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# A Study of Select Factors Associated with School Social Workers' Perceived Effectiveness in Providing Services to Homeless Students in Metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

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A STUDY OF SELECT FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL SOCIAL  
WORKERS' PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS IN PROVIDING SERVICES  
TO HOMELESS STUDENTS IN METROPOLITAN  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Committee Chair: Gerry White, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated May 2019

This study examined the relationship between school social workers' perceived effectiveness and their perceived levels of competency (knowledge and skills), collaboration, and school culture when providing services to homeless students. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed in this study. Specifically, this study provided insight on how these select factors influence school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students.

The study sample consisted of 103 school social workers and homeless liaisons who serve the metropolitan Atlanta. Respondents participated in the study by completing the "School Social Workers' Perceived Effectiveness Survey" that was disseminated via email or in person. All respondents participated in the study voluntarily.

Data analysis was conducted at three levels. The first level presented descriptive findings associated with demographic information and school social work experience of the respondents. The second level utilized crosstabs to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, perceived effectiveness, and each of the independent variables (competency, collaboration, and school culture). The third level of analysis was analytical procedures which tested the hypothesis under this study. This section used Spearman's Correlation Coefficient to determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables.

This study found a positive, strong correlation between school social worker perceived effectiveness and skill-set, competency, collaboration, and school culture. There was a positive moderate correlation between school social worker perceived effectiveness and knowledge. The conclusions drawn from the findings of this research suggested that all of the independent variables showed a significant correlation with the dependent variable. The study findings proved to be useful for school social workers, policy makers, school administrators, homeless students and their families, and other school-based staff.

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
SANDREA ALEXIA JONES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HHM	Homeless and highly mobile youth
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
RHY	Runaway and homeless youth
RHYA	Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
RtI	Response to intervention
SSWAG	School Social Workers Association of Georgia
SEL	Social-emotional learning
SES	Socioeconomic status
TIC	Trauma-informed care

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Families with children continue to account for the highest and fastest growing homeless population in the United States. The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that children under the age of 18 made up 59% of people experiencing homelessness. In addition, there are approximately 1 to 1.7 million school-age children who experience homelessness annually (Barman-Adhikari, Bowen, Bender, Brown, & Rice, 2016; Uretsky & Stone, 2016). Due to the state of the American economy; with a diminishing middle class and an increasing gap between the wealthy and those living in poverty; it is projected that homeless children will remain as the most vulnerable population at risk of homelessness.

As well as homeless children, nonhomeless families with children who are living in poverty are also negatively impacted by the state of the economy. Children who live in poverty are also likely to be highly mobile. The welfare of homeless and highly mobile youth can be attributed to the lack of affordable housing, shortage of job availability, low wages, and parents who are unskilled workers. These economic conditions also contribute to intergenerational poverty and racial inequality in the U.S. (Rahman, Turner, & Elbedour, 2015).

Race, access to financial resources, and children are the three greatest predictors of homelessness. Non-Caucasian Americans make up less than 25 % of the U.S. population, but account for a vast majority of the homeless population: 38% of the homeless population is African American, 9% is Hispanic, 8% is Multi-racial, 4% is Native American, and less than 1% is Asian American (Rahman et al., 2015). The sociodemographic characteristics of homeless and highly mobile students include being a racial minority, male, English language learner, and having a special education status. Overall, this population is associated with poorer academic achievement (Uretsky & Stone, 2016).

It was found that homeless and highly mobile youth disproportionately have a higher rate of experiencing adverse life events which contributes to the development of social-emotional problems (Bender, Ferguson, Thompson, Komlo, & Pollio, 2010; