REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AMONG HOMELESS STUDENTS IN RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Prepared for: Richmond Public Schools

RPS RICHMOND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

UVA | FRANK BATTEN SCHOOL *of* LEADERSHIP *and* PUBLIC POLICY

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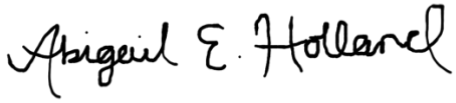
Disclaimer

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

Honor Pledge

On my honor as a University of Virginia student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.



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Glossary

Chronic Absenteeism: defined as missing 10% or more of the academic school year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences, suspensions, and time missed due to changing schools.

Homelessness: for the purposes of this report, I will refer to the federal legal definition of homelessness, which includes "individuals or families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 1987). This includes individuals who have lost housing due to eviction, natural disaster, abuse, financial hardship, or other factors, and who reside in shelters, family or friend residences, hotels/motels, or unsheltered locations including public spaces, cars, streets, etc. as a result.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): U.S. law passed in December 2015 that currently governs the United States K–12 public education policy, replacing its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The law reauthorized the National Education for Homeless Children and Youth program under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. It also updated the McKinney-Vento Act by requiring states and school districts to ensure the identification, enrollment, attendance, and school stability of homeless children and youth by providing additional federal funding, staff, and policies for school districts.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987: U.S. law passed in July 1987 that funded several programs to support homeless individuals and families. The law has been reauthorized, amended, and updated several times since its original passing to include additional provisions for homeless children and their education.

Professional Development (PD): a broad category of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness in school settings.

Trauma: psychological and emotional damage to the mind that results from a deeply distressing event, series of events, or set of circumstances, which can have lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional well-being. The condition may last months or years, with triggers that bring back memories of the trauma and lead to intense emotional and physical reactions.

Trauma-Informed: a program, organization, or system that understands the condition of trauma and its impacts on individuals within the system, recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma, and integrates knowledge about trauma into responsive policies, procedures, and practices, which seek to resist re-traumatization and address symptoms of trauma in a healing and productive manner.

Executive Summary

Unfortunately, the condition of homelessness impacts a significant and growing population of our nation's children. The circumstances of homelessness have various, multi-faceted, adverse impacts on a child's development and educational experiences. The city of Richmond, Virginia has struggled with the problem of homelessness for many years and as a result, Richmond Public Schools (RPS) serves a significant population of homeless children and families. Students experiencing homelessness in RPS have some of the worst attendance rates in the district. During the 2018-2019 school year, over one-third of these students missed 10% or more school days total.

The condition of homelessness poses logistical, developmental, psychological, social, and health challenges that negatively impact children's academic outcomes and their consistent attendance at school. This report reviews and summarizes the literature on best practices, utilized by school districts, nonprofit organizations, corporations, and others throughout the nation, to mitigate these challenges and to support improved attendance for K-12 students. In light of this evidence and the current status of programs and policies at RPS, this analysis considers three alternatives to address chronic absenteeism among students experiencing homelessness:

1. Expand School-Based Resource Centers: Build off current efforts to ensure that each school in the district has a resource room with a food pantry, clothing bank, and hygienic supplies, as well as laundry facilities for students to wash clothes.
2. Trauma-Informed Teacher & Staff Training: Implement a district-wide professional development training on trauma-informed practices, focused on teachers and staff who work with students and families who have lost housing.
3. Expand After-School Engagement Programs: Increase access to existing after-school programs for homeless students by providing them transportation, and initiate additional programs tailored towards broader purposes and groups of students.

Each alternative is evaluated with respect to the following criteria: (1) effectiveness, defined as the projected reduction in the percentage of chronic absenteeism among the homeless student population at RPS, (2) cost, (3) administrative feasibility, and (4) equity. The analyses conducted in this report suggest that expanding school-based resource centers represents the most promising option of those considered. With regards to implementation, it is recommended that RPS partner with the Washington Redskins Charitable Foundation through their Loads of Love program, which will cut costs and ease administrative burden significantly.

Problem Definition

Last year, over one-third of homeless children in Richmond Public Schools (RPS) were chronically absent. (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

This means that they missed at least 10% of school days, or nearly a month total of instruction time, through the school year. It also makes homeless students the sub-group with the worst attendance rates in RPS, with higher absenteeism rates than their housed peers of the same racial and/or socioeconomic status (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). A myriad of factors creates unique barriers for homeless children in the education system that lead to these results. With over 1,000 homeless students identified in the 2018-2019 school year, and 350 homeless students already identified in the first week of the 2019-2020 school year, RPS must act to address the unique problem of helping their homeless students get to school (Schmale, 2019).

Background

CAUSES & SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

On the national scale, families with children account for one of the fastest-growing subgroups of the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). Although accurate data are difficult to obtain on the exact number of families and individuals experiencing homelessness at any given point in time, the U.S. Department of Education's data indicates that the number of children experiencing homelessness who are enrolled in public schools nationwide has increased since 2014, from 1,260,491 students to 1,354,363 students in 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). At this current and growing number, homeless students make up about 3% of the nation's K-12 student body.

The city of Richmond's homeless population has increased by 30 percent since 2014, from about 1,880 people to over 3,000 people last year. Data also shows that as the homeless population has grown, the representation of African Americans has increased disproportionately. Over this time period, the African American homeless population grew by over 900 people, while the white homeless population grew by 265 people (Homeward & HCIS, 2019).

The main attributing factor to the increase overall is likely the particularly high eviction rate in Richmond, which is 3-4 times higher than the national rate (Princeton Eviction Lab, 2018). Richmond also rates second among the nation's top 100 largest cities with

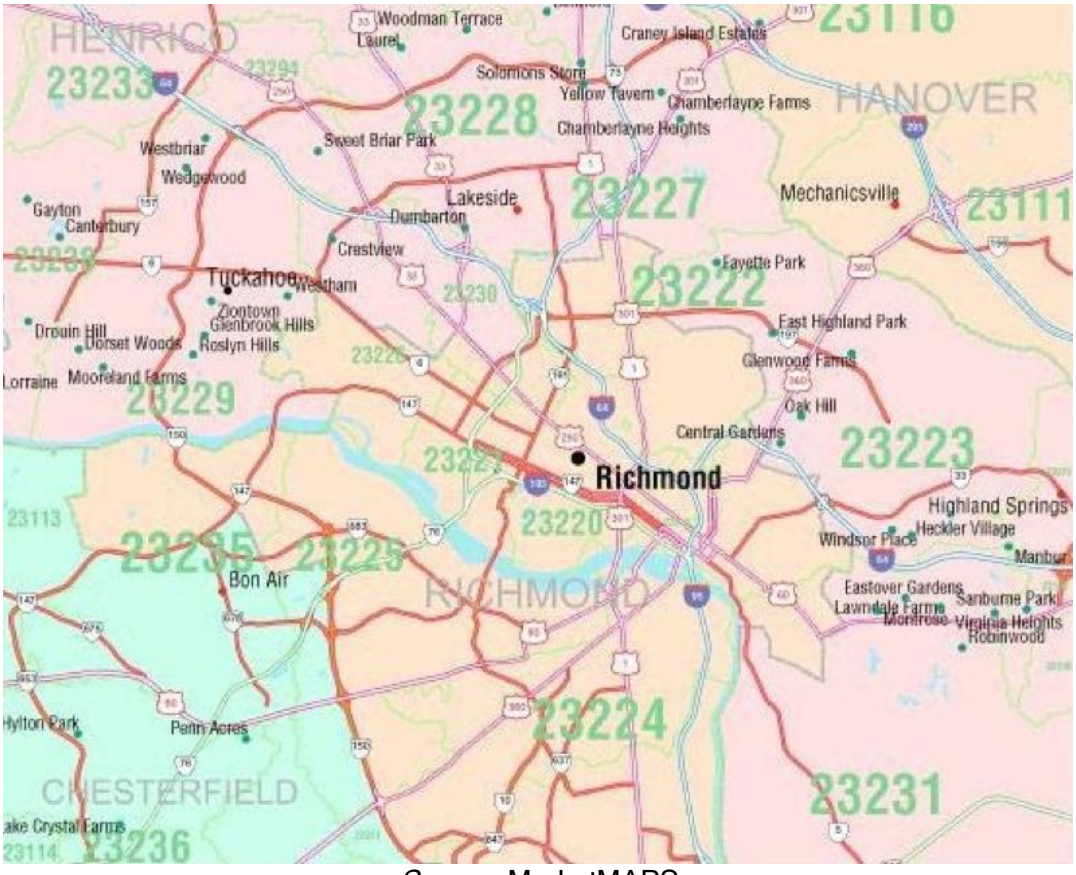
the highest eviction rates, with roughly 17 evictions per day (Princeton Eviction Lab, 2018).

