

**Health** - may miss school due to infections, asthma. Infections and chronic health problems such as asthma impact a child's ability to learn. For example, the child may be tired from coughing at night with asthma. Or may have trouble hearing or show delayed language development due to untreated ear infections. Prescription glasses may be lost or broken and child may have difficulty with school work.

**Transportation** - because of complicated transportation arrangements, students may arrive at school late, miss the school breakfast program or first period - there may be erratic attendance and tardiness.

## CLASSROOM INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:

### Clothing

- Have extra clean clothing available at school, and if possible arrange to launder dirty clothes if there's a washer & dryer at school. If there's a shower at school, quietly give the student access to the shower.
- Tell students they look nice when they do.

### Food

- Keep students' living situations confidential; increase self-esteem by providing an opportunity to pursue non-academic activities at which they can succeed; determine students' strengths and build on these.
- Make sure students and parents are aware of free breakfast and lunch - the students who are coded as homeless and highly mobile are automatically eligible for free lunch. Keep a few healthy snacks around for students who miss breakfast or need a mid-afternoon snack. Ask students what the foods taste like to help them wake-up their sense of taste.
- Students may want and take more food than they can eat at one time, saving the food to eat later or to give to other family members. Have school staff closest to the parents get information to them about food shelves and other resources.

### Health

- Have necessary toiletry items on hand to ensure proper hygiene at school, such as shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste and toothbrush, hairbrush, combs.
- Alert school nurse when child is having health problems that may be impacting ability to participate at school. The school nurse can help child and family access health care, prescription glasses, asthma medication and other health needs.

### Transportation

- Don't penalize students for arriving late at school; try not to cover key learning material in the first period. Transportation arrangements can be complicated and that can mean erratic schedules. Consider a different consequence for being late.
- Do monitor attendance and provide appropriate follow-up immediately when students are absent from school.
- Ensure that students can participate in field trips and school-wide activities if they do not have transportation or money.
- Help students make plans for transportation for after school activities or other special events.
- Parents' participation at school may be minimal because of transportation issues, but do not consider that a measure of disinterest; keep inviting parents and sending them information about their students' progress. Find ways to visit families whether they are in shelters or in new living arrangements.

## Any Projects That Require Family Resources

- Be wary of assigning projects that include any costs to students - this financial burden may stop students from participating.
- If you celebrate birthdays in your classroom with treats, look for alternatives - parents may not have the money to buy treats or the facilities to make treats for their child's school birthday party.



### Sources:

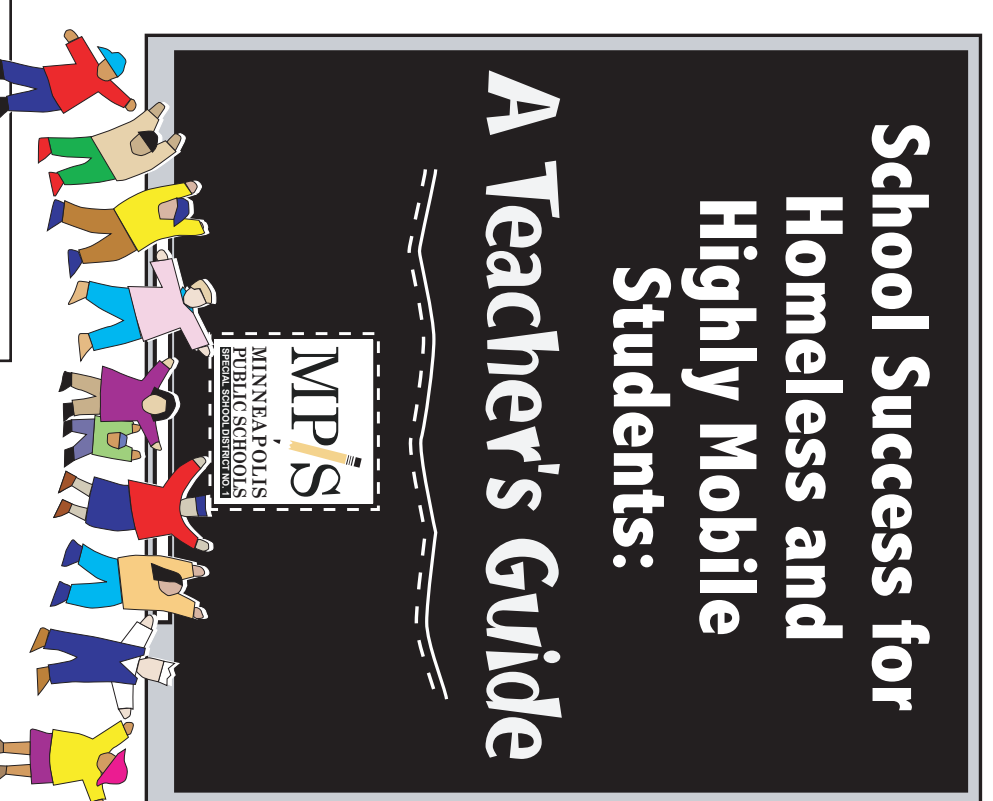
Minneapolis Public Schools  
 Maryland State Department of Education  
 National Center for Homeless Education  
 Capitol UniServ: MEA Teachers  
 New Hampshire Department of Education  
 Pennsylvania Department of Education  
 Minnesota Department of Education  
 Children in Transition Program, Washoe County, Nevada

