

Spring 2018

## **Bridges and Barriers: The Educational Experience of Homeless Students and Families in Santa Cruz County**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.qz5j-268s>  
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BRIDGES AND BARRIERS: THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESS  
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Jennifer Ann

May 2018

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The Designated Dissertation Committee Approves the Dissertation Titled

BRIDGES AND BARRIERS: THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESS  
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

by

Jennifer Ann

APPROVED FOR THE EDUCATIONAL DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### BRIDGES AND BARRIERS: THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESS STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

by Jennifer Ann

This study explores in depth interviews of parents, teachers, and educators within the confined geographical boundary of Santa Cruz County, California in order to offer to the broader community a more concise look at the challenges families and schools face in addressing the issue of family homelessness. The current state of family homelessness is detailed by viewing the data obtained via various measurement methods. In addition, specific barriers and challenges that homeless students and families face outside of and on the school site are explored. The legal policies that support homeless youth and families are described, as well as the literature surrounding supports and other factors that contribute to the success of homeless students and families outside of and on the school campus. Finally, previous research completed that included the voices of homeless students and families, and teachers working with these families is summarized. The data for this study were obtained in video format and were then edited to produce a documentary. Participants included families that were currently or recently homeless, educators who worked with these families directly, and community members who had a direct connection with homeless families in Santa Cruz County. Findings indicated that strong relationships between educators and homeless parents create an environment in which families feel supported. Future research areas are detailed in order to further expand the knowledge base of the experience of homeless students and families as they interact with the education system.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my three children, Ruby, Sanya, and Zayn Ciervo, for their never-ending support as they gave up much of their “mom” time over the past three years in order for me to pursue my studies and complete this dissertation. I also have had an extended family of support that was found in the Hoden, Nguyen, and Ross families. I relied upon each of these families to be my personal cheerleading squad and I cannot thank them enough. I truly believe I would not have finished without them. In addition, I found a new family with several members of my cohort. They encouraged me as I went through this process and have become my life-long friends. I also am forever in debt to the chair of my committee, Robert Gliner. He provided me with guidance and technical assistance throughout this journey and managed to always say just the right thing at just the right time.

In addition, I am thankful for the willingness of all of the participants in this study to share their experiences and stories with me. It is not easy to be videotaped while discussing such a personal issue as homelessness and I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview Chris, Aimee, Jason, Ebony, and Silvia. I know first hand that homelessness can hit anyone, as it was only six years ago that my children and I lived in a one room shed; yet, I believe in the power of stories, relationships, and connections. School employees have the opportunity to make a direct impact and difference with homeless students and families. They may not be able to solve the problem, but offering compassion, understanding, and empathy can go a long way in helping a family feel that they are not alone.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
BoS	Balance of State
CBPR	Community Based Participatory Research
CFPM	Collaborative Family Program Model
CoC	Continuums of Care
EHCY	The Education for Homeless Children and Youth
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
HAP	Homeless Action Partnership
HUD	The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
LEA	Local Education Agency
LOSD	Live Oak Elementary School District
MVHAA	McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987
NCHE	The National Center for Homeless Education
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PIT	Point in Time
PVUSD	Pajara Valley Unified School District
SCCOE	Santa Cruz County Office of Education
SEA	State Education Agency
USDoE	United States Department of Education
YLPR	Youth Led Participatory Research

## **Introduction**

### **Overview**

Students in transition, otherwise referred to as homeless, constitute a large number of children living in the United States. While it is difficult to obtain a completely accurate count, it is estimated that over a million children experience homelessness in the United States each year (Miller, 2011; Rafferty, 1999). “These children temporarily live in emergency shelters, motels, other people’s homes, abandoned buildings, parks and sometimes on the streets” (Miller, 2011, p. 426). Each of these students are entitled to a public education, yet due to individual and family circumstances it can be difficult to navigate the school system and experience success in an educational setting. Parents may be so exhausted from spending their time ensuring that daily basic needs are met – that their child’s education might not be their primary focus (Duffield, 2000). Educators often find themselves caught up in this issue, when a student in transition is enrolled in their classroom, school, and district. When faced with this scenario, most education professionals may want to “fix” the problem. However, the issue of homelessness is complex requiring a wide range of possible responses each with its own consequences for educational practitioners.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to delve deeper into understanding the experiences of homeless students and families using a phenomenological methodology, as well as participatory action research (PAR). Moustakas (1994) writes “Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and

perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved” (p. 59). This study seeks the in depth-input-of parents, teachers, and educators that have personal experience with the issue of homelessness within a confined geographical boundary in order to offer to the broader community a more concise look at the challenges families and schools face in addressing this issue. As a result, PAR is also a component of the study, as individuals are asked to share their ideas for improvements to current systems. The exploratory research question is: what is the experience of students and families that are homeless in Santa Cruz County, California as they interact with the educational system? By interfacing with parents, teachers, educational leaders, and community members, an analysis will be conducted to determine what supports or other factors lead to success, as well as what barriers or challenges students and families face when interacting with the education system.

The format of the narratives will be detailed in a documentary, which is attached as a supplemental material to this dissertation, in order to give the participants an opportunity for their voice to be heard and for the viewer to recognize the themes present among the participants. The decision to use a documentary to depict data and the results of research is described by Petrarca and Hughes (2014) as follows:

No longer is the audience faced with text or numerical data printed on the pages of an academic journal for review and consideration; but with a documentary film, the audience is provided with a variety of sounds and images, shifting how the data might be analyzed or interpreted. (p. 580).

The experience of homeless families as they interact with the educational system in Santa Cruz County is brought to the surface with their voices telling their own story. The inclusion of educators, such as teachers and social workers, that know the families is

provided in order to explore multiple angles of the issue of homelessness as it intersects with schools. In addition, the voice of local government officials and education administrators provides insight into policies that impact families. The documentary pulls together these data and includes images, graphics, and sounds to offer a deeper understanding of the issue.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research project does not attempt to solve the problem of a prevalence of homelessness in this country. Rather, it serves to provide stakeholders with an understanding of the issue, specific to Santa Cruz County, by looking in depth at the experiences of homeless students and their families, as well as educators and community members they interact with in order to help shape community policies. The intent of the documentary is to expand the viewer's knowledge regarding systems at the local level, identify barriers and supports that homeless students and their families face within the educational system, and offer an opportunity to address any possible preconceived notions of homelessness by viewing the perspectives of diverse family units that are homeless within Santa Cruz County. With these pieces of information in place, stakeholders may better understand their role within a larger system and will be more prepared to support and educate children that are experiencing homelessness in their communities. While the narratives presented in the documentary depict themes that are unique to individuals and/or to their geographical location; the experiences also portray a message that can be applied to other areas in which homeless families and students reside.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Current State of Homelessness**

The current state of homelessness in America is alarming. Numbers continue to rise and each year there are more than 1.6 million children that are homeless (Haskett, Armstrong, & Tisdale, 2015). At a federal level, there are multiple agencies and departments that run programs to address the needs of homeless individuals; at a minimum, there are at least 27 different entities (Abdul Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). Many of these entities have their own definition of homelessness, which impacts the number of people that are identified. These numbers are critical in determining the extent that homelessness is an issue, how many individuals are impacted, and where homelessness is occurring throughout our nation. It is a concern specifically for the issue of homelessness among families, as some of the methods for counting homelessness may not be effective in getting realistic numbers. This nationwide issue of obtaining an accurate count is felt on a large scale, but also at a community level. Without a reliable method for identifying homeless families, communities are left guessing how wide-scale the problem is which could impact the availability of services in a community, the funds allocated to develop programs, and the likelihood of enough affordable housing initiatives within a city.

**Homelessness in America: measurement methods and current trends.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires Continuums of Care (CoC) that receive federal funding for housing and services for homeless individuals and families to complete a Point-In-Time (PIT) count (Applied Survey Research, 2015).

Continuums of Care (CoC) vary geographically, as they may cover a city, county, larger metropolitan area, or a state. They are divided into “three types: major city CoCs, smaller city, county, and regional CoC’s, and balance of state (BoS) or statewide CoCs” (Mullins et al., 2016). The CoC takes an annual count of homeless persons in their community that are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. This excludes anyone that is seeking shelter in an alternate space (staying with friends or family, living in a car, or living in an unsheltered location), which families may choose to do. “Every two years, during the last 10 days of January, communities across the country conduct comprehensive counts of their homeless populations in order to measure the prevalence of homelessness in each community” (Applied Survey Research, 2015, p. 11). The most common method to conduct this PIT count is for trained surveyors to go out in the community to look for people living in unsheltered locations. Again, this may leave out homeless families that are doubled up or purposefully trying to stay out of the public eye.

The United States Department of Education (USDoe) also issues reports on the number of students that are homeless. For the past 13 years states have been collecting data annually on the-number of homeless students attending their schools, per a requirement made in 2004 at the federal level by the USDoe. Each state sends their data to EdFacts, which is the system used by the USDoe to collect and analyze pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade data. Researchers can access this data to determine the number of homeless students’ enrolled, as well as look at specific points of interest regarding homeless students, such as the graduation rate or academic achievement (Abdul

Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). This count is obtained via each Local Education Agency (LEA), which reports to the State Education Agency (SEA), and then finally to the USDoE. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's (MVHAA) definition of homelessness is used to determine how many students meet eligibility within each LEA (Canfield & Teasley, 2015). This definition is broad in comparison to the HUD definition of homeless.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, the term “homeless children and youths” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes children and youth:

- \* who are sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
- \* who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- \* who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- \* who are migratory children who live in one of the above circumstances. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 2).

At a national level, homeless families make up 37.8% of the total U.S. homeless population (Abdul Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). The numbers of homeless

children have increased drastically over the last decade, from one in 50 in 2006 to one in 30 in 2013 (Bassuck, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014). Lightfoot (2011) discusses the rise in homelessness within the state of Washington, pointing out that the numbers have increased there due to homelessness impacting rural counties more so than in the past. The issue in America is that homelessness is often considered an urban problem, leaving out much needed resources, services, and supports at the rural level. Many rural locations are unaware of the homelessness impacting their community, as it is a more “hidden” problem and therefore not as easily recognized (Canfield, 2014). At a macro level, national policy has been shaped by the debate of the cause of homelessness: if it is structural or individual. Structural solutions include subsidized housing efforts, such as the providing of housing vouchers or rent subsidies to families. Individual solutions focus on increasing the social capital of a family in different contexts, such as acquiring job related skills, improving parenting skills, and providing education opportunities (Chaviano, 2013).

**Homelessness in Santa Cruz County, California.** Santa Cruz County, California is located on the coast of central California, approximately 70 miles south of San Francisco; 30 miles southwest of San Jose; 40 miles north of Monterey; and 375 miles north of Los Angeles. The total population of the county is 275,902, which is divided between four incorporated cities, Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville, and 13 unincorporated areas, Aptos, Ben Lomond, Bonny Doon, Boulder Creek, Brookdale, Corralitos, Davenport, Felton, Freedom, La Selva Beach, Rio Del Mar, Soquel and Zayante (Santa Cruz County Facts, Stats, and FAQs. (n.d.). Half of the residents in the

county reside in unincorporated areas, which include areas that are as diverse as coastal communities to mountain villages to communities nestled between redwood trees.

Santa Cruz County operates a CoC (Community of Care) that serves its entire geographic area. “The CoC role and responsibilities is fulfilled by a community-wide action team called the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP)” (Santa Cruz County Homeless Action Partnership, 2014). HAP does not have a fixed number of members and members can represent more than one of the categories that make up the group (government officials, businesses, advocates, homeless, school districts, public housing agencies, law enforcement, affordable housing developers, organizations that serve homeless or formerly veterans, hospitals, universities/research, victim service providers, faith-based organizations, nonprofit homeless service providers, social service providers, and mental health agencies) (Santa Cruz County Homeless Action Partnership, 2014). The group meets together at least six times per year, with the HAP board meeting at least twice. The board is smaller, 9 members, of which 4 are government officials, 4 nonprofit/private seats, and 1 homeless or formerly homeless individual.