Recent gentrification trends explain the racial aspect of the problem, as young white professionals migrate into previously predominantly black neighborhoods such as Westover Hills and Carver, displacing the residents in these areas. As a result of this trend and other socioeconomic factors, Richmond has had a steady eviction rate of approximately 11% for the past 16 years. Multiple studies across the nation have found that eviction is a leading cause of homelessness (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2018).

HOMELESSNESS & EVICTION IN RICHMOND

The city of Richmond has four regions: the north side, south side, east end, and west end. The regions are socioeconomically and racially distinct from one another, largely due to housing and highway policies of the twentieth century. The west end has the highest proportion of white and affluent residents. A vast majority (88%) of homeless individuals between 2014-2018 identified their location in just 5 zip codes in the North Side and East End: 23223, 23224, 23222, 23220, 23225 (Homeward & HCIS, 2019).

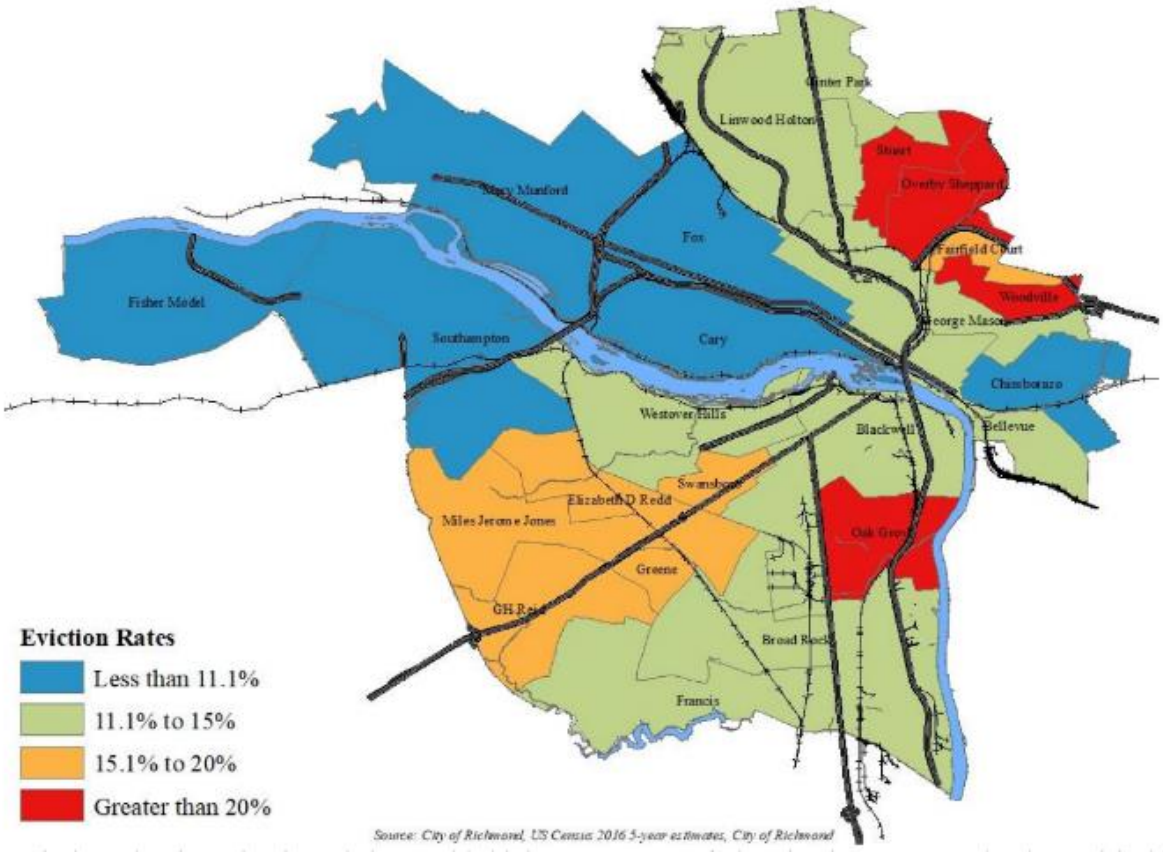
City of Richmond Zip Code Map



Source: MarketMAPS

Figure 1 below illustrates the eviction rates of the neighborhoods surrounding RPS' 25 elementary schools. It is important to note that evictions disproportionately affect neighborhoods in the north and south side regions of the city, which are predominantly African American, with Oak Grove, Stuart, Overby-Sheppard and Woodville Elementary Schools having eviction rates between 20% and 25% (Howell, n.d.). The problem is exacerbated by the relatively high percentage of rental housing in these neighborhoods (Howell, n.d.). Meanwhile, schools in the west end region fall well below the citywide average, with neighborhood eviction rates as low as 4.4% (Howell, n.d.)

Figure 1: RPS Elementary Schools and Surrounding Neighborhood Eviction Rates



Families with children already have a greater difficulty in finding affordable housing, and they are more likely to be evicted than other types of renters (Bernet, Warren, and Adams 2015; Desmond and Gershenson 2017; Reina and Winter 2017). Eviction results in an immediate loss of housing that qualifies families and children to be classified as "homeless" according to the federal definition under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Furthermore, a previous eviction makes the possibility of finding affordable housing more difficult (Desmond and Gershenson 2017; Reina and Winter 2017). Therefore, evictions and gentrification play a major role in the particularly high rate of homeless families with children in the city of Richmond.

IMPACTS OF HOMELESSNESS ON SCHOOLING & ATTENDANCE

The condition of homelessness impacts children's education in many ways. Homeless students face unique enrollment obstacles, difficulties due to high mobility, and a myriad of other social, economic, and emotional disadvantages related to their lack of consistent housing. First, enrollment in schools can be daunting and difficult for parents and caregivers due to the typical residency and guardianship requirements ("Education of Homeless Children and Youth", 2007). Beyond enrollment, multiple logistical issues arise with transferring academic records and transitioning children to new teachers and curriculums when they change schools, which can happen multiple times in a single school year for highly mobile homeless children ("Education of Homeless Children and Youth", 2007). In particular, children of evicted households often change schools and miss school days as they move. Some studies estimate that every move causes a child to lose up to 3-6 months of education ("Education of Homeless Children and Youth", 2007). Additionally, the general instability of high mobility hurts overall academic outcomes and increases disciplinary problems (Scanlon and Devine 2001; Pribesh and Downey 1999; Kull, Coley, and Lynch 2016; Ersing, Sutphen, and Loeffler 2009).

On top of the logistical obstacles it poses, homelessness is an experience of ongoing, chronic trauma for children (Miller, n.d.). Their parent/s or caregiver/s experience continuous chronic stress related to where the next meal and source of shelter will come from, and their children experience this stress directly and indirectly from their interactions (Hopper et al, 2010). The lack of a consistent, safe, and stable home also imposes chronic stress on children (Hopper et al, 2010). Additionally, the condition of homelessness is often associated with previous and future traumatic events, such as eviction, natural or physical disasters, domestic and/or community violence, physical/sexual abuse, accidents, hunger, unsheltered exposure to harsh natural elements, mental illness, and substance abuse (Hopper et al 2010).