## Questions to Consider

- What behaviors have you observed among students who are living with these conditions?
- How are you aware of these living conditions?
- Which behaviors are assets in these living conditions and how?
- Which behaviors are assets in your classroom and how?
- What strategies have you found that help to engage homeless and highly mobile students?
- What strategies have you found that engage families of homeless and highly mobile students?
- How have you appropriately shared information about the student with others in the school that "need to know"?

## For more information, contact:

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## Does your school have a Need to Know List of key staff?

While protecting homeless and highly mobile students' privacy and emotional well being, it is important to share appropriate information with key staff (principal, secretary, social worker, teacher, school nurse, health assistant, food service) to help these staff better meet the needs of students who are homeless and highly mobile. All schools should to have a Need to Know List.

Teachers see each child as an individual - with gifts and strengths to contribute and also with potential and problems to help overcome. This is especially important when teaching students who are homeless or highly mobile. This Teacher's Guide is intended to help teachers of all grade levels find strategies to respond to students' specific needs caused by their living conditions, and to maintain and increase the students' progress in learning. Many teachers will find these are also useful strategies to use with students with other challenges.

**CONDITION:**  
constantly moving, leaving behind familiar space, possessions, and people

**EFFECT on CHILDREN:**  
Rootlessness; no sense of their space or possessions; see life as temporary; frustrated; difficulty with transitions; no sense of control.

**POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS:**  
Leave projects half finished; cling to possessions; restless, aggressive behavior as they try to claim something for themselves; feel loss of control so they fight for control at school; poor attention span.

### CLASSROOM INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:

- To counter the loss of control, give new students classroom jobs (monitor, team captain, etc); give them choices when appropriate. Look for ways students can control their classroom environment without being aggressive. Teach them to act responsibly in the classroom - be explicit about rules and expectations whenever possible, and re-teach rather than discipline.
- Teach students alternative ways to express frustration (e.g., talk to someone or talk into a tape recorder, take a voluntary "time out" and remove yourself from the situation to work on an art project, etc.).
- Support students' efforts to manage or negotiate their own conflict or problem solving, rather than rushing too quickly with an expedient solution.
- Include defined transition procedures as you move from one activity to the next ("We have 10 minutes left in this math period." or "At the beginning of the day, we will....")
- Break tasks down into small segments that can be completed in a short period of time; keep a checklist of completed work; contract with students to finish projects and assignments. Experiences of mastery and achievement are critical to their self-esteem.
- Give the students something that belongs only to them (e.g., care of a plant, ball, game). Others must ask their permission to play or work with this possession.
- Don't take away their possessions (e.g., toy, book, pen sets, etc.) as a disciplinary measure.
- Find ways to help students value and care for material items. Many things come to be disposable for people who are homeless, constantly on the move and unable to track locations of objects.

**CONDITION:**  
frequent change of schools

**EFFECT on CHILDREN:**  
Little or no structure in their lives; lack of continuity; unwilling to risk deep friendships; depression over loss of familiar places and friends.

**POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS:**  
Use withdrawal and introversion as a defense; unfriendly or overly casual with friendships; may have extreme behaviors - withdrawal, shyness, aggression and anger; fantasize about a "normal" life. The students may fall behind academically as they miss school days, change curricula and teachers; gaps in skill development; may be inappropriately placed in learning groups because of missing school records.

### CLASSROOM INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:

- To quickly integrate new students into the classroom, have a set of assessment tools that can be quickly administered in order to place the students if their records are unavailable.

- Assign students a "buddy" to help them learn their way around the school. Have the buddy work with the student for a week or two and be clear with the buddy about what you think would be helpful for the new student. Involve the student and the buddy in cooperative learning activities.