HAP partners with Applied Survey Research, a non-profit social research firm, in order to conduct the PIT count biennially (Applied Survey Research, 2015). The data obtained in 2015 were the result of a physical canvassing of the county on January 22, 2015 between daybreak and 11:00 A.M. Later in the day, between the hours of 12PM and 4PM there was a specific physical count of unaccompanied children and youth under the age of 25; a similar youth count in Santa Cruz County has been conducted in 2009, 2011, and 2013. Applied Survey Research (2015) reports that 1,964 individuals were included

in the street count and shelter count, which was a 44% decrease from the number of homeless individuals in 2013 (3,536). Santa Cruz County has both visible and hidden homelessness. Based on the count conducted by Applied Survey Research (2015), out of the entire homeless population 69% are unsheltered (37% live on the street, 2% in abandoned buildings, 21% in vehicles, and 9% in encampment areas) and 31% are sheltered (20% live in emergency shelters and 11% in transitional housing). The cities in the county that experienced the highest amount of homelessness were Santa Cruz (n=497) and Watsonville (n=257). Of the overall homeless population in 2015, 24% of the individuals were in families. While the total number of individuals in families that were identified as homeless dropped from 2015 compared to 2013 (481 compared to 544), there is still cause for alarm in that 206 of the 481 individuals were identified in the unsheltered / street count (Applied Survey Research, 2015). Interesting to note, is that out of the 206 individuals mentioned above, 145 students were identified by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE) as homeless. Applied Survey Research (2015) utilizes the SCCOE to obtain the most accurate count possible, as it is often difficult to locate an unsheltered family during the PIT count. While the SCCOE provides Applied Survey Research with their data on unsheltered families, there are also numbers that they obtain from each LEA (Local Education Agency) which indicate families that meet the definition of homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. Similar to what is seen at the national and state level, the different definitions of homelessness between HUD and MVHAA create different numbers at the county and local level.

The issue of homelessness in Santa Cruz County is a visible one, with certain parts of the county being known for areas where homeless individuals gather, such as downtown in the city of Santa Cruz. As indicated above, homeless families are also in unincorporated areas of the county, but they are not usually as visible to the public. However, their existence is documented, as school district homeless liaisons throughout the county are aware of many of these families. There are also a few shelters within the county that serve this population, such as the Rebele Family Shelter in Santa Cruz. Eliminating family homelessness in the county is a goal set forth in a plan developed by HAP, Smart Solutions to Homelessness Santa Cruz County, and the United Way. This plan, All-In Toward a Home for Every County Resident, sets forth to end family homelessness by 2020 by meeting both short and long-term action plans. Achieving this goal will take a coordinated effort, as homeless families in Santa Cruz currently face limited options in relation to affordable housing (Gardner, 2015). Given the prevalence of family homelessness in the county and the unique situation of each family, it is critical to take the time to hear their voices in order to understand their experience. In relation to interacting with the education system, targeted questions will allow families to identify barriers and challenges they currently face.

### **Barriers and Challenges that Homeless Students and Families Face**

Homeless students and families face barriers and challenges. Ultimately, these outside factors may impact a child from being able to attend and learn during a lesson (Tucker, 2000). Students in transition may live their lives with uncertainty. This can contribute to “...emotional, social, developmental, educational, or health problems” (Eddowes, 1993,

p.381). Yet, is homelessness in itself a barrier that will lead to definitive negative results for a student? The answer is no. Canfield et al. (2015) conducted a study to determine if there was a difference between homeless students and others in relation to attendance problems. For students in the fiftieth and higher percentiles, the authors saw a higher degree of absences. However, in the lower percentiles there was little difference. Canfield et al. (2015) argued "...future studies must consider homelessness as an experience that may exacerbate various outcomes, rather than cause them" (p. 204). The authors point out that it is time for research to take a person-centered approach in order to examine the nuances that come out of the data. Again, there is heterogeneity among homeless families and as such, their perspectives, outcomes, and barriers are not uniform. Canfield et al. (2015) states "... a better understanding of the impact of homelessness may lie in grasping the interplay of these various factors" (p. 204).

**Barriers outside of the school environment.** Perhaps the largest barrier outside of the school environment for families is housing. Yet, depending on a family's situation their housing could be quite diverse. Families that are homeless may face limited options, depending on the availability of housing resources in their community. Housing may be offered as a short term solution (transitional housing) or on an emergency basis, programs might be only available to mothers and children, which could result in families having to either split up in order to have shelter or decide to stay together in an unsheltered or doubled up situation. In addition, some families may be unable to access a sheltered program due to other exclusionary criteria (such as prior legal offense), which can make the search for housing even more difficult. (Chaviano, 2013). Burt (2006) studied the

housing outcomes of families as they exited a transitional housing program. While 70% of the families obtained permanent housing, 30% ultimately did not. Out of the transitional housing staff that responded, 74%, felt families were unable to acquire housing due to issues of affordability. While this may not represent the experience of all communities, it is significant to note.

There are also differences between experiencing homelessness as a student in a rural setting or an urban setting; rural settings often have fewer resources and services than a large city (Mullins, Wilkins, Mahan, & Bouldin, 2016). Transportation can be difficult to access and shelters (if there are any) often have limited space for families. The homeless population in rural settings are often referred to as “hidden” as they may stay with friends, camp in private places, sleep in parked cars on abandoned roads or take shelter in abandoned buildings (Skott-Myhre, Raby, & Nicolau, 2008). This may be a stark contrast to the experience of a student that is homelessness in an urban setting, where students may spend most of their life in full public view, with a lack of privacy. While more programs are usually in place in a large city, children may have to spend much of their time on public transportation with their parents going from agency to agency. Their life can become one of constantly waiting in long lines: for the restroom, food, and shelter. (Eddowes, 1993). Understanding the effects of being homeless in either setting may help educators better serve the students in their classrooms.

Children that are homeless may also face challenges in their social-emotional functioning. Haskett et al. (2015) found that while some homeless children demonstrated skills above the norm in developmental milestones and social emotional functioning, the

overall performance of the children was significantly below the norming group. Homeless parents have also demonstrated risks in their mental health; specifically depression, parenting stress, and negative parenting practices (Holtrop, McNeil, & McWey, 2015). Parenting stress has been found higher among mothers that are doubled up or homeless, and this type of stress can be a predictor for higher rates of physical or psychological aggression toward children (Park, Ostler, & Fertig, 2015). Studies have found that co-sharing housing, being doubled-up, contributes to greater stress among individuals that are homeless “ – that homelessness is associated with the lack of comfort, freedom, privacy, and control over one’s daily activities in the place of residence” (Teo & Chiu, 2016, p. 572). While not all homeless parents have internalizing distress, those that do often have higher rates of parent negativity, which is related to higher rates of negative affect in their children (Labella, Narayan, & Masten, 2015). In a study of three districts in Minnesota (Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul), homeless students were more likely to be African American, to experience moves and disruptions in school, and slightly more likely to be identified as a special education student compared to students that were not homeless or highly mobile. In addition, homeless students were less likely to be identified as gifted and talented, and were less likely to be in a home where a language other than English was spoken (Larson & Meehan, 2011).

**School district and site barriers.** Despite the best intention of a school district, parents may face barriers when working with this level of the educational system. The MVHAA (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act) is interpreted at the federal and state level and then is passed along to the district. The district then has the responsibility

to interpret the law in order to develop policies that will be put in place at the school site. “Each stage of the policy process shapes how the original mandate gets implemented at the ground level” (Hallett, Skrla, & Low, 2015, p. 672). This can be an issue for districts that have limited resources and are unable to allocate enough staff to implement the MVHAA policy. Homeless liaisons at the district level often have multiple responsibilities that are outside of the realm of MVHAA and therefore do not have enough time to address the needs of homeless students and families in their district (Mullins et al., 2016). In addition, many liaisons have limited contacts with community agencies and social service providers, which impact their ability to assist families in linking them with support for outside services (Miller, 2011b).

An area of concern for homeless students and families that has not received much attention is the possible harm from districts closing schools and initiatives involving school choice (Abdul Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015). The opening and shuttering of schools can lead to increased mobility for students who may already have attended multiple schools. For students that are homeless, remaining at their school of origin is one of the constants that are supported by the MVHAA. If a district does not have a policy to evaluate the effect of school closures on this community, then this could become a significant barrier for students and their families. Santos et al. (2016) note several other areas of concern that become a barrier for homeless families and students at a district level: only a small amount of districts receive federal funding through grants (just 10.7% of California school districts), most districts are not accountable to the state for compliance monitoring regarding their MVHAA obligations, and some districts threaten

the stability of families' housing by violating student privacy. One pertinent example provided pertained to a district's policy in securing an address for a homeless family. When the family stated that they were doubled up and provided the address where they were staying, the district investigated by contacting the landlord of the property. This ultimately put the family at risk, as the renter had not disclosed to the landlord that they were allowing this family to stay. Districts also create forms that families will fill out and they can either be written in a parent friendly manner or not. In some districts parents are asked to sign affidavits regarding their residence under penalty of perjury or under oath (Hallett et al., 2015). These practices can be frightening for families and deter the formation of a positive relationship with the school district.

The policies set forth in the MVHAA support homeless students in remaining in their school of origin, in order to decrease school mobility. However, the policy itself does not address what actually happens in the classroom (Canfield & Teasley, 2015). This is an issue, as not all teachers enter the classroom with the necessary social and emotional competencies to meet students' needs (Chow, Mistry, & Melchor, 2015). Teachers are also not always aware of what the housing situation is for their students and there is often little, if any, professional development provided to them regarding strategies for working with students that are homeless (Moore, 2013). "While some students are willing to divulge their homelessness, others keep it to themselves..." (Larson & Meehan, 2011, p. 190). Tobin (2014) argues that there are several factors that impact the ability of a child to be successful in school; they are as follows:

Homeless children are commonly faced with logistical and procedural barriers to enrolling in school. Next, they are plagued by physical ailments. Homeless children also suffer from mental health issues at greater rates than children in the general population. Finally, homeless children often face educational readiness challenges. (p. 199)

Stronge (2014) asserted that being homeless in and of itself does not predict success in school, but that it should be considered a risk factor to take into consideration, “such as poverty, race, and mobility, which threatens student success” (p. 217).

At the school site, students that are homeless can be subject to discipline and criminalization based on their housing status. Over time, there have been situations that have arisen where a student’s housing status was not considered prior to making a determination regarding a discipline procedure. Students that were frequently absent or late due to unreliable transportation were suspended or expelled and students that had dirty uniforms were reprimanded. (Santos et al., 2016). As a result, some critics of existing school policies have recommended that it is essential that the teacher and leadership at a site level consider the situation that a student is facing, rather than relying on zero tolerance discipline measures that do not take into account individual factors. Also noteworthy at the site level, is the barrier students can face when accruing credits at the high school level toward graduation. Students that are homeless and highly mobile frequently change school, which can result in difficulty in graduating, due to an inability to receive partial credit for the time spent at a high school. Santos et al. (2016) report that “...only about 20% of states have publically available policies that award partial credit to homeless students for work completed at another school prior to a mid-semester move” (p. 7). This is an area of concern, as homeless students nationwide experience lower

graduation rates than students that are in permanent housing. Given the barriers and challenges that homeless students and families face, the government has responded with legislation to mitigate these factors.

### **Policy to Support Homeless Youth and Families**

Legislative policy is in place to support the rights of homeless students and families as they interact with the educational system. As mentioned above, some of the barriers and challenges that families face is the result of districts not meeting the obligations laid out in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVHAA), not necessarily due to flaws in the policy itself. MVHAA was introduced over thirty years ago and has been amended over time to meet the growing and changing needs of homeless families in America. Understanding the policy is an essential component of recognizing the rights of homeless students and families. With a solid grasp of the policy in mind, conversations with homeless families can produce data related to the ability of districts within the county to implement MVHAA.

**McKinney-Vento policy: origins and transformation over time.** The passing of the most significant piece of federal legislation benefiting children in transition occurred in the 1980's (Foscarinis & McCarthy, 2000). At this time, homeless advocates were pressing the federal government to view homelessness as a “national problem requiring a national response” (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006, p. 1). Advocates had a difficult audience in the form of Ronald Reagan, then current president and strong believer in reducing the role of the federal government in social problems. “Reagan cut the budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by three-

fourths, from 32 billion in 1981 to 7.5 billion by 1988. Under Reagan’s administration, the number of people living below the federal poverty level rose from 24.5 million in 1987 to 32.5 million in 1988” (Aviles de Bradley, 2008, p. 263). Also significant to families was the creation of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act in 1982, which significantly reduced the number of families eligible to receive aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) and for the families that did continue to qualify to receive this benefit, the amount was substantially reduced (Chaviano, 2013).