Such a condition of ongoing trauma causes children to have poor self-regulation, states of hypervigilance and intense anxiety, distraction and executive function challenges, and difficulties forming relationships with teachers and adult educators (Miller, n.d.). School teachers and staff may misinterpret these symptoms as defiance, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or other behavioral problems and respond with disciplinary action or mis-identification for special education. Both of these treatments exacerbate the issues, and disciplinary action can disrupt attendance in the event of suspension or expulsion (Miller, n.d.).

In addition to trauma and logistical barriers, homeless students are more likely to miss school due to poor health and lack of basic necessities such as clean clothing. Children experiencing homelessness have various unmet physical needs. Homeless shelters often provide meals, clean clothing donations, personal hygiene items, and showers. However, shelters also function as short-term solutions by nature and families cannot regularly rely on these services for the long term. Only 81 out of the 1,189 RPS children in homelessness during SY 2018-2019 were staying in shelters

(Schmale, 2019). For the remaining 1,108 children in motels, unsheltered locations, and family/friend residences, there is no consistent guarantee of adequate food, clothing, or personal hygiene necessities. Studies show that homeless children consistently exhibit more health problems than securely housed children, and are sick four times more often than their peers (Foss, 2015; The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). In addition, lack of clean clothing or access to showers and hygienic supplies can keep homeless students from coming to school regularly (Naborny, 2016). According to U.S. Department of Education survey data, 82% of respondents cite "family worried about basic survival needs" as the top challenge homeless children face in attending school (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The relationship between chronic absenteeism and high eviction rates in the RPS district can be seen in Figure 2 below. Since high eviction rates often signal high rates of homelessness in an area, as discussed previously, Figure 2 also illustrates the relationship between homelessness and absenteeism in the Richmond area. The schools in neighborhoods with eviction rates higher than 20% have significantly higher rates of chronic absenteeism above the average, while schools with the lowest rates of absenteeism are located in neighborhoods with low eviction rates. Although homeless students are disadvantaged in many academic outcomes, this report will focus on their chronic absenteeism rates in particular, as regular attendance forms a baseline for all other academic opportunities and outcomes.

FIGURE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RICHMOND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

School Name	Eviction Rate	Chronic Absences[1]	% White	% African American	% Hispanic	Accreditation
Fox	4.4%	3.8%	64.1%	17.1%	8.4%	Full
Mary Munford	4.8%	3.6%	75.4%	11.0%	5.0%	Full
Fisher Model	6.1%	11.0%	13.9%	58.8%	19.5%	Full
Cary	7.8%	12.3%	8.2%	83.2%	3.7%	Full
Southampton	10.2%	13.9%	7.0%	80.7%	7.0%	Full
Chimborazo	10.6%	14.6%	4.1%	93.1%	0.4%	Denied
Carver	11.1%	18.2%	1.5%	92.2%	0.8%	Full
Bellevue	12.5%	12.9%	4.2%	89.4%	4.2%	Partial
Westover Hills	12.7%	12.6%	7.1%	83.3%	5.0%	Denied
Blackwell	12.9%	9.7%	1.5%	82.0%	11.1%	Denied
Linwood Holton	13.4%	8.1%	29.9%	60.7%	3.1%	Full
George Mason	13.9%	28.9%	0.9%	92.9%	0.9%	Denied
Ginter Park	14.4%	10.7%	0.7%	94.0%	0.4%	Denied
Broad Rock	14.6%	15.4%	4.2%	60.0%	32.1%	Full
Francis	14.7%	11.1%	2.4%	62.2%	32.3%	Denied
Elizabeth D Redd	15.1%	6.5%	2.1%	68.9%	26.7%	Full
Miles Jerome Jones	16.8%	12.9%	3.8%	69.9%	23.9%	Full
Swansboro	17.5%	12.5%	2.7%	93.0%	2.7%	Denied
Fairfield Court	18.2%	19.5%	0.4%	96.6%	0.8%	Full
GH Reid	18.5%	11.0%	1.9%	57.8%	38.7%	Denied
Greene	19.1%	6.1%	1.7%	16.0%	81.1%	Full
Woodville	20.6%	25.9%	0.9%	93.3%	1.5%	Denied
Oak Grove	20.8%	19.3%	1.9%	79.5%	14.4%	Denied
Overby Sheppard	22.0%	20.6%	2.4%	95.6%	0.5%	Denied
Obama (formerly Stuart)	24.3%	16.4%	1.8%	90.4%	2.5%	Full

SOURCE: VA DEPT OF EDUCATION, PRINCETON EVICTION LAB, US DEPT OF EDUCATION OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY ON HOMELESSNESS

The federal government defines homelessness as “an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 1987). The legal definition encompasses those whose primary nighttime residences include public or private places not normally designated for sleeping, public or private shelters, hotels/motels, and those doubled-up temporarily in a family member or friend’s residence. The main federal policy that shapes public education for homeless students is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, most recently amended under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

ESSA updated McKinney-Vento by requiring states and school districts to ensure the identification, enrollment, attendance, and school stability of homeless children and youth. It removed enrollment barriers by allowing for children who have lost housing to continue attending their base school or enroll in the most convenient school as needed, without having to provide a permanent address or typically required documents such as birth certificates or shot records (“Every Student Succeeds Act”, 2015). It also mandated that schools must immediately enroll homeless children and youth, even if they have missed application or enrollment deadlines during periods of homelessness (“Summary of Major Amendments on Homelessness and Foster Care in ESSA,” 2016).

ESSA also provided for federal funding, staff, and policies for school districts to track and provide McKinney-Vento services to all of their homeless students. The policy called for states to designate a State Coordinator and a Local liaison for each school district, in order to serve as a bridge between homeless families and school personnel and support homeless children in their school experiences. These personnel reach out to homeless families to ensure their awareness of their protections and services under the McKinney-Vento law, help families obtain the services, improve identification and monitoring of homeless children, and implement professional development for school personnel to improve awareness and response to homeless children’s needs. Finally, ESSA provided state grants for the identification of homeless children, activities and services to support them, professional development for school personnel, and coordination between school staff and community/housing agencies (“Summary of Major Amendments on Homelessness and Foster Care in ESSA,” 2016). McKinney-Vento services include free transportation to school for all K-12 students, as well as other supports that vary between school districts, such as food pantries.

CURRENT STATUS IN RPS

Richmond Public Schools (RPS) serves roughly 24,000 students in 25 elementary schools, including one charter school, seven middle schools, five comprehensive high schools and three specialty schools. The district’s student population is 75% African American, 12.8% Hispanic, 9% white, and about 3% other races and ethnicities.

Seventy-five percent of students in the district received free or reduced lunch as of 2015, which serves as a proxy for a socioeconomic status of poverty (Richmond Public Schools, n.d.). Jason Kamras serves as the current superintendent of RPS, since his official start in February, 2018. Under the new administration, RPS has initiated many new programs and policies to work towards equity for all students.

The McKinney-Vento State Coordinator for Virginia is Patricia Popp at the William and Mary School of Education. Her role mainly consists of administering the state's program for the education of homeless children and youth, "Project HOPE" (William and Mary School of Education, n.d.). The McKinney-Vento Liaison at Richmond Public Schools is Erika Schmale, and she has three other staff to support homeless students and families in her office as well (Richmond Public Schools, n.d.).

Under McKinney-Vento, RPS currently provides free transportation to all K-12 homeless students in the district. This policy ensures that all students may continue attending their current school, but also costs the district significant resources and money. The law does not require transportation for pre-K students, and because of limited resources, RPS does not currently provide transportation for these students to Head Start and public pre-K schools. The district has established a family support center, where families who have lost housing can come for support, resources, and information on services available to them. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year (SY), they received another grant to start a new food pantry and resource room in the family support center. Other programs in place include a leadership program for high school students and a vision and empowerment program for girls (Schmale, 2019).