- Making friends is difficult. You may wish to provide a time and place for homeless students to meet friends and classmates. The quality of peer relationships is predictive of a wide variety of educational outcome measures, including attendance and drop-out rates. Avoid removing students from positive social situations for disciplinary purposes.

- Provide structure in the classroom by keeping a consistent daily schedule and clear rules, posted on the wall so that the schedule and rules are visible at all times. When possible, let students know if you are planning to have a substitute the following day, or any other change of schedule.

- Be flexible about classroom schedule when possible so that activities with positive social exchanges can be lengthened and activities with negative exchanges can be shortened.

- Ensure that the students have access to full range of educational services: Title 1, ELL, gifted and talented activities, tutoring. If scheduling is a problem, look for alternative solutions.

- Offer encouragement and understanding; look for ways to recognize students' talents and accomplishments.

- Social exchanges with all adults in the school community have potential significance - from short hallway conversations to extended teacher-student interactions. Find ways to build in these opportunities.

- Be persistent in maintaining positive social interaction and support, even when a student does not respond or responds inappropriately.

- If students are insecure about letting their possessions out of their sight, like removing coats or hats, negotiate; e.g., keep hat in pocket or coat on back of chair.

- Sharing may be difficult. Keep in mind that any possession may be the student's one of a kind.

**CONDITION:**  
overcrowded living conditions; children all in one room; lack of private space; limited space for physical activities

**EFFECT on CHILDREN:**  
Lack of privacy; disturbed sleep; no quiet area to do homework; unable to do homework because of noisy environment and lack of physical space; falling behind academically; unable to concentrate.

**POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS:**  
Withdrawal or aggressive behavior; constantly tired; other people are "tuned out"; hyperactivity and delays in gross motor development; wanting to be alone - staying overly long in school lavatory or locker area; possessiveness - unwilling to share; easily frightened and concerned for safety; refuse invitations from peers because they can't reciprocate; show consistent lack of preparation for school - coming in without books, supplies, homework not completed or papers signed.

### CLASSROOM INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:

- Use different approaches for presenting important information (e.g., say it, write on chalkboard, have students repeat it).
- Arrange assignments so they are clear and doable at home. Be clear with students about where to go for resources to complete the assignment - offer tools to complete any required task; e.g., clipboard for portable desk, paper and pencils, supplies to build a diorama, etc.

- Give plenty of lead time for assignments, since students may be less able to produce assignments within a limited time frame.

- Arrange assignments so they can be done at school if you learn that it is not physically possible for the student to do work at home (i.e., 3 families in one apartment, family is moving each night, etc.). Avoid assignments that require TV, computer, or other resources they are unlikely to have.

- Keep a folder of the students' work. There may be no place for this recognition at home. Use the folder to remind the students of their accomplishments.

- Don't use students' recess or PE times as a makeup or detention period - they may not have space in the motel or shelter to run, jump and play. Think of another consequence that is consistent with your school's approach to discipline.

- Provide a safe haven for students to express their fears and frustrations through verbalizing, drawing and writing.

- Allow students space if they need it. If they show discomfort with physical closeness, try to modify the environment to gently allow them more room.

- Show attention to students. Offer lots of eye contact if students are comfortable with this. Make sure they know that you see them, know their names, and find ways to include them.

- Provide a safe and secure place for students to store their belongings.

**CONDITION:**  
lack of access to basic necessities

**EFFECT on CHILDREN:**  
Clothing - low self esteem; may be bullied or put down by peers.

**Food** - children are put at nutritional risk when parents have expense of buying food daily - this means less food and food which may not be the most nutritious; may cause gastroenteritis (stomach aches), diarrhea, anemia; all lead to a general weakened condition making child more vulnerable to upper respiratory infections, ear infections, and other health problems that may impact on ability to learn and participate fully in school.

**Health** - lack of adequate medical care; chronic health conditions like asthma and diabetes may be poorly managed or made worse by living conditions; more exposure to infections and less resistance to fight infection; possible insufficient sleep, poor nutrition, inconsistent availability of showers and laundry facilities can mean poor hygiene; increased risk of mental health issues like depression and anxiety disorders.

**Transportation** - may have complicated travel arrangements to get to school (2-3 buses, involving different adults, cars and drop off points).

### POSSIBLE BEHAVIORS:

**Clothing** - children won't attend school if they feel their clothes are dirty, worn or out of style. Clothing and poor hygiene draws attention. They may refuse to take off coats or jackets because they are wearing the same clothes throughout the week or longer.

**Food** - may show signs of being chronically hungry, such as anxious fast eating, hoarding extra food, stealing food from others; numbness to tastes and smells because of prolonged stress.