



A Lifeline for Homeless Students

Article

RED BANK, New Jersey (Achieve3000, March 15, 2021). For Christine Delianne, her family's homelessness was a constant source of stress. She, her sisters, and her mom—a nurse—had moved some 18 times by the time Christine was in her late teens. Unable to afford a long-term home, they relocated from rental houses to shelters. Some nights were spent at low-cost and sometimes scary motels. The most unforgettable stay, she recalled, was camping out in a storage unit for five nights.

Christine's school community had her back, though. One assistant principal in particular knew what the school's homeless students were facing. She made sure they had access to supplies for hygiene and schoolwork. She provided food if needed. With that support, Christine was able to stay on track to graduate.

It's tough to calculate how many American kids, teens, and young adults face such housing insecurity. The number, though, is higher than most people realize. An extensive study from the University of Chicago estimated that at least 1 in 30 teens ages 13-17 experience homelessness at some point in a year. Those who track homelessness, though, know that job losses and other family difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have made the crisis much, much worse.

With so many families struggling to secure stable housing, more schools are serving as social safety nets. Like Christine's assistant principal, educators can team with at-risk students to help them get the support they need.

Homelessness encompasses most situations where people do not have a permanent roof over their heads. Many homeless families reluctantly move in with relatives or friends for a while. For others, homelessness may mean seeking a room at a community shelter, paying for a low-cost motel, or sleeping in their vehicles or outdoors. Urban, suburban, rural, the setting doesn't matter—every community in the United States has a homeless crisis.

More schools are mobilizing to become better allies to their homeless students. Some schools stock pantries to address food insecurity. Some provide shower and laundry facilities to help kids feel more comfortable going to class. These services help preserve students' privacy and dignity. Some school districts have also established after-school and weekend programs. While there, students can make use of computers, Wi-Fi, and additional educational resources.

Barbara Duffield is the executive director of SchoolHouse Connection. "School was really the only basic provider of services for these families, and that is even more so now even during school closures," Duffield told EdSurge. "There really isn't another system out there that's meeting their needs. It's school."

Many teachers, counselors, and social workers are helping homeless students connect with services that can help stabilize their living situations. Even so, school staff are not always aware of who needs assistance. Students may also feel shy about coming forward. According to advocates, these students can help their own cause by letting a trusted teacher or counselor know their situation. Together, they can develop a support plan.



Photo credit: skynesher/Getty Images

With many families struggling to secure stable housing, more schools are serving as social safety nets.

Christine Delianne credits her assistant principal with helping her not only graduate from high school but also gain entry to Stanford University. She is currently studying communications there. Without her high school's support, Christine is doubtful she would be where she is today.

"I think that I would have been more vulnerable if I wasn't at school for most of the time," Christine said in a 2020 panel discussion about family and youth homelessness. "Really, what made a difference...is having that safety net."

Think about and discuss these questions:

- What conclusions can you draw about the importance of schools offering a safety net for homeless students?
- Suppose you could help to find a solution to housing insecurity. What kinds of things would you do? Explain.

Dictionary

advocate (*noun*) supporter; defender

encompass (*verb*) to include

insecurity (*noun*) state of being unsure or without confidence

stabilize (*verb*) to make steady or firm

vulnerable (*adjective*) likely to be affected by

Activity

PART 1

Question 1

Which of these is **most** important to include in a summary of this Article?

- (A) School staff are not always aware of who needs assistance because homeless students may feel shy about coming forward.
- (B) Many homeless families find shelter by moving in with friends or family or sleeping in their vehicles.
- (C) Many advocates believe homeless students can help their own cause by sharing their situation with trusted school staff.
- (D) Schools are working to become better allies to their homeless students by providing them with the support they need.

Question 2

Which is the closest **antonym** for the word *vulnerable*?

- (A) restless
- (B) perilous
- (C) solemn
- (D) resistant

Question 3

Which passage from the Article best supports the idea that there can be obstacles to helping students who are experiencing homelessness?

- (A) Many teachers, counselors, and social workers are helping homeless students connect with services that can help stabilize their living situations.
- (B) Like Christine's assistant principal, educators can team with at-risk students to help them get the support they need.
- (C) Without her high school's support, Christine is doubtful she would be where she is today.
- (D) Even so, school staff are not always aware of who needs assistance. Students may also feel shy about coming forward.

Question 4

Which question is **not** answered by the Article?

- (A) How can families support schools that are helping homeless students?
- (B) How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the homeless crisis?
- (C) How do school communities support the needs of homeless students?
- (D) How can students experiencing homelessness help their own cause?

Question 5

Think about the following statement made by Barbara Duffield, executive director of SchoolHouse Connection:

"School was really the only basic provider of services for these families, and that is even more so now even during school closures...There really isn't another system out there that's meeting their needs. It's school."

The author's purpose for including this quote was to _____.

- (A) suggest that schools are not in a good position to provide services to homeless students
- (B) provide details about what schools are doing to become better allies to homeless students
- (C) emphasize that the services some schools are providing to their homeless students are vital
- (D) argue that providing access to technology is not what homeless students need most

Question 6

Read this passage from the Article:

One assistant principal in particular knew what the school's homeless students were facing. She made sure they had access to supplies for hygiene and schoolwork.... With that support, Christine was able to stay on track to graduate.

In this passage, the word *access* means _____.

- (A) protection from something
- (B) permission to use something
- (C) separation from something
- (D) hesitation to use something

Question 7

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- (A) One study estimated that about 1 in 30 teens experience homelessness at some point in a year.
- (B) Schools and communities are not doing enough to help homeless students and their families.
- (C) Homelessness can be any situation where a person does not have a permanent place to call home.
- (D) Many teachers and counselors are taking action to connect homeless students to services.

Question 8

What is a cause-and-effect relationship that takes place in the Article?

- (A) Because no extensive studies have been done, it's tough to calculate how many American kids are homeless.
- (B) Because Christine Delianne credits her assistant principal with helping her graduate, more schools have stepped up to serve as social safety nets.
- (C) Because the Covid-19 pandemic caused people to lose their jobs, the homeless crisis has become much worse.
- (D) Because many homeless students are asking for help, more communities are mobilizing to become better allies to them.