By the end of the 2018-19 SY, RPS identified a total of 1189 students (PreK-12) who experienced homelessness at some point throughout the year and qualified for McKinney-Vento services. Upon first identification, 878 of these students were staying with friends or family, 216 were in hotels or motels, 81 were in a shelter, and 14 were unsheltered (Schmale, 2019). Many of these students moved into different housing situations throughout the school year.

Despite transportation services and the other programs, homeless students in RPS have worse academic outcomes, dropout rates, and attendance rates than their peers overall and their housed peers in poverty. RPS has one of the highest absenteeism rates in Virginia, with nearly one in five students chronically absent and one of the lowest graduation rates in the state of Virginia (Mattingly, 2018). In 2018-19, RPS had a 24.4% dropout rate for all RPS students, 22% for those economically disadvantaged at any point, and 27.6% for those homeless at any point. Fifteen percent of all students in RPS experienced chronic absenteeism in SY 2018-19, compared to about 35% of McKinney-Vento students (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

In the first week of the 2019-2020 SY, RPS identified about 350 homeless students, and at the time of this report, the number is expected to grow as the year progresses.

Literature Review

Homeless children face unique obstacles in terms of unmet basic physical needs, traumatic experiences, high mobility, and lower parent engagement in their education. All of these factors contribute to their lower attendance rates. Therefore, this literature review summarizes and analyzes the evidence on potential interventions to address these obstacles and support homeless children's regular attendance in public schools.

MEETING BASIC NEEDS

Overall, evidence shows that interventions to provide meals, clean clothing, and sources of basic hygiene to children in their schools have strong correlation with improved attendance rates and academic outcomes for those children in need. First, studies show that children perform better in school and have less behavior problems when they have nutritious meals every day (Morello, 2019). Schools can provide a natural and convenient access point for food pantries (Morello, 2019). School-based pantries can also provide homeless families access to food to take home on the weekends (Morello, 2019). One recent 2019 study found that the Feeding America Backpack program, which provided children living in food-insecure households with backpacks of meals for the weekend, made participating children more likely to attend school on Fridays (Fiese, 2019). In Wisconsin, researchers also found that universal free breakfast programs were linked to a 3.5 percentage point drop in the percentage of students with low attendance, using multivariable regression models with school fixed effects and extensive demographic controls (Bartfeld et al., 2019).

Schools can also provide on-site access to clothing and personal hygiene resources that homeless children need. Nonprofits throughout the nation have helped to lower absenteeism rates for children in poverty by providing them with clothing, toiletries, and supplies right within their schools (Catie's Closet, n.d.; Note in the Pocket, n.d.). Although data is not yet available on the specific measured effects of these interventions on attendance rates, participating schools report improved attendance among other positive outcomes for students (Catie's Closet, n.d.). Other school districts have installed showers and laundry facilities, in order to provide access to homeless students who might be too embarrassed to come to school otherwise (Tribune Media Wire, 2017). An elementary school in Kansas City, Missouri saw the overall chronic absenteeism rate decrease from 54% of students to only 16% of students, over the course of one school year, after installing washer and dryer machines (Rueb, 2019). Whirlpool Corporation, a home appliance manufacturing company, launched a laundry program to provide about 2,000 loads of clean clothes to students across two school districts (Whirlpool Corporation, 2016). Over 90% of tracked students in the program improved their attendance by an average of 6.1 more days in school than the previous year (Whirlpool Corporation, 2016). The program had even greater impacts on the most at-risk students, who saw an average increase of

nearly two more weeks in school than the previous year (Whirlpool Corporation, 2016).

TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHER & STAFF TRAINING

Children experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable to instances of trauma, which severely impacts their ability to learn in school (Murphy and Tobin, 2011). Most homeless children operate under a condition of chronic stress due to constant transition and instability, food insecurity, lack of shelter, and often other accompanying circumstances such as domestic violence and abuse (Hart-Shegos, 1999; Nabors et al., 2001; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011; Zima et at., 1997). One in five homeless children demonstrate "extreme emotional distress" that warrants professional intervention (Hart-Shegos, 1999). The condition of chronic trauma causes homeless children to have poor self-regulation, states of hypervigilance and intense anxiety, distraction and executive function challenges, and difficulties forming relationships with teachers and adult educators (Miller, n.d.). School teachers and staff may misinterpret these symptoms as defiance, ADHD, or other behavioral problems and respond with disciplinary action or mis-identification for special education. Both of these treatments exacerbate the issues (Miller, n.d.).

Trauma-informed teaching and culturally responsive classrooms provide a powerful solution to these problems. Warshof and Rappaport (2013) found that teachers can help homeless students to develop coping and social skills that allow them to succeed in school, by creating a nurturing and culturally responsive classroom. Positive behavioral reinforcement systems improve behavioral outcomes for homeless students, and also provide them with needed structure and predictability (Murphy and Tobin, 2011). Both of these outcomes could help improve attendance in turn, by reducing out-of-school suspensions and expulsions and making school a safe and welcoming place for students experiencing chronic trauma.

In addition to studies focusing on the general positive school outcomes of trauma-informed practices for at-risk students, other researchers have focused on the specific effects of these interventions on attendance rates. One study found that implementing cognitive-behavioral teacher training and therapy for struggling students improved attendance rates by 67 percentage points, and the most effective aspect of this multi-faceted approach was the teacher training (Heyne, 2002). This evidence is promising, as the study included sixty-one children in a randomized trial, with statistically and clinically significant effects after four months (Heyne, 2002). However, the limitations of this study were its short time frame of 4 months, and the researchers acknowledge that additional studies are necessary to assess long-term effects. Another study found that 48% of children receiving trauma-specific treatment through the Children's Mental Health Initiative reduced their number of days absent from school over the course of one year (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018). Although this study was not perfectly randomized since participants opted into the program, it shows promising correlational evidence. In addition, a Washington state high school saw a dramatic drop in their suspension and expulsion rates, from 798

suspensions and 50 expulsions in the 2009- 2010 school year, to 135 suspensions and 30 expulsions in 2010-2011, after implementing trauma-informed discipline practices and policies (Stevens, 2012).

School teachers and staff can provide some of the most powerful remedies to the struggles homeless children face when they employ trauma-informed strategies, which ultimately supports their consistent attendance. The caveat, however, is that professional development (PD) is costly and often ineffective in actually helping teachers improve (TNTP, 2015). A two-year study of three large public school districts revealed that PD cost them nearly $18,000 per teacher, per year and 19 full school days of teacher time (TNTP, 2015). Teachers' evaluation ratings did not improve, and in some cases declined, over the period of study (TNTP, 2015). Teachers who did improve showed no significant correlation to the particular development strategies targeted in the training (TNTP, 2015).

While PD may be costly and at times ineffective, other low-cost alternatives to help teachers incorporate effective instruction strategies are worth exploring. For example, school districts can provide teachers with brief one-pagers on strategies and tips to help homeless students (Evers, 2011). Briefing resources such as these can include recommendations that encourage culturally-responsive, trauma-informed teaching. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provided a brief list of recommendations to help teachers support homeless students, such as administering a brief educational assessment to evaluate new students' level of academic ability, weekly one-on-one "check-ins", pairing them with a "buddy" in the class, and connecting them with counseling and tutoring resources in the school (Evers, 2011). However, evidence is not yet available on the effectiveness of these low-cost alternatives to traditional professional development.