Despite the focus of the president, this comprehensive piece of federal law, targeting the support of the homeless was enacted, due to the then changing demographics of homelessness. Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler (2006) report that during the 1970s and 1980s, families were offered less support from federal assistance programs (such as food stamps) which was likely one of the contributing factors to the significant increase of families among the homeless population. In addition, in 1986, estimates were made to Congress that “more than 50% of the homeless student population was not attending school” (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006, p. 294). These facts, as well as a strong advocacy campaign, led both houses in Congress to pass the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act in 1986. Shortly after passing in both the House of Representatives and Senate, one of the bills largest supporters – Connecticut Representative, Stewart B. McKinney passed away. In his honor the act was renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act and was presented to Ronald Reagan who signed it into law in 1987 (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006).

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act contains nine titles; of particular interest to school systems is Title VII, which authorizes the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program. The Act has since been amended multiple times. In 2000, "...President William Clinton renamed the legislation the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act after the death of Representative Bruce Vento, a leading supporter of the act since its original passage in 1987" (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006, p. 1-2). In 2001, the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program was reauthorized by Congress as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act and subsequently became part of the No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002 (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006; Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). The act "... advocates for students who are homeless by stipulating who is eligible for homeless services, requiring schools to serve them, and developing supportive structures to help them thrive" (Miller, 2011, p. 428). In 2011, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act was amended and consolidated with the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to become the Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2011 (Abdul Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015).

**McKinney-Vento Policy at the local, state, and national level.** Interesting to note, is the role the federal government has played in creating policy through this legislation for schools and districts to abide by when educating and supporting students in transition. Why has it continued to be a federal issue, with the federal government placing more and more policies on the state and local educational departments? Could it be that the federal

government lacks trust in the local schools or state level education departments to adopt policies that benefit students in transition (Kirst & Wirt, 2009)? One of the most significant facets of the guidelines set forth by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act is an infrastructure that separates roles and responsibilities to meet students' needs at the local, state and national level. This has often resulted in conflicts when attempting to implement the Acts central themes.

At the local level, each district is required to identify a homeless liaison. This liaison is responsible to inform school and district employees about the policies and regulations detailed in the McKinney-Vento Act. In particular, school employees use the definition provided in the act to identify children that qualify as homeless. If a student meets the eligibility criteria, all barriers to enroll and attend school must be removed as quickly as possible. The National Center for Homeless Education (2007) states “[d]elaying the enrollment of a homeless student violates federal law and may place the student in danger” (p. 1). Liaisons roles may vary district to district, depending on the needs of the location. Miller (2011) writes: “Liaisons are broadly responsible for monitoring transportation-related issues, facilitating student matriculations into schools and programs, educating schools and parents about McKinney-Vento, and consulting parents about how to navigate school systems” (p. 430). In addition, liaisons are eligible to apply for sub-grants through their state to support the students in transition in their district. However, the real concern here is that studies have shown many liaisons do not even know they are identified as such by their Local Education Agency (LEA) and they have no background or knowledge about the McKinney-Vento Act (Miller, 2011a). This

reality leaves room to speculate how students in transition attending these districts are getting their needs met.

At the state level, “[t]he McKinney Act mandates SEA (State Education Agencies) to establish an Office of Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth (Rafferty, 1999, p.27). This coordinator is required to submit an annual report to the USDoE detailing the following: an estimate of how many homeless children and youth are in their state, the problems these children and youth have faced in enrolling in preschool / school, and the progress that has been made within the state to address these issues. In addition, they are required to report on their own departments’ success in “...facilitating school enrollment, attendance, and success...” (Rafferty, 1999, p.27). States are also required to facilitate coordination among social agencies and develop partnerships with homeless service providers in order to “...improve the provision of comprehensive services to homeless children and youth and their families” (Tucker, 2000, p.230). Varied responses are seen at the state level in regards to partnerships between the Office of Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth and outside agencies (Rafferty, 1999).

At the national level, the USDoE is held to several mandates by the MVHAA, “...including: reviewing and evaluating state plans, evaluating and disseminating information about programs for the education of homeless children, determining the extent to which SEAs are meeting their responsibilities under the Act, and providing technical assistance to SEAs ...” (Foscarinis & McCarthy, 2000, p. 141). The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) is the aforementioned technical assistance and

information center for the USDoE and is associated with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (National Center for Homeless Education, 2007). NCHE, under the umbrella of the USDoE, has been criticized for its lack of leadership among SEAs and its lack of consistency in submitting accurate reports to Congress regarding estimates of children and youth in America that are homeless (Rafferty, 1999). Yet, others believe that lack of adequate funding coming from Congress is the real reason MVHAA's policies are not able to be put fully into place at the national, state and local levels (Riley, 2011). In summary, these factors can result in conflicts as to who is responsible at the local, state, and national levels.

**McKinney-Vento policy: current status and future implications.** On October 1, 2016 the most recent amendments to the MVHAA went into effect (Santos, Fernandez, Hostetler, Tars, & Foscarinis, 2016). These were the result of the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). ESSA required LEAs and SEAs to continue to implement MVHAA, with some additional responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is that students in preschool are now entitled to remaining-in their school or origin and receive transportation rights, similar to students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) oversees the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and provides funding for coordinators. However, despite recent amendments, there are several issues that remain unresolved. For example, there is no evaluation tool in place to measure the effectiveness of these EHCY funded coordinators or to measure the ideal amount of time that coordinators should spend on activities related to homeless students and families (Abdul Rahman, Turner, &

Elbedour, 2015). In fact, many of these coordinators have positions that extend beyond this topic and they have reported varying degrees of time spent engaged with McKinney-Vento related activities. Shea, Zetlin, and Weinber (2010) report that in one study 92% of liaisons spent less than 25% of their time working on MVHAA activities. This is an area where the federal government could provide guidance on the amount of time coordinators should spend on activities related to MVHAA.

Another concern related to the MVHAA centers around funding. Canfield and Teasley (2015) write, “A major question posed in the discourse of the MVHAA’s efficacy is whether the policy is an unfunded mandate” (p. 68). Elements of the MVHAA include financial obligations for LEA’s, such as transporting students to their schools of origin. However, not all LEA’s receive federal funding, as states are free to disperse this funding in the way that they see fit. For this reason, liaisons may be required to fulfill obligations put forth by MVHAA with no funding to support them. Santos et al. (2016) argue that “funding should be based on the number and needs of identified students” (p. 3).

While there are areas of concern regarding the MVA going forward, it does continue to serve two purposes well: first, the definition for who qualifies as homeless in the school setting is clearly defined and second, it requires schools to provide the opportunity for an equal education for homeless students (Canfield, Nolan, Harley, Hardy, & Elliot, 2015). The MVHAA policy has secured several rights for homeless students and families in the realm of public education. The next layer in support to homeless students and

families can be found in the efforts of communities, as well as individual schools and school districts.

### **Supports and Other Factors that Contribute to Success**

While homeless students and families face barriers and challenges, there is legislative policy in place to support them. Also, efforts at the local level, by community partners and/or school sites can positively impact the experience of students and families as they interact with the educational system. The key for educators to realize is that a paradigm shift has occurred in which the school is not only functioning as a place of learning, but is also a social agency charged with the task of helping children get ready to learn (Tucker, 2000). Comprehensive programs that take this into account and seek to meet the many needs of students in transition are ideal. Educators can form collaborative partnerships with outside agencies in order to become part of a larger system of support. In fact, the MVHAA suggests these partnerships should be made, but it leaves the actual task up to the local level. Most likely this is due to diverse dynamics between localities. A service delivery model that may work in an urban setting may not be ideal in a rural town (Skott-Myhre, Raby, & Nikolaou, 2008; Eddowes, 1999). In a large geographical area such as Santa Cruz County, it is likely that supports may vary depending on the city that a family lives in and/or that services available may depend on the initiatives of a particular school or district.

**Resilience and resolve.** While families that are homeless face many barriers, many families display a level of resilience and resolve when interviewed regarding their experience. A study conducted by Teo and Chiu (2016) found that “while the families

were disappointed and stressed, they remained resolute in coping with the loss of the home, and non-housing issues that had contributed to or were a consequence of homelessness” (p. 574). This resilience and determination can also be observed in children, as noted by Masen et al. (2014)

Despite past and present challenges, children are manifesting resilience in their families and at school, drawing on adaptive capacity across many systems that support positive development, from both internal systems and interactions with other people and the larger ecology. Their resilience depends on the resilience of other systems that support children, including families, communities, and schools. (p. 205)

Homeless families also benefit from individuals that are boundary spanners between multiple agencies, such as the school and shelter. Miller (2008) explains “not only do they know, respect and believe in their neighbors, their neighbors know, respect and believe in them—and they trust that the boundary spanners will continue to work on their behalf” (p. 370). In Santa Cruz County these boundary spanners can be seen holding a position in local government, as well as running a non-profit benefiting the population, writing letters to the editor for the local newspaper, and holding personal relationships with homeless families.

**School district and site supports.** School districts have the potential to create long term and far reaching impacts when addressing the issue of homelessness, rather than relying on the efforts of only one district homeless liaison (Hallett et al., 2015). Districts create the policy that is carried out at the site level, which can make a significant difference with issues such as obtaining an accurate count of homeless students. Districts also have the opportunity to apply for federal McKinney-Vento grants, which can directly benefit students and families. Stronge (1995) offers several recommendations that a

district can put in place that will benefit homeless students and families: providing preschool programs for homeless students, offering professional development to staff regarding understanding the needs of homeless students, developing a continuum of education services, expanding educational services to include social support, coordinating within the schools, and collaborating with other agencies. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) also advised educators by issuing a fact sheet on how they can support homeless youth. Many of the recommendations are similar, with an emphasis on having empathy and understanding for students and families. Districts are advised to provide professional development to staff on trauma-informed care, as many homeless youth may have experienced trauma in the past. California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson (2016) wrote to educators in California advising them that homeless students have reported seeing school as an actual home to them. They regard it as a place that they can see familiar people and experience a routine. Torlakson further advised districts to upload the MVHAA and ensure that their liaisons participate in professional development related to their roles, as required by the amendments in ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act). This push will likely benefit homeless students and parents as districts comply with the new guidelines. Liaisons that have direct contact with homeless students and families are also more likely to understand their obligations under the MVHAA (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2015).

Abdul Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour (2015) report that homeless youth programs that foster constructive, supportive interaction and provide links to support networks and services are known to improve student outcomes” (p. 695). Schools have the option of

creating four different learning environments for students in transition, that can each weave in support from outside agencies in a different way: mainstreamed, supplemental support, transitional and modified comprehensive (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). Mainstreamed sites include children into existing school contexts. Advocates for this type of school environment, such as The National Coalition for the Homeless, believe that this type of program creates the least amount of stigma and allows the child to learn in a natural environment. In this setting, children can access support for other needs in the same manner as other children in the school (free lunch and Title 1 programs). Supplemental support services are an after-school addition to a mainstreamed program. These services specifically target the needs of students in transition; services can range from tutoring, counseling, and supplying clothes (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). Transitional schools are perhaps the most controversial, as they provide a separate setting for children in transition to attend school. Often these schools are located in a homeless shelter – so that students can have immediate access to school while their families are in transition. However, these separate schools present concerns, such as: isolation from non-homeless students, inadequate facilities, inadequate curriculum, limited services in bilingual education, and special education (Foscarinins & McCarthy, 2000). Modified comprehensive schools resemble typical school settings, in that children are placed in a grade level classroom and follow the grade level curriculum. However, these schools are only open to children in transition. Services at the school site may include medical and dental clinics, food programs, donation rooms, busing services, counseling, and

mentoring. Students remain at this site while in transition and then transfer to a mainstream site (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006).

