

Guidance Counselors

Tips for Ensuring Educational Access and Success for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- Be familiar with common characteristics of children and youth who are homeless. Common signals are attendance at several schools, poor hygiene, gaps in learning, transportation problems, poor health and nutrition, and a lack of preparedness for class. For more information, visit http://www.serve.org/nche/nche_web/warning.php.
- Introduce yourself as someone who will work as an advocate for the student's success in school.
- Ask if the student participated in any after-school activities or had special classes at a previous school, then work to connect the student with similar resources, if they are available; ensure that the student has every opportunity that a non-homeless student has for participation in after-school activities and in-school programs.
- Make sure the student enrolls in your school's free meal program. Homeless students are automatically eligible for free school meals. For more information, visit http://www.serve.org/nche/legis_other.php.
- Inform parents about their child's educational rights.
- Know your attendance zone, visit shelters to make contact with the shelter director, and reinforce that students will find the school safe and supportive.
- Offer support for the physiological needs of the student (food, clothing) as well as the social/emotional needs (safety, security, and belonging).
- Train peer buddies to orient students to the school.
- Arrange a follow-up meeting with parents a couple of weeks after enrollment; you may need to conduct the meeting by phone or visit the parent outside of the school.
- Show that you care about the student!



This tip sheet was adapted from materials from the Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia Departments of Education, and the National Center for Homeless Education. For more information about helping homeless students succeed in school, visit the National Center for Homeless Education website at <http://www.serve.org/nche>.