AFTER-SCHOOL & ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

After-school and summer programs in public schools can provide another route to foster the supportive, nurturing environment homeless students need to counteract the effects of trauma, increase their engagement in school, and improve their attendance. These programs can function as safe environments of acceptance, social support, peer connection, and nurturing community, which has been positively correlated with academic achievement for at-risk children (Kronenberg & Strahan, 2010). They help homeless students to develop a sense of belonging, as well as the positive school and social behaviors linked to multiple positive school outcomes (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). They also give children opportunities to develop coping skills and positive relationships with teachers and peers, all of which help to counteract the negative impacts of insecure housing and support consistent school attendance (Kronenberg & Strahan, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Evidence suggests that the most beneficial educational components in after-school programming for homeless students include remediation, tutoring, and counseling/supportive services (Donlon et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2013). The

consistency and stability of these services and routines reduce developmental delays and disruptive classroom behavior in homeless children (Donlon et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2013). Other research shows the effectiveness of combining teacher-led and child-initiated activities, focused on language development, problem-solving, self-regulation, and other social-emotional skills (Wang, 2009). In addition, these programs provide a safe setting for homeless children to play, which research has proven to be a critical intervention to counteract the negative effects of trauma (Cozolino, 2013). Games as simple as "Simon Says" can stimulate social connectivity, feelings of well-being, and a sense of accomplishment that are critical for cognitive development and learning (Cozolino, 2013).

Check-and-Connect provides a promising model for school-based programming targeted towards K-12 students who miss more than 12% of school days per year, which can be implemented as an after-school program. In Minneapolis, researchers found that the program increased the percentage of engaged students (as measured by reduced tardiness) by 44 percentage points, and increased the percentage of engaged students (as measured by fewer absences) by 23 percentage points (Anderson, 2004). However, this study has limitations in that it did not include a control group, and the pool of participants included only those students referred into the program. Another option is to implement after-school programs through an "attendance group" for students who struggle with absenteeism, as referred by their teachers (Baker, 2000). Researchers found that such attendance groups at an elementary school, which focused on a variety of activities to increase self-esteem and engagement, such as goal-focused worksheets, playing games, self-esteem building activities, incentives, self-reporting of attendance, attendance charts, and problem-solving, decreased student absences by 6.7 days over a four-month period of implementation (Baker, 2000). Another promising program is Big Brothers Big Sisters, which pairs children from low-income and diverse backgrounds with adult mentors, who typically meet with them two to four times per month (Tierney, 2000). One study found that participating students skipped 36 percent fewer classes and 52 percent fewer school days than students in a matched control group (Tierney, 2000).

The above evidence shows that even simple, low-maintenance after-school and summer programs provide significant benefits to homeless students. However, the intervention involves significant costs in additional staff time and resources. Fortunately, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides for additional funding to provide services such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, and the development of after-school/summer school programming (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

MOBILITY

Because homeless children move schools often and also require multiple types of services, it is important that schools and agencies coordinate their efforts. Researchers have found that interventions to support homeless children are most effective when school personnel and homeless service providers such as social

workers and Continuum of Care workers communicate to identify needs and provide coordinated services (McGah and Saavedra, 2015; Zima et. al. 1997; Miller 2011). However, coordination can be complicated due to different organizational structures and staff trainings (Miller, 2011). Therefore, it requires additional time and outward communication efforts by school district personnel, who already have a large burden of responsibilities coordinating within-district services to homeless students.

Other studies found positive effects of more feasible, intra-district policies to improve smooth coordination of McKinney-Vento services to highly mobile students. For example, a case study of two school districts in Texas showed improved results implementing services to homeless children when upper-level administrators such as superintendents and principals made efforts to be on the same page as their "frontliners," such as bus drivers and special education teachers (James and Lopez, 2003). Audette and Algozzine found that school district policies which established standard procedures across schools for within-district transfers helped improve student monitoring, smooth transitions, and student achievement outcomes (2000).

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Parents of homeless children are often non-communicative and difficult to reach, since they lack a permanent address, consistent forms of contact, and the time and energy to devote to their children's education on top of meeting their family's urgent and basic needs. However, parent involvement plays a critical role in the outcomes of homeless students. It is correlated with higher enrollment and attendance rates and academic advancement (Murphy and Tobin, 2011).

Lechuga-Peña and Brisson completed a qualitative study of nine mothers in public housing, which confirmed that low-income mothers desire to be involved in their children's education but face unique barriers (2018). Their findings identified three main barriers: (1) cultural and language differences in their children's school, (2) undertones of racism from teachers and other parents, and (3) limited time and energy as the primary or sole caregiver. These findings suggest that providing translators, child care, and flexible opportunities for working parents to attend school events and teacher meetings would improve parent involvement (Lechuga-Peña and Brisson, 2018). Berliner (2002) found that simply increasing communication between schools and the family helps to increase attendance rates and awareness of family needs. Teachers and other personnel can initiate this by sending a welcome note to parents through the child, inviting them to meet or talk on the phone (Evers, 2011). Professional development can also play a helpful role here by training teachers and staff to understand and connect to families in crisis and poverty with cultural sensitivity (Murphy and Tobin, 2011; Lechuga-Peña and Brisson, 2018).

Evaluative Criteria

I will evaluate each of the three proposed alternatives based on the following four criteria. I will weight each of these criteria equally in my evaluation. Some criteria are qualitative in nature, and will provide scores of *low, medium*, or *high*, while other criteria are quantitative and will provide a number estimate of a given metric.

1. Effectiveness

Definition: This criterion will measure the extent to which the alternatives reduce the overall average absenteeism rate for homeless students in Richmond Public Schools. For comparison, I will use the most recent, baseline absenteeism rate of 35% for homeless students in RPS in SY 2018-2019, as cited in the background of this report (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). This is the target problem that this report focuses on; therefore, this criterion is important to evaluate the projected success of each alternative to improve homeless students' attendance rates.

Measurement: I will measure effectiveness by calculating projected reductions in the average number of chronically absent students among the homeless population in RPS. I will calculate these projections based on analysis of RPS data from SY 2018-2019, as well as data from other school districts and organizations who have implemented similar policies or programs. There are limitations to existing data about these projected outcomes, however, so I provide these estimates as ranges to account for factors of uncertainty.

2. Cost

Definition: This criterion will measure the projected cost of each alternative. Since most alternatives will involve both upfront costs to initiate in the first year of implementation and recurring costs to continue implementation in forthcoming years, the cost of each alternative is evaluated with respect to both of these aspects. This criterion is important to include because Richmond Public Schools has a tight budget with multiple areas of need for financial support. Some alternatives may simply cost too much for the district to reasonably afford and implement, even if they have a high projected effectiveness.

Measurement: I measure the projected cost of each alternative in 2020 U.S. dollars over the course of 1 year. Again, each projection will include an "ongoing" cost which will remain consistent each year of implementation, along with an "upfront" cost which will only be incurred in the first year of implementation (in alternatives 1 and 2). I estimate these costs based on data on the cost of existing programs and policies in Richmond Public Schools, such as their current food pantry and the cost of hiring additional staff, as well as data from other school districts and organizations who have implemented policies and programs similar to the proposed alternatives on their related costs and budgets.

3. Administrative Feasibility

Definition: This criterion will measure the degree to which Richmond Public Schools could reasonably implement each alternative, given their staffing constraints, jurisdiction, and relationships with relevant stakeholders. This is an important consideration given that limited time, staff, and resources are already challenges that RPS struggles with as a district.

Measurement: I evaluate the complexity of the new policy or program by considering the number of new rules and regulations it would involve, the number of RPS offices, staff, teachers, outside agencies, and other organizations that would need to be involved, and the timeline over which the program or policy would need to be phased in. I will assign each alternative an administrative feasibility classification of *low, medium,* or *high.*

4. Equity

Definition: This criterion will measure the extent to which the alternatives bring equitable benefits to homeless students regardless of their race/ethnicity, first or primary language, disability status, family makeup, socioeconomic status, and timeline/circumstances of homelessness.

Measurement: I will assess the equity implications of each alternative based on the evidence available from other school districts, organizations, and entities that have implemented identical or similar programs and policies. I will assign each alternative an equity classification of *low, medium,* or *high.*

Alternatives

The following recommendations seek to address the combination of factors that contribute to absenteeism among homeless students, from ensuring they have clean clothes to wear to school, to improving relations between parents and school staff.