Regardless of the model chosen, critics have suggested that partnerships with community agencies should be formed in order to meet the complex needs of students in transition (Miller, 2009). In fact, the possibility of creative initiatives is more likely to come through local partnerships than by federal legislative requirements (Tucker, 2000). Riley (2011) discusses district liaisons making partnerships with The Rotary, United Way, and other community organizations. The district can collaborate with these community partners to “help students overcome other barriers, including appropriate school clothing and a lack of school supplies, food, personal hygiene items, and a regular, adequate, night-time residence” (p. 3). In essence, it has been suggested that district liaisons need to branch out of their own system, so that they can understand the role of other agencies within their community.

In Santa Cruz County these efforts can be seen in the collaboration between SCCOE and HAP, as well as partnerships formed at the local level between school districts and community agencies, Live Oak Elementary School District and Live Oak Community Resources. Miller (2011) argues that the types of distributive leadership in homeless education contexts are worth evaluating in terms of building community partnerships. Educators need to move away from the methods of collective leadership distribution, where individuals working separately toward the same problem and coordinated leadership distribution, where routines and procedures have to be completed in a sequential manner. Instead, the MVHAA forces educators to embrace collaborated

leadership distribution – “working together in place and time on a common routine” (Miller, 2011, p. 440). Essentially, it takes people forming trusting relationships with each other in order for real collaboration to grow (Tucker, 2000). These relationships allow multiple stakeholders to have a voice.

### **Voice and Visibility**

There are multiple stakeholders involved when considering the issue of homelessness and how it impacts students and families that interact with the educational system.

Government officials often hold the power and position to bring about new policies and programs that benefit homeless students and families. Their voices, combined with those of non-profit organizations, can impact change on a large scale. Yet, there is a continued need for the voices of homeless families and the educators they intermingle with.

Research containing the voices of teachers and families is limited. By examining what studies have been completed in the past, it is clear to see that these perspectives should be at the forefront of understanding what homeless families and students experience in the educational setting.

**Voice of teachers working with homeless families.** Despite the direct role a teacher holds in interacting with homeless students and their families on a daily basis, there is limited research on the experiences of teachers’ working with homeless students and their families, in particular qualitative interviews. Yet, one study was recently conducted in which the results show the necessity of obtaining the voice of teachers in order to understand their experience and further this body of knowledge. Chow et al. (2015) met with 28 teachers and conducted qualitative interviews regarding their experiences. These

teachers taught at one of three elementary schools in southern California, where at least one family shelter was within each schools boundary. The teachers were asked the same questions in a semi-structured interview that lasted an average of 20 minutes (13 to 51 minutes). Chow et al. (2015) writes

The protocol was designed to address four main areas of inquiry: (1) teachers' awareness and perceptions of students and families who are homeless; (2) how teachers adjust their instruction to meet students' learning and behavioral needs; (3) challenges teachers face when working with homeless students and their families; and (4) professional development or training experiences for working with homeless students and their families. (p. 648).

Through these interviews, it was clear to the authors that teachers have varying perspectives related to the homeless students in their classroom. While some teachers displayed stereotyped thinking, more than half of the teachers questioned provided answers that reflected a high level of sensitivity and understanding toward homeless students and their families (Chow et al., 2015). Teachers are on the direct forefront of working with students and families and it is crucial that their voice is heard. However, the next step in adding to this body of knowledge is to conduct qualitative interviews with both parents and teachers or other school professionals that have had a relationship working with each other. This would allow the researcher to identify and verify responses related to the relationship using multiple data points. In fact, this gap in the research was one of the factors considered in developing the components of this current research study. Homeless families in Santa Cruz County identified educators that made a significant impact on their lives and these educators were interviewed to gather their perspectives, while also obtaining the perspectives and voices of homeless parents, which is also an area in which literature is lacking.

**Voice of homeless students and families.** Individuals that are homeless are a heterogeneous group; they are different, but share this particular characteristic related to housing. Understanding the viewpoint of the wide range of individuals experiencing homelessness is critical in recognizing the diverse needs of this group. In particular, what are the thoughts of homeless families as they navigate the school system for their children? Do they face similar barriers and struggles? Are there effective practices and strategies that schools can employ? Are there differences to these answers based on family experiences, housing type, geographical location? The answers lie in their own voices. “Empowering families to take part in the creation of their service plans and keeping in mind their individual needs and strengths may help reduce feelings of powerlessness, shame and isolation...” (Chaviano, 2013, p. 41).

One effective approach in using ‘family voice’ to help answer these questions is the use of community-based participatory research (CBPR), such as is described by Fraenkel (2006). His team utilized the collaborative family program model (CFPM), which is a type of CBPR in order to obtain the perspectives of homeless families participating in a program in New York City. CBPR follows 10 steps that are meant to engage the family in the process of program development. The researcher takes on the role of a listener and seeks to understand the situation from a person-centered perspective. Fraenkel (2006) explains

These 10 steps guide movement from initiating the project and forming collaborative professional partnerships to engaging cultural consultants; conducting in-depth research to understand the problems, resources, contexts, and recommendations from the perspective of families who will receive the program and from the perspective of front-line professionals working with these families; transforming research findings

into program contents and formats; and implementing, evaluating, revising, and replicating the program. (p. 237)

By following these steps, CFPM is able to empower the homeless individual. Youth led participatory research (YLPR) is another form of CBPR. Gomez and Ryan (2015) conducted qualitative interviews with homeless youth that participated in YLPR and found that the youth "... felt that participating in the project mattered, that people listened to them and that they had a voice" (p. 191). The youth expressed power to influence the future. This is significant when considering what format should be utilized to address the needs of homeless students and their families. Research incorporating the voice of this population is more likely to yield positive results. Barker (2015) obtained the voice of youth in an ethnographic study he conducted in Australia; he was a participant observer for twelve months and also conducted focus groups and youth interviews. His findings suggest that youth who are homeless have a habitus of instability that is built upon the instability of their environment. The decisions that they made and their rationale behind it, was attributed to the chaos that shaped their daily life. While his research focused on homeless youth, the uncertainty of homelessness likely impacts other age groups (children and families) in a similar way. Barker (2015) found

The terms of 'instability' and 'uncertainty' can capture many facets and factors that shape conditions of existence. It may appear to simplify diverse experiences under a broad term. However, the generalizability and breadth of the experiences and conditions captured under the notion of a habitus of instability allows for us to see similarities across experiences, or diversity within similarity. It provides a way to make sense of a diverse range of experiences and practices by what emerged as... the pervasive them of instability. (p. 680)

A study using CBPR was conducted by Holtrop et al. (2015) in order to "acquire a better understanding of the psychosocial status and life experiences among homeless

parents residing in transitional housing” (p. 179). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 24 participants (79.2% female) and their responses were analyzed by using thematic analysis. Five themes emerged from the participants, which provided a more in-depth understanding of the experience of homeless parents in transitional housing: they retained their core identity as parents - despite their homelessness, their current housing situation was a better choice than the alternatives, their community was like a big family, they were in a unique parenting context, and they were moving forward despite the difficult obstacles (Holtrop et al., 2015). While this study was conducted within the context of only one transitional housing community, it did yield rich data on the experience and perspective of residents that participated in the interviews. The authors identified an area of further research to include the perspectives of other family members or service providers.

A phenomenological qualitative study by Lorelle & Grothaus (2015) looked at the experiences of parents and children that received services from an agency in one of three supportive housing programs. Interviews were conducted and themes emerged, with 89% of the parents indicating at least one benefit of the program. The themes that were positively related included the following: the program provides services that parents feel they cannot, their children have improved psychosocial outcomes, they are satisfied with the services, and they have supportive relationships with the staff. Themes were also identified as areas of improvement: specific changes to the program, lack of supportive relationships with staff, and children’s needs that were unmet (Lorelle & Grothaus, 2015). This type of research is likely to produce effective change and positively direct

programs and policies, as participants who have been marginalized in the past are given the opportunity to have a voice (Fraenkel, 2006).

### **Summary**

Family homelessness in America is continuing to rise. In California alone, 40% of school districts in the 2005-06 school year reported having no homeless students, but just 6 years later only 15% of the districts reported no instances of homelessness (California Homeless Youth Project, 2014). The issue is impacting both urban and rural locations and is often the cause of a lack of affordable housing and not enough income (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). Additionally, despite best efforts to obtain accurate counts, the definition of homeless varies depending on the program conducting the count and it is likely that the number of homeless families in our nation is more than reported. For each family that is homeless, there is a unique story as the demographics of family homelessness are diverse. The experience of family homelessness varies as well, depending on the resources available within a community and the existence, or lack thereof, of a social network (Cunningham, 2010). While not all families face the same barriers and challenges, the lack of permanent, stable housing is a significant concern (Bassuck, 2010).

Federal policy is also in place to protect the rights of homeless students and their families. The MVHAA ensures that no school places unnecessary barriers in the enrollment process or in a student remaining at their school of origin (Miller, 2012; National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2009). While the MVHAA has been in place for a significant time period, little research has centered

on whether the policy has been effective in addressing the challenges homeless children face when obtaining an education (Canfield & Teasley, 2015). In fact, even though the MVHAA ensures certain layers of support, not all educators are aware of these guidelines (Groton, Teasley, & Canfield, 2013). Interviewing educators and continuing to conduct research studies that involve the voice of homeless students and their families is one way in which the successful implementation of MVHAA can be assessed. In addition, engaging homeless families in PAR allows them to be involved in developing solutions that are meaningful. Finally, by employing phenomenological methods in research, the greater base of knowledge grows in understanding what a certain phenomenon is like from multiple angles (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon of family homelessness is one which educators need to understand, so that they can best meet the needs of the homeless students and families that they engage with.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Homelessness is widespread in America and the situation of each family that is impacted by this issue is different. Families that are homeless do not fit one pattern. They are not one race, they do not share identical educational backgrounds, they are not all single parent households, they are not all inflicted with drug and alcohol issues, and they are not all living in shelters. They do not all have the same story and do not share the same voice. In order to truly understand the experience of a homeless family, it is imperative to take the time to listen. By using an approach rooted in phenomenological research methods, I was able to take part in families' lives and world in order to understand their experience. Moustakas (1994) explains that in this type of research "...the only way I can truly come to know things and people is to go out to them, to return again and again to them, to immerse myself completely in what is there before me, look, see, listen, hear, touch, from many angles and perspectives and vantage points..." (p. 65). By engaging in the topic with the families that are impacted by the issue, the door is opened for higher understanding and empathy. In addition, generating solutions from individuals that are experiencing a problem is a powerful tool used in Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR was a component of this research, as the intent was not only to describe the experiences of homeless families, but also to focus on identifying solutions and barriers that impact the educational success of homeless students.

This study provided the opportunity for families that are currently homeless or have been in the past within Santa Cruz County, California to have their voices heard.

Teachers, educational administrators, non-profit and government leaders were also interviewed in order to understand what the experience of students and families that are homeless in Santa Cruz County is like as they interact with the educational system. By narrowing participants within this geographical region and interviewing not only families, but also individuals that have connections with these families, it was possible to identify themes regarding barriers and supports that homeless students and their families face within the educational system. In addition, through the medium of a documentary, families were not only given the opportunity to share their voice, but also their image. The end result is information that can be applied by educators and service providers as they work with homeless families that reside in other regions and support children as they pursue their educations.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

This study investigates the experience of students and families that are homeless in Santa Cruz County as they interact with the educational system. It seeks to find what supports or other factors leads to success, as well as what barriers or challenges that students and families face. With the continued rise in homelessness impacting families in the nation, it is crucial for educators, community members, and policy makers to understand the issue in order to offer empathy, support, and understanding. In addition, partnering with families will increase the likelihood in generating solutions that are effective. Voices and perspectives were obtained through videotaped interviews with homeless parents, teachers of homeless students, site, district and county educational employees and administrators that assist homeless students and families, and non-profit

and local government leaders in Santa Cruz County. By analyzing the content of the interviews, this study looks to provide themes in solutions and barriers that can be considered when refining practices for assisting homeless students and families in the educational setting.

