(4), 429–437.

Appendix B

Initial Participant Questionnaire

Pre-Questionnaire: Working with Homeless Students

1. How many years have you been teaching/working with homeless students?
2. How many of those years have been in a public education setting with homeless students?
3. How often do you encounter students in your classroom who are experiencing homelessness?
 - a. Never
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Often
 - e. Very often
4. What are the primary challenges you observe in homeless students within the classroom?
(Select all that apply)
 - a. Academic performance
 - b. Attendance
 - c. Emotional and behavioral issues
 - d. Social interactions
 - e. Engagement and participation
 - f. Other (please specify)
5. What strategies do you currently use to support homeless students in your classroom?
(Select all that apply)
 - a. Providing additional academic support (e.g., tutoring)
 - b. Creating a predictable and structured environment
 - c. Offering emotional and psychological support
 - d. Facilitating access to school resources (e.g., food, clothing)
 - e. Encouraging social connections with peers
 - f. Referring students to outside support services (e.g., counseling)
 - g. Other (please specify)
6. How confident are you in your ability to identify and address the needs of homeless students?

- a. Not at all confident
 - b. Slightly confident
 - c. Moderately confident
 - d. Very confident
 - e. Extremely confident
7. Have you received any specific training on working with homeless students?
- a. Yes, extensive training
 - b. Yes, some training
 - c. No, but I would like to receive training
 - d. No, and I do not feel the need for training
8. What additional resources or support would help you better assist homeless students?
(Select all that apply)
- a. Professional development on trauma-informed practices
 - b. Access to a school social worker or counselor
 - c. More information on community resources and services
 - d. Guidance on creating an inclusive classroom environment
 - e. Enhanced communication with families
 - f. Other (please specify)
9. How do you involve homeless students in classroom activities and ensure their inclusion?
(Select all that apply)
- a. Providing flexible deadlines and accommodations
 - b. Offering choices in assignments and projects
 - c. Regularly checking in with students to assess their needs
 - d. Creating opportunities for leadership and participation
 - e. Ensuring all students have access to necessary materials
 - f. Other (please specify)
10. What impact does homelessness have on the academic performance of your students?
- a. No impact
 - b. Minimal impact
 - c. Moderate impact
 - d. Significant impact
 - e. Unsure

11. How do you collaborate with other school staff (e.g., counselors, social workers) to support homeless students?
- Regularly communicate and coordinate efforts
 - Occasionally share information and resources
 - Only collaborate when specifically requested
 - Do not collaborate
 - Other (please specify)
12. In your opinion, what are the most effective ways to advocate for the needs of homeless students within your school or district? (Select all that apply)
- Raising awareness among staff and administration
 - Developing and implementing school-wide policies
 - Securing additional funding and resources
 - Building partnerships with community organizations
 - Engaging in advocacy at the local or state level
 - Other (please specify)

This questionnaire aims to gather insights into teachers' experiences, strategies, and needs related to working with homeless students, providing valuable information for improving support and interventions.

Thank you for taking the time to share your insight.

Questionnaire created by Sarah Vernier 8/26/24

Appendix C

Follow-Up Interview Questions

Follow-Up Interview Questions: Working with Homeless Students

1. You mentioned encountering homeless students [insert frequency]. Can you describe a specific instance or case that stands out in your experience?

- What challenges did this student face?
- How did you address these challenges?

2. Regarding the challenges you observed in homeless students, which of these do you find most difficult to address?

- Why do you think this particular challenge is the most difficult?
- Can you provide an example of how this challenge has impacted a student?

3. You indicated that you use strategies to support homeless students. Which of these strategies have you found to be the most effective, and why?

- Are there any strategies you wish you could implement but currently cannot? If so, what are they and why?

4. You rated your confidence in working with homeless students as [insert confidence level]. What factors contribute to your confidence or lack thereof?

- Can you identify specific experiences or resources that have influenced your confidence level?

5. Have you received trauma informed professional development?

- If yes do you use any trauma informed strategies to assist homeless students? If yes which strategies?

- If you have not received trauma informed professional development do you feel it would benefit you as a teacher of homeless students? Why or why not?

6. In response to the need for additional resources or support, which one do you believe would have the most immediate impact on your ability to assist homeless students?

- How would you implement this resource or support in your daily routine?

7. Have you made any modifications to classroom procedure to benefit homeless students?

- If yes what changes have you made?

8. You observed that homelessness has had an impact on academic performance. Can you provide specific examples or data that illustrate this impact?

- How do you adjust your teaching methods to accommodate the effects of homelessness on academic performance?

9. Regarding collaboration with other school staff, you [insert level of collaboration]. Can you describe a situation where this collaboration was particularly beneficial or challenging?

- What improvements could be made to enhance this collaboration?

10. Do you as a teacher feel you need more support from your building/district in order to better serve homeless students in your classroom?

- If yes, what is the most immediate support your building could offer?

These follow-up questions aim to provide deeper insight into the teacher's experiences, strategies, and perceptions, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of their approach to supporting homeless students.

Thank you for taking the time to share your insight.

Interview questions created by Sarah Vernier, 8/26/24