1. Expand School-Based Resource Centers

This alternative would build upon existing food pantries throughout RPS schools and the newly created resource room at the family engagement center on W. Leigh Street to ensure that each of the 40 schools throughout the district have a food pantry, clothing bank, resource room with hygienic supplies and other needed items, and laundry facilities. RPS has just created its first resource room with a food pantry, household items, clothing, hygiene products, and school supplies, using a McKinney-Vento grant. Although the current resource room is a solid starting point, many homeless children and families still have difficulty accessing it without their own

transportation. Thirty-five of the 40 schools currently have some degree of a food pantry through the assistance of Communities in Schools (Schmale, 2019). Therefore, this alternative would build off current efforts to implement resource centers at all 40 schools throughout the district, so that families and students can access the basic resources they need more frequently and easily. RPS could also follow the lead of other school districts in the nation by installing laundry facilities and showers, in order to provide access to homeless students who might be too embarrassed to come to school otherwise (Tribune Media Wire, 2017). Ten out of RPS' 40 schools currently have laundry facilities through the Washington Redskins Loads of Love program (Schmale, 2019). Installation of new facilities in the remaining 30 schools could take significant funding, so this may require another grant. In the meantime, RPS could start by providing homeless children with access to showers, locker rooms, and bathrooms that already exist in certain schools, for use in the hours before or after the regular school day.

Effectiveness

As shown in the literature review, lack of basic necessities such as consistent food and clean clothing makes up one of the most preventative barriers to attendance for low-income students generally. Providing direct, in-school access to clothing, toiletries, and other supplies for children in poverty has helped to lower absenteeism rates throughout the nation (Tribune Media Wire, 2017; Catie's Closet, n.d.; Note in the Pocket, n.d.). The school-based nature of these programs means they not only remove significant barriers to attendance, but also create new and powerful incentives for students to come to school.

Evidence previously summarized in the literature review suggests that adding a washer and dryer on school facilities can reduce chronic absence rates at a school from anywhere from 38 to over 50 percentage points (Rueb, 2019; Whirpool Corporation, 2016). In addition, programs that provide consistent food sources to students at the school they attend show effects of reducing absenteeism by 3.5% and bringing low attendance rates for food-insecure students up to the overall school population average (Fiese, 2019; Bartfeld et al, 2019). Although data is not yet available on the measured effects of clothing banks in schools, participating schools report improved attendance among other positive outcomes for students (Catie's Closet, n.d.), and it can be inferred that such programs have similar effects to the installation of laundry facilities in schools. However, these studies have limitations, as acknowledged in the literature review. Given this evidence, RPS' existing programs, and RPS' current rates of chronic absenteeism for the overall student population and homeless student population, I estimate this intervention to reduce the chronic absenteeism rate among RPS McKinney-Vento students by a range of 30-35 percentage points.

Cost

The main costs involved with this intervention include installation of facilities for the food/clothing banks and laundry machines. Since 35 of RPS' 40 schools already have some kind of food pantry through the assistance of Communities in Schools, I assess the costs of installing food banks in the 5 remaining schools and starting a small clothing bank in all 40 schools. Previous food pantries installed at RPS have cost about $400 per school for the purchase of two storage units. Since the pantries are stocked through donations and maintained by volunteers, there are no additional out-of-pocket expenses involved. However, it should be noted that these are resources that could presumably be allocated towards other activities, and therefore have value. Assuming that clothing banks can operate in a similar fashion to food pantries, I anticipate an upfront cost of $200 per school for the purchase of one storage unit to begin. Therefore, installing food and clothing bank facilities at RPS schools would total about $10,000.

Given average costs of washer and dryer units in the current market, I anticipate upfront installation costs of laundry facilities to total $2,100 per school. Therefore, initial costs to install facilities in the remaining 30 RPS schools who currently lack them would total $63,000. Ongoing costs of detergent would also be involved, however. I estimate that about 1,500 students total would use the new school washers and dryers throughout RPS. (This estimate excludes students already covered by the Loads of Love program but provides additional leeway for the imperfect data RPS has on the precise number of homeless students at any time, and additional usage from non-homeless students may also lack access to laundry facilities.) Assuming each student uses the facilities for one load per week for the duration of a school year (36 weeks), and given current market prices for detergent averaging 9-18 cents per load, I estimate the ongoing costs of detergent to total about $7,290 per year. In total, this alternative has the lowest cost of $73,000 upfront and $7,290/year ongoing.

Administrative Feasibility

Based on other school models analyzed in the literature review, this intervention would require significant administrative burden to coordinate the funding and initiation of the programs, as well as their ongoing maintenance. Since the installation and maintenance costs of these facilities are high, RPS will likely need to partner with nonprofits, apply for grants, and seek other sources of charitable donations to support the purchase of storage units, laundry machines, detergent, etc. Each school will also need to identify at least one designated teacher, administrator, or volunteer to coordinate and oversee the laundry facilities to connect students and parents in need, schedule time slots, and coordinate donations of detergent. Adding a clothing bank to existing food pantries will slightly increase the administrative burden on staff in those schools who already coordinate food pantry functions, and it will create a new administrative burden for the five schools who do not yet have any kind of food pantry.

Although these administrative burdens are significant, RPS already works with many community partners and nonprofits to provide services to their students. If they follow the model of other schools to partner with nonprofits and programs such as Catie's Closet or the Washington Redskins' Loads of Love program, much of this burden could be lifted by outside community partners. Therefore, I assign this alternative a score of "medium" for administrative feasibility.

Equity

Given that this alternative would provide in-school access to fulfill basic necessities for RPS' most disadvantaged student populations, at all 40 schools across the district, I assign this alternative a score of "high" in terms of equity. As the designated staff or volunteer coordinator will help students learn how to use the laundry machines, it is also equitable across age groups and experience levels, regardless of students' parental involvement and assistance.

2. Implement Trauma-Informed Teacher & Staff Training

Children and families experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable to instances of trauma, which severely impacts their ability to communicate effectively with teachers and staff and to coordinate enrollment and transportation to school regularly (Murphy and Tobin, 2011; Miller, n.d.). Most homeless children and their parents operate under a condition of chronic stress due to constant transition and instability, food insecurity, lack of shelter, and other accompanying circumstances such as domestic violence and abuse (Hart-Shegos, 1999; Nabors et al., 2001; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011; Zima et at., 1997). The condition of chronic trauma causes homeless children and parents to have difficulty with self-regulation, states of hypervigilance and intense anxiety, distraction and executive function challenges, and difficulties forming relationships with teachers and authority figures (Miller, n.d.). School teachers and staff may misinterpret these symptoms in children and respond with disciplinary action. These responses exacerbate the effects of trauma, which makes school a traumatizing place that students want to avoid, and which also often leads to suspensions and expulsions (Miller, n.d.).

School staff can also misinterpret symptoms of trauma in parents. For example, homeless parents can become agitated, stressed, or even triggered when front office staff lack sensitivity in their communication and interactions. This leads to miscommunication and hostility between parents and staff that bars them from receiving the support they need and may discourage them from enrolling their student or coming back to the school for help. Both situations exacerbate absenteeism and mental health issues for homeless children (Miller, n.d.).

Trauma-informed training for teachers and school staff would seek to improve communication and relationships between RPS teachers/staff and homeless children and their families. This is first critical to ensure that parents/caregivers who have lost housing are able to coordinate enrollment and transportation services for their children

to get to school. It is also key to reducing student suspensions and expulsions, as well as allowing students to feel safe and engaged at school, both of which are necessary to reduce absenteeism rates among homeless students in RPS.