### **Research Design and Procedures**

This qualitative research study utilizes components of PAR, which links participation into action research. The participants in this study work with the researcher to identify issues that are affecting their lives. Liamputtong (2007) suggests “Researchers adopting this methodological approach clearly aim to work collaboratively with people who have traditionally been oppressed and exploited. Collectively, fundamental social change can be achieved through PAR. And this is what sensitive researchers aim for in their research endeavours” (p. 129). These guiding principles and former studies related to PAR formulated the decisions made in the design and procedures followed throughout the study. Participants were selected and semi-structured interviews were conducted with homeless families and stakeholders familiar with homelessness within Santa Cruz County, California. Three sets of questions were produced based on the role of the participant (homeless parent, teacher of a homeless student, and community / educational leader). The data was then analyzed in order to identify themes in the participants’ responses based on experiences, barriers, and supports related to the educational system in Santa Cruz County. In addition, each individual’s experience was regarded in its own right in order to allow each participant’s unique perspective to be reflected. All interviews were videotaped and data edited to produce a documentary that depicts

individual as well as group themes. A visual of the research design of this study is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research Design



The creation of a documentary film was a key tenant of the research design. While a majority of scholarly work utilizes other methods of research design, given the questions asked in this study and the need to obtain and depict personal points of view, the use of digital media was necessary and appropriate. Petrarca and Hughes (2014) highlight the benefits of using digital media for research purposes, which is detailed in the instrumentation section of this chapter.

### **Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in phenomenological and participatory action research methods. These methods combine to allow participants to depict their own experience, as

well as take part in finding solutions to issues they face. The phenomenon of being homeless may be difficult for some individuals to understand, without having had the experience personally. As one of the principals of phenomenological research is the commitment to offer a description that is true to the participant's voice, this study extends the knowledge of the experience of families that are homeless. The results allow others to put themselves in the shoes of families that are experiencing homelessness, even if they have no prior context. In addition, phenomenology is based in a central question that guides the study in a quest to understand a phenomenon from all sides. Similar to participatory action research, phenomenology is a method that is suited for studying topics of interest that hold high personal value to the researcher. Moustakas (1994) argues "In a phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (p. 59). Such is the case in this study, which is detailed further in the methods section regarding positionality.

The PAR component of this study was guided by the methods related to this theoretical framework. In studies that involve PAR it is common for the subjects of the research to belong to a marginalized group or sector of society; therefore, it was critical that the vulnerability of homeless families was considered in making decisions throughout the study. Also, PAR ideals include an emphasis on positive benefits for participants being involved in the study, rather than contributing to greater marginalization (Liaimputtong, 2007). The benefits of this study for participants was their opportunity to share their personal story, identify ways in which they have felt

support in navigating the educational system for their students and take part in offering solutions for removing current barriers that exist. PAR also looks to locals for information regarding an issue, rather than only utilizing larger sources of information. This study focused primarily on the gathering of data within a specific geographical region, Santa Cruz County, and interviews were conducted with individuals familiar with the local dynamics of homelessness. Finally, research conducted using PAR should be done in a format where participants feel comfortable in communicating with their interviewer, which is also a vital component of phenomenological research (Liamputtong, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Population and Sample**

The school districts in Santa Cruz County are diverse in size, demographics, geographical features, and focus. Of the 12 school districts in Santa Cruz County, 4 are single school elementary districts, 2 offer transitional kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 4 provide transitional kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 1 encompasses charter schools managed by the SCCOE, and finally the SCCOE operates alternative education programs. Participants that were interviewed in this study have a connection and knowledge to at least one of the 12 school districts within Santa Cruz County. Many participants had experiences with more than 1 district's educational program. Participants were selected in three categories: homeless parents, teachers of homeless students, and leaders at the community or educational level that interacted with and supported homeless students and families. Parents that had experienced homelessness within the last year or were currently experiencing homelessness were invited to take part in this study

as well. The MVHAA definition was used in order to make a determination of a parent's housing status in order to participate in the study.

### **Strategy for Selecting Participants**

The initial strategy for selecting homeless parents to participate in the study involved a form letter being sent home to parents of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students at the three elementary schools in Live Oak Elementary School District (LOSD) in Santa Cruz, California. Over 300 letters went out and 1 response was received. This parent and her husband were willing to participate; however her family did not meet the MVHAA definition of homelessness. It was clear based on this initial response to form letters that a personal connection would be needed in order to identify parents that were interested in participating. At this point, I made the decision to contact a family that I had previous experience working with as the homeless liaison for LOSD. The father agreed to meet with me to find out more about the project. After an initial meeting and an explanation of the research, the parent signed consent forms and we scheduled an interview. From this point forward, a snowballing technique emerged in which participants identified subjects that they knew who might be interested in participating in the study (Atkinson & Flint, 2004).

A total of 5 homeless families participated in the study. Of the families that participated, 4 were from single parent homes. The interviews were conducted with 2 males and 3 females. One parent's primary language was Spanish and the interview was conducted with the use of an interpreter. The rest of the families came from English speaking homes. Families participating in the study represented a variety of living

situations: 4 out of 5 currently met the MVHAA definition of homelessness, with 1 parent having recently obtained permanent, stable housing. Families had varying experiences, with children in elementary, middle, or high school. Homeless parents had the option of identifying a teacher or school employee that made a difference in their family's lives while faced with homelessness. While not all parents identified a specific teacher or educator, those that did gave permission for the individual to be contacted to participate in the study. All school employees that were contacted participated and were interviewed. The school employees that participated included 4 teachers and 1 social worker. Of those participating, 3 were female and 2 were male. One teacher was no longer in the classroom, having recently retired from the profession.

Finally, community and educational leaders were asked to participate based on their direct experience supporting homeless families and students in Santa Cruz County. While there are multiple providers that support homeless families in the county, only a select group were contacted to participate in the study. This decision was made in order to not have the data obtained from service providers overpower the voice of homeless families. The providers that were selected had a direct relationship with the families interviewed in the film. Community and educational leaders that participated included an elementary school principal, a Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) team of 5 that support homeless students and families, a SCCOE project specialist, 2 county wide non-profit leaders, and a Santa Cruz city council member. Of the community and educational leaders, 7 were female and 4 were male.

## **Addressing Ethical Considerations**

Conducting research of a vulnerable population, such as homeless families, requires sensitivity and adherence to ethical considerations. Researchers need to consider the power imbalance between themselves and the subjects that they are interviewing, as participants may feel that they should respond to questions because they are obligated to. In addition, interviewing one family member opens up the possibility of other family members having their personal information shared (Liamputtong, 2007). This was specifically an issue with data being recorded in an audiovisual format. In order to mitigate these concerns, I offered to meet with participants first in an informal meeting to discuss the project and explain the contents of the consent form (see consent forms in Appendix E-H). Prior to this research study, many of the participants had never met me, which necessitated time spent building relationships prior to the videotaped interview. The level of rapport building spent varied, depending on the participants. Communication prior to the interview was conducted via several different means, depending on the preference of the participant, and included texting, messaging through Facebook, emailing, talking on the phone, meeting at a coffee shop, and meeting in my workplace.

At scheduled interviews, after obtaining signed consent, participants were reminded of their rights and told throughout the interview that they were able to skip any questions they did not want to answer or terminate the interview at any time. In addition, participants understood that at any point after the interview they could withdraw their participation in the project and have their interviewed erased. Of the parents interviewed, only one asked for information to be withheld from the final documentary (the name of

her children, in order to respect their privacy). After the interview, one teacher sent an email apologizing for getting emotional, but he did not request for data to be removed. An administrator reached out via phone the day after the interview to ask if her answer to one question seemed insensitive. She provided further information regarding her thoughts and requested that I review the material and not include it if I felt her answer did not reflect her thoughts.

In order to build trust and rapport with all participants, the location, date, and time of the interview was determined by the interviewee. Consent forms detailed that no participants would benefit financially from participating in this study and this was clarified at the beginning of each interview as well. As research grounded in phenomenological and participatory action methods, the benefits to participants included sharing their own story and being involved in generating solutions to barriers that homeless families face. Research shows that members of vulnerable populations may find the opportunity to share their story as therapeutic and empowering (Liamputtong, 2007).

### **Limitations (Internal Validity Threats)**

The internal validity threats of this study include positionality, roles held as the researcher and roles of participants, self-reporting and selection bias. In a study grounded in phenomenological and participatory action research methods it is important to review these areas of potential threats to validity, as the researcher, in collaboration with the participants, undertakes the interpretation of the qualitative data (Liamputtong, 2007; Moustakas, 2004).

**Positionality.** The issue of homelessness is one in which I have a deep and personal connection. Several years ago, I had close members of my family experience homelessness and found myself unable to assist them in the way that I would have wanted to, because of our distance apart and my own financial limitations. Not being able to help and knowing that these people I cared so much for were experiencing such hardship was heartbreaking. While the school system was not able to offer housing, I know that there were people at the school that did make a difference to the entire family. Several years later, I found myself in a similar situation having to enroll my children as students in transition with their school district. Despite having a graduate degree and an administration position at a school district, I just could not afford the cost of living in Santa Cruz. For five months, my three children and I stayed in temporary housing. We were able to get through the experience largely due to an extensive network of family and friends. The district did not place any barriers with their enrollment, despite changing our address multiple times outside of their boundaries. Teachers knew about our living situation and were understanding. This experience significantly impacted my decision to pursue this topic as an area to study and I brought it with me throughout each step of this research. While I realized the need to be cautious of my own experiences getting in the way of the study, I also considered the perspective I had to offer as an asset. I believe this experience gave me credibility with parents and service providers. I freely disclosed my background, which I believe allowed participants to open up more than they might have without knowing that I have been homeless.

**Roles.** The roles involved throughout this study contained several different elements that I took into consideration when interacting with participants. As the student services director for a local school district, the MVHAA district homeless liaison, and researcher, I held positions of power in interacting with many interviewees. I also considered my role as a white, female, primary English speaker when interacting with participants, as these traits taken together or separate may have impacted the responsiveness, level of comfort, and degree of power dynamics taking place throughout the interview process. In several situations, I felt on the lesser side of the balance of power, as some of the participants I interviewed held administrative positions within local government and/or had more information than I did in regards to the historical context of homelessness within Santa Cruz County.

**Self-reporting and selection bias.** As expressed by Polkinghorne (2005) the ability of participants to report and reflect on their own experiences is limited. While this is a possible limitation in this study, the inclusion of educators that knew the students and family offered the ability to view the data from multiple angles. Several instances occurred in which teachers and parents discussed similar occurrence's, which allowed self-reporting to be explored in both participants' responses. With this said, the data obtained from each interviewer was taken as their unique perspective, as many of the answers included discussion of feelings and emotions. The interviews conducted were within a context and the meaning and interpretation was based on a relationship formed between the participant and I, as is common practice in qualitative research (Pederson et al., 2015).

### **Delimitations (External Validity Threats)**

The results of this study may be limited in their applicability, as the participants involved were restricted to a confined geographic location and included the voices of a small number of homeless parents, teachers, and educational and community leaders. The descriptions of participants are relative to their own experiences and may not be shared by others, even within Santa Cruz County. Also, the experiences of homeless families in an urban area may vary and the needs of these families in working with the education system could yield different results (Lawrence, 1995). Parents interviewed represented diversity in multiple areas, including: reasons for experiencing homelessness, family demographics, marital status, housing status, education background, employment status, number of children, and age of children. While this allowed for a variety of descriptions regarding homelessness in Santa Cruz County, these factors should be considered when attempting to generalize findings to other families experiencing homelessness. In addition, all children attended different schools in different districts. A phenomenological approach would be to seek to understand the unique descriptions offered by each participant, while recognizing the themes across the entire group; recognizing that these descriptions and themes are one interpretation of the data presented, rather than a narrative that speaks for all homeless families, educators, and administrators.

### **Instrumentation**

As mentioned previously, the tool used for data collection in this study was a video camera. The decision to use this to collect data, as well as utilizing editing software in order to produce a documentary was based on a phenomenological approach, wanting to

explore and understand the phenomenon of family homelessness from multiple viewpoints. The use of alternative forms of data representation is not a new field. Eisner (1997) discussed the idea of choosing a tool or instrument based on the purpose of “illuminating rather than obscuring the message” (p. 8). Families that are homeless may not have the ability to have their voices heard in a venue or format that reaches a wide audience, but this documentary gives them that chance. It also allows the viewers of the documentary the opportunity to hear and see a perspective they may not be able to without taking the time to connect with and form personal relationships with homeless families. Benefits of using a documentary as a format to display data include being able “to ‘see’ [a] story in a more emotive way than text...and mak[ing] research findings more accessible to the general public” (Petrarca & Hughes, 2014, p. 572-3). Throughout the editing process, there are decisions that involve adherence to the true voice and story of the individual speaking, such as determining when to include “music, images, words, photos, narrations... and supplementary b-roll footage” (Petrarca & Hughes, 2014, p. 571). Each of these elements contribute to the ability of the documentary to depict individual perspectives of interviewees, as well as themes that surfaced throughout multiple participants.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

As mentioned above, in order to build trust and rapport with all participants, the location, date, and time of the interview was determined by the interviewee. Interviews took place in Marina, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, Soquel, and Watsonville, California. I met with parents in various settings: in a classroom after school, in an adult education

classroom in the evening, in two homes, and in a greenhouse at a community garden. In three of the interviews with parents, I was the only other person present. One parent had his children and a childhood neighbor present, as they ran in and out of the room, playing with each other and checking in on the interview. A translator was present for the final interview that was conducted. One child was filmed in other settings that included his classroom, as well as a coffee shop that he and his dad often go to for breakfast prior to school. Teachers chose several locations for their interviews: their classrooms, my office, and their homes. Administrators and community leaders were interviewed in their offices, my office, and outside in downtown Santa Cruz. In interviews with teachers and leaders I was the only other person present, with the exception of my advisor assisting with videotaping a group meeting held at Watsonville High School in Watsonville, California. Interviews took place on weekdays and weekends, and the appointments were scheduled in the morning, afternoon, and evening depending on the preference of interviewees.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format, with three sets of interview questions used based on the role of the participant (homeless parent, teacher of a homeless student, and community / educational leader). Interviews were untimed and flexible and occurred over a period of two months. Parent interviews were longer in duration, with 4 out of 5 interviews taking over 60 minutes to complete. One interview was significantly shorter, 32 minutes, which may have been due to a language barrier. While a translator was used, it was difficult to ask follow up questions that were timely and relevant. Also, this parent had her two children playing outside and may have felt more constrained by time compared to other parents. Teacher interviews were between 12 to 20 minutes.

Administrator interviews ranged in duration from 13 to 27 minutes. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was anything else that they would like to add or share.

Identifying information of participants was collected via a data intake sheet. Identifying information was also collected and reported via the video recording device. In the final edited version of the documentary, parents and their family members are referred to only by their first names. However, other identifying information related to children and their family is included in the documentary, such as the name of the school district, the city the school district is in, and the schools that students attend. For one family, at the request of the parent, the names of her children are not included in the documentary. The section of the documentary that includes the interviews of teachers, school and community administrators includes first and last name identification, as well as work titles. Materials and data that were collected digitally (video recording) were stored on a private external hard drive. Materials and data that were collected as hard copies were scanned and stored on this same external hard drive. Hard copies were also kept in a secured, confidential file by the primary investigator.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was analyzed using phenomenal analysis. Videotaped data was reviewed and each statement made by participants related to the experience of homeless students and families was given value, which is referred to as horizontalizing the data. This data was then clustered into meaning units, then themes, and finally textural descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Instead of the traditional method of producing

transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews and separating data via a word-based format, this process was completed using the audiovisual data. Data was categorized and moved into thematic units as part of the editing process of creating a documentary. The finished product contains textural depictions of the experience of participants in their own words, as well as themes in which several individuals identify areas that connect to each other. The edited version of the data in documentary form is my view of the themes presented, as is illustrated in the description van Meder (1990) provides, “A phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description” (p. 31). The possibilities for extension of this study are endless as each family experiencing homelessness has their own story to tell.

## **Findings**

### **Introduction**

The findings from this study are depicted in the film, Finding Home, Homeless and Schools: Bridges and Barriers. Through the editing process footage was chosen that depicted the educational experiences of homeless families in Santa Cruz County. Connections between school personnel and families were highlighted in the film by showing the story of each family within their own segment of the film. The film included footage of schools and landmarks within Santa Cruz County to separate the story of each family, as well as to provide the viewer with a visual of the distance many homeless families travel on a daily basis in order to have their children remain at their school of origin.

### **Families Describe Bridges and Barriers**

In the film, five families describe the bridges and barriers that they have encountered while being homeless in Santa Cruz County. Of the five families that participated in the film, four were homeless at the time of their interviews. The remaining participant had secured an affordable housing unit within the city of Santa Cruz and was able to discuss the multi-year process that she went through in order to obtain her residence. While there was ample information provided by families on the lack of affordable housing in the county, much of this content was not included in the film. Instead, the decision was made to include the sections of the interviews that centered on each family's educational experience for their child(ren), in relation to the homelessness that they experienced.

### **School Employees and Community Leaders Describe Bridges and Barriers**

The school employees and community leaders that were included in the film either had a direct relationship with one of the families that participated in the project or they had experience working with homeless students and families within Santa Cruz at a direct level. The sections of the interviews that were included in the film focused on the personal relationships that had been developed between school personnel and families. In addition, themes of empathy were noted throughout the interviews and included where appropriate. Teachers discussed the level of support they provided at the classroom and their daily interactions with students and parents, a principal shared her thoughts from an administrative standpoint, while social workers and community leaders offered thoughts based on their experiences with families outside of the classroom, and at times, school settings.

### **Descriptive Information on Participants Not Included in the Film**

Not all participants were included in the final cut of the film, as their interviews did not directly relate to the experience of the homeless families depicted in the film. The team of employees interviewed from Pajaro Valley Unified School District work directly with families on a daily basis, but none of these families were willing to participate in the film. Therefore, it would have felt disjointed to include the comments made by the PVUSD team without a family connection for the viewer to see and hear. The other individual that was not included in the film did have experience in organizing fundraising efforts at the SCCOE to support homeless families and students in the county, but she did not have any direct experience with families. While her role is vital for the support of

homeless students and families, her comments did not apply to the themes depicted in the film.

## **Discussion**

### **Conclusions**

The completed documentary highlights the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and leaves the viewer in a position to consider what should be done next. The families and educators in the film shared several similarities in experiences, which were found in analyzing the content of the interviews. The search for affordable housing in Santa Cruz County is a struggle and families expressed the challenges that they faced in securing permanent housing. Also, many of the families explained that their commute to and from their schools of origin was tedious, but worthwhile. Families were willing to utilize their last financial resources on bus passes, gasoline, and car maintenance in order to have their children remain at their schools. Several families spend more than 2 hours per day getting to and from school. Likewise, stories emerged from educators in regards to their willingness to support the students and families. One teacher shared that he allowed children to work in his class an hour before school every day in order to negate the need for parents to pay for before school care. Another teacher welcomed a parent to volunteer in her classroom on a daily basis, which eventually led to an offer of employment for the parent as an instructional assistant at this school.

The narratives obtained throughout this project and represented in a documentary format point toward further questions that can be asked in order to better understand and meet the needs of homeless students and their families. In addition, several of the interviews shed light on areas that can be addressed in the future in the field of educational leadership. Policies that are currently in place can be examined to determine

if they serve the needs of homeless students and families, which directly relates to the application in practice for educators as they determine where they should put their focus when offering support.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this documentary brought forward information related to the experiences of families and educators, there were areas in which the doors to future research were opened. The families that participated in this project were diverse, but they did not represent all of the stories of homelessness within Santa Cruz County. It would be ideal to hear the perspectives of other families as well, particularly families with different demographics than those that participated in this project. It would be interesting to compare the perceptions of parents that were interviewed with the answers provided by unaccompanied youth, families led by grandparents, families with two or more guardians, families with no transportation, and/or families with no connections to Santa Cruz. These subgroups were not represented within the small sample size interviewed for this project. It could be possible that some of these factors may increase or decrease the amount of positive interactions a homeless student and family has with a school system.

Also, the responses provided by families and educators related to homelessness were confined to their experiences within the specific geographic area of Santa Cruz, which is primarily suburban. As a suburban area, does the experience of the families in Santa Cruz County resonate more with urban or rural homeless populations? Increasing the sample size and expanding the project to include homeless students and families living in nearby

urban areas, such as San Jose and San Francisco, California and rural areas, such as Aromas and Davenport, California, could explore this question.

Another area that could be explored further is the differences (if any) of the perspective of families, based on their living situations. The definition of homelessness is broad and families can be in very diverse environments for housing. This particular sample group did not have any families that were currently living in a vehicle, even though one family did travel in the past from church to church on a nightly basis to secure shelter. The answers regarding concerns for families that experienced unsheltered situations in the past were different than those that were doubled up or residing in smaller living accommodations. The stressors that were mentioned varied, as one family found more of a concern in locating clean restrooms to use and another felt stressed by their lack of privacy. Through further research and obtaining more narratives from homeless families, a theme might emerge in best practices for supporting students based on the type of housing that a family resides in.

Finally, this particular research was narrow in that all of the families that participated had a positive relationship with a school employee. This may have given one-sided information, as families without a personal connection were not included in the study. In fact, the homeless family without a personal relationship is likely the one that feels the most isolated and may need the greatest support from the educational system. Interviewing these families to understand their perspective would be an appropriate next step. The challenge would be in identifying these families, as they may keep their homeless status hidden.

## **Implications for Educational Leadership and Policy**

The results from this study indicate that concerns related to homeless students and families remain real and relevant in Santa Cruz County. While several parents were aware of their legal right to keep their children in their school of origin while they were homeless, one mother was not. This parent had three boys that had changed schools multiple times due to their unstable housing situation. If this parent had been informed of her rights, her children would have been able to stay in one place. This is an important finding from this research that relates directly to implications for educational leadership and policy. Districts and school sites need to ensure that accurate information is given to parents when they are enrolling at a school. Front office staff members, teachers, and administrators need to be trained in the qualifying categories of homelessness in order to advise parents of their rights. Also, information should be available to parents in their first language.

Policy related to the amount of funding available to districts with homeless students also needs to be addressed. Currently, districts can apply to the state for grants in order to meet the needs of their homeless students. Yet, these grants are competitive and often districts do not have staff available with the knowledge and time to write effective grant proposals. This was seen in the districts represented within Santa Cruz County. Despite having a large number of homeless students in the county, the small districts did not have any additional grant funding. This funding should be provided to districts automatically, based on the number of homeless students enrolled. This would allow districts to create sustainable programs and provide services to a high need student population.

## **Applications to Practice**

This documentary provides viewers with multiple examples of ways in which they can connect with and support homeless students and families. The strong relationships that were built between families and educators were apparent in the interviews, as much of the content included was emotional and heartfelt. Several teachers became teary-eyed when discussing their interactions with students and their parents over the course of a school year. This offers the viewers of the documentary a takeaway of the high value in the educator creating a relationship with not only the student, but the parent(s). Also, the educators spoke highly of the parents that were homeless. It was clear that they took on an empathetic approach, commenting on how hard parents worked in order for their child to be successful. One teacher stated that many people are only one paycheck away from being homeless and that it could happen to anyone. In addition, it was evident from the parent interviews that parents felt supported and valued by the educators. They viewed themselves as important team members in their child(ren)'s education and felt empowered to participate at the school level. Educators and parents also mentioned tangible things that were done at the school level to support students and families, such as providing a bag of food to take home, accommodating late starts to school due to transportation issues, and coordinating efforts to get families items they needed. The documentary highlighted the importance in creating relationships, in order for students and families to not feel alone.

At a school site level, educators need to create multiple pathways for families to indicate their housing status. Questionnaires can be sent home in the first day packet that

would ask all families about their living conditions. These can then be reviewed and recorded in order for educators to have an accurate count of who is homeless at their school. These lists will also assist the district's homeless liaison in understanding the scope of needs at each site. On a larger scale, the narratives presented in the documentary also lead the viewer to consider their role in addressing the issue of family homelessness. In certain communities, such as Santa Cruz County, there is a lack of housing options available for homeless families. Educators need to be at the table when their communities are discussing affordable housing issues, in order to highlight the issue and discuss with local officials the magnitude of this problem. All of the interviews completed for this project addressed the primary problem of a lack of affordable housing in the community.

### **Reflections**

This documentary serves as a call to action for educators working with homeless students and families, as was seen in the reaction of audience members at the first screening of the film. In attendance were individuals that were filmed, as well as their guests. After the film was shown, these audience members were encouraged to provide feedback regarding the way that they were portrayed in the film, as well as their thoughts regarding the piece as a whole. The response following the screening was emotional and overwhelming. Individuals that viewed the film lingered around at the end in order to have a personal conversation with me regarding their thoughts. The families found solidarity with each other by having the opportunity to see they were not alone. Educators felt connected by the level of care and compassion they felt regarding students and families.

One particular response that was moving to me was from an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student. Her mom had participated in the film and had shared their story regarding homelessness. This student had asked that her name not be included in the film, because she was embarrassed and concerned that people would find out it was her. Knowing this as a background, I was surprised that this particular student came to the first screening of the film with her mom. Not only did she view the film, she had her mom stay until the very end of the conversations in order to speak with me. She gave her feedback in the midst of about ten people, no longer worried about being identified as a child that had been homeless. Her thoughts centered around the accuracy of the film in what being homeless was like within Santa Cruz County. She had spent three years in different living situations that qualified their family as homeless, from residing in short term family shelters, staying with friends, traveling to different night shelters, and living in a small apartment without adequate space for her family. She felt that the film captured the experience of family homelessness in this county and also the importance of the school connection. She said that this film should be shown everywhere and when I asked her if she would ever be interested in accompanying me to a screening in order to speak with the audience about her experience, her answer was an immediate yes.

This is the power in presenting this research in the format of film. It allowed an individual who preferred to remain anonymous to evolve into a young woman with a clear, strong, and proud voice. While the technical aspects of creating a film was challenging, the end result is a piece of work that I believe has the power to make a difference. I believe that when we take the moment to hear and see the stories of others,

that we are more likely to open our hearts to an issue we may not have understood in the past. My hope is that this documentary is viewed on a large scale, so that a wider audience can have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and refine their approach when working with homeless students and families.

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## Appendix A

### Definition of Terms

#### Aid to Families with Dependent Children

A program that provides financial assistance to families that meets eligible income requirements and is overseen by the federal and state governments.

#### Continuum of Care

A group that serves a geographic area (local or regional) in overseeing housing needs and coordinates funding efforts for services that benefit the homeless population. This group must be in existence in order to apply for homeless assistance grants from HUD.

#### Doubled up

A person or family that is living with another family, friends, or non-relatives due to financial hardship. Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition, this type of living situation would qualify as homeless.

#### Every Student Succeeds Act

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that was signed into law in December, 2015 and included the reauthorization of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth, by Title IX, Part A.

#### Homeless

The definition for homeless is broad and can change based on the context. The definition of homeless in relation to this study is described on pages 9-10.

### Homeless Action Partnership

The name for the Continuum of Care that serves Santa Cruz County, California.

### In transition

A term that is synonymous with the meaning of homeless. Homeless students and/or families are often referred to as “in transition”.

### McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

A comprehensive United States federal law that addresses multiple issues surrounding homelessness and includes subtitle VII-B, which refers to the Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program.

### Point in Time

A count taken every two years of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January.

### The Education for Homeless Children and Youth

The education portion, subtitle VII-B, of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987.

### The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

A federal department, created in 1965, which oversees and administers many programs related to housing and community development.

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions: Parent (English)

1. Describe a typical day. (Do you make breakfast, how does your family get ready, how do they get to school, and so on?)
2. How did you end up in this type of housing situation? How long have you lived in this type of housing? What are the challenges?
3. Does your family's housing status impact your child's ability to be successful in school? If so, how?
4. Do you have a support network?
5. If you could change just one thing about your housing situation, what would it be?
6. What is your own experience with education? How far did you go into school?
7. Do you feel comfortable helping your child with homework? (Is there enough physical space, do you have enough time, and so on)
8. If your child has a problem in school, do you feel comfortable going to the school for support?
9. If you could change just one thing about your child's school, what would it be?

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions: Parent (Spanish)

#### Preguntas de la Entrevista: Padres (Español)

1. Describa un día típico. (¿Haces el desayuno, cómo se prepara tu familia, cómo llegan a la escuela, etc.?)
2. ¿Cómo terminó en este tipo de situación de vivienda? ¿Cuánto tiempo ha vivido en este tipo de vivienda? ¿Cuáles son los desafíos?
3. ¿El estatus de vivienda de su familia afecta la habilidad de su hijo para tener éxito en la escuela? ¿Si es así, cómo?
4. ¿Tiene una red de apoyo?
5. Si pudiera cambiar sólo una cosa sobre su situación de vivienda, ¿cuál sería?
6. ¿Cuál fue su propia experiencia con la educación? ¿Cuánto tiempo asistió a la escuela?
7. ¿Te sientes cómodo ayudando a tu hijo/a con la tarea? (¿Hay suficiente espacio físico, tienes suficiente tiempo, etc.?)
8. Si su hijo/a tiene un problema en la escuela, ¿Te sientes cómodo al ir a la escuela para recibir apoyo?
9. Si pudiera cambiar sólo una cosa sobre la escuela de su hijo/a, ¿cuál sería?

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions: Teacher

1. What impact do you think this student's housing situation has had on their ability to do the coursework?
2. What are the strengths and challenges that this student displays in the school setting?
3. Have you, as a teacher, helped this student in any way this year? If so, how?
4. From your perspective, how has the school, district and/or community responded to the needs of this student's family?
5. Has this child's housing situation impacted the way other students view them?
6. How do you notice other students reacting to this child?

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions: Administrator / Community Leader

1. Can you share in what ways you interact with and possibly support students and families that are homeless?
2. Please describe any personal experiences that allow you to understand the situation of homeless students and their families.
3. Some people have strong feelings about families that are homeless. What would you tell them?
4. What impact do you think a student's housing situation has on their ability to be successful at school?
5. Are there any barriers that are unique to homeless students in Santa Cruz County?
6. Describe the ideal supports and programs that could be put in place in order for homeless students to succeed in school and the community.

## Appendix F

Consent Form 1: Adult Participant (Student not shown in film)

### **REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICPATION IN RESEARCH**

#### **TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Challenges that Impact the Educational Success of Students that are Homeless in Santa Cruz County.

#### **NAME OF THE RESEARCHERS**

Dr. Bob Gliner, San Jose State University  
Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Graduate Student  
Department of Educational Leadership

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that students and their families face in Santa Cruz County, California, when they are living in one of the following housing situations:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- In motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations
- In emergency or transitional shelters
- Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- In cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings

The study will focus on the connection between a student's housing status and their experience in the school setting. Parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders will be interviewed in order to hear their perspectives on this topic.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Families will be documented throughout the school year. They will be filmed during pre-determined and agreed upon times between the primary investigator, student's family, and student. In the school setting, the agreement of the teacher and site principal regarding the date

and time of taping will also be included. The student's face will not be shown in the documentary.

Interviews will also be conducted with family members of the student, as well as the student's teacher. These interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time by the interviewee and the primary researcher. These interviews will be video recorded.

Interviews will be conducted with school administrators, community agency directors, and city officials regarding their thoughts on homelessness within Santa Cruz County. These interviews will take place throughout the school year and will occur in mutually agreed upon locations. Locations must be confidential and allow the interviewee to feel at ease. The preferred location will be the interviewee's private office. These interviews will also be video taped.

In the home setting, the following experiences may be filmed for each family, while keeping the identification of the student anonymous:

- Getting ready for school in the morning
- Going from home to school
- After-school activities (leisure activities, spending time with friends)
- Completing homework
- Making / eating meals
- Getting ready for school events

In the school setting, the following experiences may be filmed for each student, while keeping the identification of the student anonymous:

- Classroom work
- Playground activities

### **POTENTIAL RISKS**

We anticipate that the primary risk involved with participating in this study is in the realm of social / emotional wellbeing. While participating in the study, children and adults, may find that the research topic brings up difficult feelings and emotions (sadness, embarrassment, hopelessness, etc.). In addition, as this research study involves the use of film, the risk of loss of privacy is great. Participants will be sharing their physical space (homes, offices, classrooms) and their personal space (thoughts, opinions, emotions, and feelings).

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Participants may benefit from being part of the study by learning more about their beliefs about the impact of housing status on student's educational experiences. Participation in this study may benefit other youth and families who are currently living in difficult housing situations, as the purpose of this study is to share with others the barriers that students and families have to overcome. Figuring out what these barriers are, allows educators and community members to find solutions that will benefit students in similar situations.

## **COMPENSATION**

No compensation is being provided for this study.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Materials and data that are collected digitally (video recording) will be moved to the primary investigator's external hard drive. Materials and data that are collected as hard copies will be scanned and moved to the primary investigator's external hard drive. Hard copies will also be kept in a file by the primary investigator. Only the primary investigator and Dr. Bob Gliner will have access to the data / materials.

Identifying information will be collected and reported via the video recording device. In the final edited version of the documentary, students and their family members will be referred to only by their first names. However, other identifying information may be included in the documentary, such as the name of the school district, the city the school district is in, and the schools that students attend. The section of the documentary that includes the interviews of teachers, school administrators, community agency directors, and city officials will include first and last name identification, as well as work titles.

We are required by law to report disclosures of abuse, or intent to harm self or others to the appropriate authority.

## **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University. You also have the right to skip any interview question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

## **QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Graduate Student, at 831-475-6333 ext. 209 or via email, [jciervo@losd.ca](mailto:jciervo@losd.ca)
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Arnold Danzig, Director of the Ed.D. Leadership Program, San Jose State University, at 408-924-3722.

**SIGNATURES**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed)      Participant's Signature      Date

**Researcher Statement**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent      Date

## Appendix G

Consent Form 2: Adult Participant (Student not shown in film – Spanish version)

### **SOLICITUD DE PARTICIPACIÓN EN INVESTIGACIÓN**

#### **TÍTULO DEL ESTUDIO**

Desafíos que impactan el éxito educativo de estudiantes que se encuentran sin hogar en el Condado de Santa Cruz.

#### **NOMBRE DEL INVESTIGADOR**

Dr. Bob Gliner, Universidad Estatal de San Jose  
Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Estudiante Graduada  
Departamento de Liderazgo Educativo

#### **PROPÓSITO**

El propósito de este estudio de investigación es obtener una comprensión más profunda de los desafíos que enfrentan los estudiantes y sus familias en el Condado de Santa Cruz, California, cuando viven en una de las siguientes situaciones de vivienda:

- Compartir la vivienda de otras personas debido a la pérdida de vivienda, dificultades económicas, o una razón similar
- En moteles, hoteles, parques de caravanas o parques de campamento debido a la falta de alojamientos alternativos
- En refugios de emergencia o de transición
- Tener una residencia nocturna primaria que es un lugar público o privado no diseñado para o habitualmente utilizado como un alojamiento para dormir normal para los seres humanos;
- En automóviles, parques, espacios públicos, edificios abandonados, viviendas de calidad inferior, estaciones de autobús o tren, o entornos similares

El estudio se centrará en la conexión entre el estado de vivienda de un estudiante y su experiencia en el entorno escolar. Padres, maestros, administradores y líderes de la comunidad serán entrevistados para escuchar sus perspectivas sobre este tema.

#### **PROCEDIMIENTOS**

Los estudiantes serán documentados a lo largo del año. Ellos serán filmados durante los tiempos

predeterminados y acordados entre el investigador principal, la familia del estudiante y el estudiante. En el entorno escolar, también se incluirá el acuerdo del maestro y el director del sitio con respecto a la fecha y hora de la grabación. El rostro del estudiante no se mostrará en el documental.

Las entrevistas también se llevarán a cabo con los miembros de la familia del estudiante, así como con el maestro del estudiante. Estas entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en un momento mutuamente acordado por el entrevistado y el investigador principal. Estas entrevistas serán grabadas en video.

Entrevistas se llevarán a cabo con los administradores de la escuela, directores de las agencias comunitarias y funcionarios de la ciudad con respecto a sus pensamientos sobre la falta de vivienda dentro de Santa Cruz. Estas entrevistas tendrán lugar durante todo el año escolar y ocurrirán en lugares mutuamente acordados. Las ubicaciones deben ser confidenciales y permitir que el entrevistado se sienta agusto. La ubicación preferida será la oficina privada del entrevistado. Estas entrevistas también serán grabadas en video.

En el ambiente del hogar, las siguientes experiencias serán filmadas para cada familia, manteniendo anónima la identificación del alumno::

- Preparándose para la escuela en la mañana
- Ir de casa a la escuela
- Actividades después de la escuela (actividades de ocio, pasar tiempo con los amigos)
- Completar la tarea
- Hacer / comer comidas
- Preparándose para eventos escolares

En el ambiente escolar, las siguientes experiencias pueden ser filmadas para cada estudiante, manteniendo anónima la identificación del alumno:

- Trabajo en el salón
- Actividades de patio

### **RIESGOS POTENCIALES**

Anticipamos que el riesgo primario involucrado con la participación en este estudio es en el ámbito del bienestar social y emocional. Mientras participan en el estudio, los niños y los adultos, pueden encontrar que el tema de la investigación trae emociones y sentimientos difíciles (tristeza, vergüenza, desesperanza, etc.). Además, como este estudio de investigación implica el uso de la película, el riesgo de pérdida de la privacidad es grande. Los participantes compartirán su espacio

físico (hogares, oficinas, salones) y su espacio personal (pensamientos, opiniones, emociones y sentimientos).

### **BENEFICIOS POTENCIALES**

Los participantes pueden beneficiarse de ser parte del estudio aprendiendo más acerca de sus creencias sobre el impacto del estatus de vivienda en las experiencias educativas del estudiante. La participación en este estudio puede beneficiar a otros jóvenes y familias que actualmente viven en situaciones de vivienda difíciles, ya que el propósito de este estudio es compartir con otros las barreras que los estudiantes y las familias tienen que superar. Averiguar cuáles son estas barreras, permite a los educadores y miembros de la comunidad a encontrar soluciones que beneficien a los estudiantes en situaciones similares.

### **COMPENSACIÓN**

No se ofrece compensación para este estudio.

### **CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

Los materiales y datos que se recogen digitalmente (grabación de vídeo) se moverán al disco duro externo del investigador principal. Los materiales y datos que se recogen como copias impresas se escanearán y se moverán al disco duro externo del investigador principal. Las copias impresas también serán guardadas en un archivo por el investigador principal. Sólo el investigador principal y el Dr. Bob Gliner tendrán acceso a los datos / materiales.

La información de identificación será recogida e informada a través del dispositivo de grabación de vídeo. En la versión final editada del documental, los estudiantes y sus familiares se referirán sólo por sus nombres. Sin embargo, se incluirá en el documental otra información de identificación, como el nombre del distrito escolar, la ciudad en la que se encuentra el distrito escolar y las escuelas a las que asisten los alumnos. La sección del documental que incluye las entrevistas de los maestros, administradores escolares, directores de las agencias comunitarias y funcionarios de la ciudad incluirá la identificación del primer y último nombre, así como los títulos de trabajo.

Estamos obligados por la ley a informar las revelaciones de abuso, o la intención de dañar a uno mismo o a otros a la autoridad apropiada.

### **DERECHOS DE LOS PARTICIPANTES**

Su participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Usted puede negarse a participar en todo el estudio o en cualquier parte del estudio sin ningún efecto negativo en sus relaciones con la Universidad Estatal de San José. También tiene derecho a omitir cualquier pregunta de la entrevista que no desee responder. Este formulario de consentimiento no es un contrato. Es una explicación escrita de lo que sucederá durante el estudio si usted decide participar. Usted no renunciará a ningún derecho si decide no participar, y no hay penalidad por detener su participación en el estudio.

**PREGUNTAS O PROBLEMAS**

Se le anima a hacer preguntas en cualquier momento durante este estudio.

- Para obtener más información sobre el estudio, póngase en contacto con Jennifer Ciervo, Estudiante de Postgrado de SJSU, al 831-475-6333 ext. 209 o por correo electrónico, [jciervo@losd.ca](mailto:jciervo@losd.ca)
- Las quejas sobre la investigación pueden ser presentadas a Arnold Danzig, Director de la Ed.D. Programa de Liderazgo, Universidad Estatal de San José, al 408-924-3722.

**FIRMAS**

Su firma indica que voluntariamente aceptó ser parte del estudio, que se le han explicado los detalles del estudio, que le han dado tiempo para leer este documento y que sus preguntas han sido contestadas. Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para sus registros.

**Firma del participante**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre del Participante (impreso)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

**Declaración del investigador**

Certifico que el participante ha recibido el tiempo suficiente para aprender sobre el estudio y hacer preguntas. En mi opinión, el participante entiende sus derechos y el propósito, los riesgos, los beneficios y los procedimientos de la investigación y ha aceptado voluntariamente participar.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento informado

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## Appendix H

### Consent Form 3: Adult Participant (Student shown in film)

#### **REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICPATION IN RESEARCH**

##### **TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Challenges that Impact the Educational Success of Students that are Homeless in Santa Cruz County.

##### **NAME OF THE RESEARCHERS**

Dr. Bob Gliner, San Jose State University  
Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Graduate Student  
Department of Educational Leadership

##### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that students and their families face in Santa Cruz County, California, when they are living in one of the following housing situations:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- In motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations
- In emergency or transitional shelters
- Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- In cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings

The study will focus on the connection between a student's housing status and their experience in the school setting. Parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders will be interviewed in order to hear their perspectives on this topic.

##### **PROCEDURES**

Families will be documented throughout the school year. They will be filmed during pre-determined and agreed upon times between the primary investigator, student's family, and

student. In the school setting, the agreement of the teacher and site principal regarding the date and time of taping will also be included.

Interviews will also be conducted with family members of the student, as well as the student's teacher. These interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time by the interviewee and the primary researcher. These interviews will be video recorded.

Interviews will be conducted with school administrators, community agency directors, and city officials regarding their thoughts on homelessness within Santa Cruz County. These interviews will take place throughout the school year and will occur in mutually agreed upon locations. Locations must be confidential and allow the interviewee to feel at ease. The preferred location will be the interviewee's private office. These interviews will also be video taped.

In the home setting, the following experiences may be filmed for each family:

- Getting ready for school in the morning
- Going from home to school
- After-school activities (leisure activities, spending time with friends)
- Completing homework
- Making / eating meals
- Getting ready for school events

In the school setting, the following experiences may be filmed for each student:

- Classroom work
- Playground activities

### **POTENTIAL RISKS**

We anticipate that the primary risk involved with participating in this study is in the realm of social / emotional wellbeing. While participating in the study, children and adults, may find that the research topic brings up difficult feelings and emotions (sadness, embarrassment, hopelessness, etc.). In addition, as this research study involves the use of film, the risk of loss of privacy is great. Participants will be sharing their physical space (homes, offices, classrooms) and their personal space (thoughts, opinions, emotions, and feelings).

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Participants may benefit from being part of the study by learning more about their beliefs about the impact of housing status on student's educational experiences. Participation in this study may benefit other youth and families who are currently living in difficult housing situations, as the

purpose of this study is to share with others the barriers that students and families have to overcome. Figuring out what these barriers are, allows educators and community members to find solutions that will benefit students in similar situations.

### **COMPENSATION**

No compensation is being provided for this study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Materials and data that are collected digitally (video recording) will be moved to the primary investigator's external hard drive. Materials and data that are collected as hard copies will be scanned and moved to the primary investigator's external hard drive. Hard copies will also be kept in a file by the primary investigator. Only the primary investigator and Dr. Bob Gliner will have access to the data / materials.

Identifying information will be collected and reported via the video recording device. In the final edited version of the documentary, students and their family members will be referred to only by their first names. However, other identifying information may be included in the documentary, such as the name of the school district, the city the school district is in, and the schools that students attend. The section of the documentary that includes the interviews of teachers, school administrators, community agency directors, and city officials will include first and last name identification, as well as work titles.

We are required by law to report disclosures of abuse, or intent to harm self or others to the appropriate authority.

### **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University. You also have the right to skip any interview question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

### **QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Graduate Student, at 831-475-6333 ext. 209 or via email, [jciervo@losd.ca](mailto:jciervo@losd.ca)
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Arnold Danzig, Director of the Ed.D. Leadership Program, San Jose State University, at 408-924-3722.

### **SIGNATURES**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study

have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed)      Participant's Signature      Date

**Researcher Statement**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent      Date

## Appendix I

### Consent Form 4: Parent permission for child participant

#### **REQUEST FOR YOUR CHILD’S OR WARD’S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**

##### **TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Challenges that Impact the Educational Success of Students that are Homeless in Santa Cruz County

##### **NAME OF THE RESEARCHER**

Dr. Bob Gliner, San Jose State University  
Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Graduate Student  
Department of Educational Leadership

##### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that students and their families face in Live Oak, California, when they are living in one of the following housing situations:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- In motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations
- In emergency or transitional shelters
- Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- In cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings

The study will focus on the connection between a student’s housing status and their experience in the school setting.

##### **PROCEDURES**

Families will be documented throughout the school year. They will be filmed during pre-determined and agreed upon times between the primary investigator, student’s family, and

student. In the school setting, the agreement of the teacher and site principal regarding the date and time of taping will also be included.

Interviews will also be conducted with family members of the student, as well as the student's teacher. These interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time by the interviewee and the primary researcher. These interviews will be video recorded.

Interviews will be conducted with school administrators, community agency directors, and city officials regarding their thoughts on homelessness within Santa Cruz County. These interviews will take place throughout the school year and will occur in mutually agreed upon locations. Locations must be confidential and allow the interviewee to feel at ease. The preferred location will be the interviewee's private office. These interviews will also be video taped.

In the home setting, the following experiences may be filmed for each family:

- Getting ready for school in the morning
- Going from home to school
- After-school activities (leisure activities, spending time with friends)
- Completing homework
- Making / eating meals
- Getting ready for school events

In the school setting, the following experiences may be filmed for each student:

- Classroom work
- Playground activities

### **POTENTIAL RISKS**

We anticipate that the primary risk involved for minors participating in this study is in the realm of social / emotional wellbeing. While participating in the study, children may find that the research topic brings up difficult feelings and emotions (sadness, embarrassment, hopelessness, etc.). In addition, as this research study involves the use of film, the risk of loss of privacy is great. Minors will have their voice recorded and potentially displayed in a documentary that may be broadcast. Their first name will be used in the film and their school and district name may also be identified.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Minors may benefit from being part of the study by having an opportunity to speak about their experiences based on their living conditions. Participation in this study may benefit other youth and families who are currently living in difficult housing situations, as the purpose of this study is

to share with others the barriers that students and families have to overcome. Figuring out what these barriers are, allows educators and community members to find solutions that will benefit students in similar situations.

### **COMPENSATION**

No compensation is being provided for this study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Materials and data that are collected digitally (video recording) will be moved to the primary investigator's external hard drive. Materials and data that are collected as hard copies will be scanned and moved to the primary investigator's external hard drive. Hard copies will also be kept in a file by the primary investigator. Only the primary investigator and Dr. Bob Gliner will have access to the data / materials.

Identifying information will be collected and reported via the video recording device. In the final edited version of the documentary, students and their family members will be referred to only by their first names. However, other identifying information may be included in the documentary, such as the name of the school district, the city the school district is in, and the schools that students attend.

We are required by law to report disclosures of abuse, or intent to harm self or others to the appropriate authority.

### **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to allow his or her participation in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or Live Oak School District. Your child also has the right to skip any question that he or she does not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to allow your child to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to allow your child to participate and there is no penalty for stopping your child's participation in the study. Your child may also decide to stop at any time.

### **QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Jennifer Ciervo, SJSU Graduate Student, at 831-475-6333 ext. 209 or via email, [jciervo@losd.ca](mailto:jciervo@losd.ca)
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Arnold Danzig, Director of the Ed.D. Leadership Program, San Jose State University, at 408-924-3722.

### **SIGNATURES**

**Parent/Guardian Signature**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to allow your child to be part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you and your child, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form, signed and dated by the researcher, to keep for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child or Minor                      Parent or Guardian Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to Child or Minor              Parent or Guardian Signature                      Date

**Researcher Statement**

I certify that the minor’s parent/guardian has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the parent/guardian understands his/her child’s rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to allow his/her child to participate. I have also explained the study to the minor in language appropriate to his/her age and have received assent from the minor.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Assent    Date