Trauma-informed training for teachers and school staff has been proven a widely successful intervention for disadvantaged students, including homeless children. When teachers are equipped to better understand the unique needs and mental health challenges of their students, they can respond better with proactive solutions rather than reactive measures such as discipline problem (Miller, n.d.). In addition, professional development helps train teachers and school staff to understand and connect to families in crisis and poverty with cultural sensitivity, which can better equip them to help homeless parents trying to coordinate enrollment and services for their children (Murphy and Tobin, 2011; Lechuga-Peña and Brisson, 2018).

Effectiveness

This alternative would take a more long-term, sustained, district-wide approach to reducing chronic absenteeism among homeless students. As shown in the literature review, evidence suggests that increasing teachers' and staff's awareness of trauma symptoms and ability to respond can help to improve behavioral outcomes for homeless students, as well as their relationships with teachers and peers, both of which lead to higher attendance rates. Since the concept of trauma-informed schools is relatively new, data does not yet exist on the effects of implementing these techniques in schools to improve general student outcomes or their attendance rates. However, one study has found that implementing cognitive-behavioral therapy for struggling students and teacher training improved attendance rates by 67 percentage points, and the most effective aspect of this multi-faceted approach was the teacher training. Although this alternative does not call for the implementation of new therapy services for students, McKinney-Vento students at RPS could see similar impacts if their staff and teachers are trained in how to provide basic behavioral techniques that are responsive to trauma. Additionally, some basic professional development and training on trauma can equip teachers and staff to recognize and identify the symptoms of trauma in students, enabling them to refer those students to counseling services already available in schools or through community partners. However, the evidence of ineffective professional development must be taken into consideration as well. As summarized in the literature review, some studies of PD have found no impact on student outcomes or targeted teacher techniques. There are also limitations in that these studies draw upon student populations with much higher baseline absenteeism rates than RPS' current rate of 35% for all homeless students. Therefore, I estimate this alternative to ultimately reduce chronic absenteeism by a range of 20-25 percentage points for McKinney-Vento students at RPS.

Cost

Depending on the specific implementation of this alternative, costs incurred may vary. For the purposes of this analysis, I have chosen to evaluate the option to implement

the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments' (NCSSLE) comprehensive Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package, which is fully available free of charge through the U.S. Department of Education. The package includes interactive e-resources, slide presentations, and downloadable handouts, including checklists, worksheets, and practice guides, in order to inform and support school staff in adopting a trauma-sensitive approach. Therefore, the main cost involved in this option would come from teacher and staff time spent on distributing and completing the training materials.

I estimate a timeframe of 30 total hours for the McKinney-Vento team of 4 staff to review the training package and develop an action plan for distribution to teachers and staff throughout the district. Thereafter, I estimate 5-10 hours per teacher/staff to review the materials and complete the training. After initial distribution to all teachers and staff, the McKinney-Vento team should follow up with 1 front office staff at each school (who interact the most with homeless families, particularly in enrollment) and the teachers who have homeless students in their classrooms, in order to ensure they received and completed the training. I estimate this follow-up process to take about 20 hours total throughout each school year. This cost will be incurred continuously each school year, along with a portion of the training time cost for new teachers each year.

The number of teachers at RPS who serve homeless students in the current school year is unknown, and the number will fluctuate from year to year. However, I estimate this number to fall in the range of 500-1,000 teachers given that there are over 1,000 homeless students throughout the district who make up about 4% of the total student population, and there are roughly 2,000 teachers throughout the district. I estimate that each year after the first year of implementation, RPS will have to ensure that 110 new teachers receive and complete this training, given their 15% rate of new first-year teachers in previous years (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Based on average salary data of teachers and McKinney-Vento staff, I estimate the total upfront cost of this alternative to be $193,290.88, with recurring costs of about $10,740.25 each school year.

Administrative Feasibility

The administrative burden of this intervention would mainly fall on the McKinney-Vento team, specifically in the initial process of reviewing the training package and developing an action plan for distribution and in the follow-up process. However, the initial review and action plan process will only have to occur once in the initial implementation, so the administrative burden should significantly lessen after the first year. For all other teachers and staff, the administrative burden of this option is very low, since the training materials can be downloaded digitally and completed on their own independent schedules. The materials are also designed for ease of use, so that teachers and staff can refer back to handouts for support as needed. Therefore, I assign this alternative an administrative feasibility of "high."

Equity

This alternative has "medium" equity. Although it targets disadvantaged students with an objective of providing them trauma-sensitive care, it is possible that teachers who are already over-burdened with student needs and lack of resources and support will not devote as much time to the trauma-informed training packages. As a result, it is possible this alternative will have slightly inequitable benefits on students throughout the district.

3. Expand After-School & Engagement Programs

After-school engagement programs in public schools can provide another route to foster the supportive, nurturing environment homeless students need to counteract the effects of trauma. They also help to further connect and engage homeless students, who tend to be highly mobile and frequently switch schools, with their school community. Both of these outcomes help to improve regular attendance. These programs can function as safe environments of acceptance, social support, peer connection, and nurturing community, and they help homeless students to develop a sense of belonging in the school (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). They also give children opportunities to develop coping skills and positive relationships with teachers and peers (Kronenberg & Strahan, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). All of these factors contribute to improved behavioral outcomes, engagement, and attendance rates for homeless children (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Since RPS already has two after-school enrichment programs, another promising alternative could involve expanding these programs and providing transportation for them to homeless students. The McKinney-Vento team could consider partnering with other RPS teams to create additional after-school programs that would reach more students than the current two programs (one of which is tailored for girls, and the other for high school students). For example, programs could offer tutoring and homework support, mentoring and counseling, and structured games and/or athletic activities that provide a safe place for homeless students to play and build healthy relationships with their peers and school community. All of these types of programs have evidence-based, multi-faceted benefits for homeless students in terms of engagement in their education, mitigated effects of trauma, positive feelings about school, academic outcomes, and attendance rates (Donlon et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2013; Kronenberg & Strahan, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Effectiveness

The literature review summarized measured outcomes from several after-school/engagement programs, which reduced absenteeism rates from 23-44 percentage points, reduced overall school days missed by 52 percent, and improved overall attendance rates by up to 50% (Tierney, 2000; Baker, 2000; Anderson, 2004). However, the limitations of these studies as summarized in the literature review must be taken into account. Given these considerations and adjustments based on RPS'

baseline chronic absence rate, I estimate the overall effectiveness of this alternative to reduce chronic absenteeism rates for McKinney-Vento students in RPS by a range of 23-33 percentage points.

Cost

There could be a wide range of variable costs involved with this alternative, depending on the specific implementation plan, the number of students that ultimately participate in the program, and the kind of programming offered. For the purposes of this analysis, therefore, I use the national average cost of after-school programming as a general base, which comes to $113.50 per student per week (Papavizas, 2014). It is not necessary that homeless students attend after-school programming every single day of the school year in order to reap the multi-faceted benefits; therefore, I assume programming that covers two-thirds of the school year, or 24 weeks in total. Assuming 80% participation, from about 800 McKinney-Vento students throughout the district, the cost of programming would total about $2,179,200.

Another important cost to consider as part of this alternative is transportation, as this is one of the main obstacles keeping homeless students from participating in current after-school programs. The average cost of normal public school transportation per student, per year totals $1,030.37, so I estimate the cost of transporting each student home from an after-school program to be about $343.36 per student, per year, for a total annual cost of $274,768. Therefore, I estimate the total cost of this alternative to be $2,453,968 per year.

Administrative Feasibility

Projected administrative burden of this alternative is also variable. On the one hand, RPS could build off existing after-school programs and focus their efforts on increasing homeless students' awareness of programs and participation. This would fall mainly on the McKinney-Vento team, but otherwise would have high administrative feasibility because the after-school programs are already in place. In addition, RPS might be interested in implementing a new, attendance-focused program such as those reviewed in the literature, or updating some of its existing programs with aspects from those programs. This would require significantly more involvement and administrative coordination. In either case, providing public transportation for homeless students in these programs would be a significant undertaking for the district, although they already have a system in place for transportation during normal school hours. Given all these considerations, this alternative has "medium" administrative feasibility.

Equity

This alternative has "medium" equity. Although the objective is to engage all McKinney-Vento students throughout the district, students most likely to participate are those who are already more connected to the McKinney-Vento staff and their schools. In addition, parents who are already more over-burdened and struggling

might have less capacity to get their child involved in an after-school program, even if free transportation is provided.

Table 1. Outcomes Matrix (Summary of alternatives in terms of evaluative criteria)

	Effectiveness	Cost	Administrative Feasibility	Equity
Alternative 1: Expand School-Based Resource Centers	**30-35** percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism	**$73,000** upfront **$7,290/year** ongoing	Medium	High
Alternative 2: Trauma-Informed Teacher and Staff Training	**20-25** percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism	**$193,290.88** upfront **$10,740.25/year** ongoing	High	Medium
Alternative 3: Expand After-School & Engagement Programs	**23-33** percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism	**$2,453,968/year** ongoing	Medium	Medium

Notes: Table 1 summarizes the projected outcomes of each alternative in terms of effectiveness (reduction in the chronic absence rate for homeless RPS students), cost, administrative feasibility, and equity, based on the evidence and rationale described above.

Recommendation

Based on the findings summarized above, I recommend that RPS implement *Alternative 1*: expand school-based resource centers. The literature suggests this alternative has the highest projected effectiveness to significantly decrease chronic absenteeism rates for homeless students in Richmond Public Schools. It also has the lowest cost in terms of upfront, initial execution as well as ongoing, annual costs for each forthcoming year of implementation. Although it will require a considerable amount of administrative effort, it also has the highest projected equity to help students regardless of their socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and family/caregiver situation. Potential options to ease administrative burden are discussed in implementation below.

Implementation

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The primary stakeholders involved in moving this recommendation forward will be Erika Schmale, McKinney-Vento Liaison for Richmond Public Schools, and the team of McKinney-Vento staff. Together this team will lead and coordinate the expansion of food and clothing banks and installation of laundry facilities to all 40 RPS schools. The RPS administration makes up another primary stakeholder group in the earliest stages of implementation, because their initial approval will likely be necessary for it to move forward at all. Another key stakeholder and partner will be the Redskins Charitable Foundation, who have already helped to implement laundry programs in 10 RPS schools through their “Loads of Love” initiative. An additional group of stakeholders to consider is the teachers and staff throughout RPS who will play a key role helping to identify homeless students (and others) in need of food, clean clothing, and hygienic resources, and connecting them to those services. The volunteers and school teachers/staff who choose to help build and stock the food, clothing, and resource banks make up another critical stakeholder group. Finally, students and parents who participate in this program make up the most important stakeholder group to consider in terms of outcomes, as they are the intended beneficiaries of this recommendation.

ACTION STEPS

The first step to move this recommendation forward will be to acquire approval and funding from the RPS administration. Chief Engagement Officer Dr. Shadae Harris would be the most logical person to communicate with initially, given her jurisdiction and area focus. Ultimately, approval from Superintendent Jason Kamras and potentially also the school board will be necessary to move forward with implementation. I recommend partnering with staff who have already led the Loads of Love efforts in the original 10 RPS schools, in order to build support and effective messaging to the administration.

Next, the McKinney-Vento staff will reach out to the Redskins Charitable Foundation in order to apply for the Loads of Love grant. Once again, this step of the process is a coalition opportunity to partner with staff at the 10 schools who have already participated in the program, in order to obtain guidance and aid in the grant application process. The total upfront cost of expanding food and clothing banks to all 40 schools ($10,000) should fit within the McKinney-Vento team’s annual budget from the McKinney-Vento/ESSA grant, with about $5,000 of additional room for other expenditures. The Loads of Love program will cover the installation and maintenance costs of laundry programs. However, in the event that not every school is able to participate in the program, RPS may need to apply for additional grants or funding to cover these costs for schools.

Next, the McKinney-Vento team will focus efforts on working with schools to select one volunteer point person for each school who will coordinate efforts to expand the resource center at their school. This is necessary since schools throughout the district have various degrees of existing resource centers currently. The point person will lead efforts to purchase additional storage units (using district funding) for food and clothing banks as necessary, coordinate volunteers to stock and maintain the resource rooms, and assist with laundry facility installation. Ideally, most schools will be able to hand off the majority of execution for laundry programs to the Washington Redskins Charitable Foundation through the Loads of Love Program. However, some schools who are not awarded the grant may need additional assistance and funding from the McKinney-Vento team and RPS administration in order to install and initiate their own laundry programs.

Finally, the point person will work with McKinney-Vento staff and teachers within their school to identify students experiencing homelessness (and then other students in need, as capacity allows) and connect those students with the resource/laundry rooms so that they know how to access them. Schools who serve a significant population of Spanish-speaking students and families should try to find a point person who is proficient in the language if possible, in order to ensure equitable implementation of the program. McKinney-Vento staff will check in with this point person at each school throughout the year to ensure that all 40 schools ultimately have a food bank, clothing/hygienic supplies bank, and laundry facilities. Given the highly mobile nature of the homeless population, as discussed in the literature review, coordination and communication between individual schools and the central McKinney-Vento office will be important to smooth and effective implementation of this alternative.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES & LEADERSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

I predict that teachers and staff at individual schools will be slightly resistant to this initiative, given the substantial number of tasks and responsibilities they already have on their plates. To mitigate resistance, it will be important to ensure that the volunteer point person at each school takes charge of the coordination efforts, so that teachers and staff only need to provide necessary support such as referring students in need of the services.

The administration has been supportive of food pantry efforts in the past, so I predict they will be interested and supportive, as long as the messaging of this initiative is framed effectively. It will be important for the McKinney-Vento team to emphasize the importance of installing these resource centers at base schools to incentivize attendance, and to show the promising data on its effectiveness to boost attendance outcomes, as well as other academic outcomes. While attendance is one of the top 10 goals in RPS' strategic 5-year plan for 2018-2023, meeting basic needs such as food, hygienic supplies, and clean clothing has not yet been a major part of this conversation. Therefore, showing the connection between school-based resource

centers and improved attendance for students will be a key point of communication and persuasion.

POTENTIAL RISK ANALYSIS

In the worst-case scenario, RPS will not back this initiative at all, and/or the Washington Redskins Charitable Foundation will refuse to partner with any additional RPS schools for the Loads of Love Program. Another worst-case scenario to consider is that even after RPS and other donors back the initiative and provide the necessary funding, they will be unable to find volunteers to install and maintain the food banks, clothing/resource banks, and laundry facilities. It is not likely that RPS will reject the initiative completely, but the McKinney-Vento team should consider the other risks at hand and prepare effective messaging for teachers and staff throughout the district who might need to step in if volunteers are unavailable, as well as ways to lighten their administrative load. For example, teachers assisting with laundry programs may need to be exempt from other typical lunch or bus duties, in order to allow room in their schedule. Additionally, the team should consider an evaluation plan of some kind to monitor the effectiveness of this initiative after a few years' implementation, by monitoring attendance rates and potentially collecting feedback from teachers, staff, parents, and students.

Finally, given the current and potential ongoing impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, there are significant uncertainties with regard to school closures, social distancing, and funds available for RPS from local, state, federal, and non-governmental sources. On the one hand, current school closures for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year may provide a unique opportunity to implement and construct the laundry facilities and food/clothing banks in schools without interrupting normal school activities and functions. However, outreach to homeless students and families given current social distancing guidelines may prove to be exceptionally difficult. The multi-faceted effects of the pandemic will likely impact them more heavily than their housed peers, given their limited access to food, healthcare, shelter, and internet/technology resources to engage with online, remote learning. In addition, it will be impossible to measure attendance rates in the traditional sense until normal, in-person schooling resumes. In the event that remote learning continues for the 2020-2021 school year, RPS will need to prioritize adaptation to online schooling for homeless students before implementing any new recommendations.

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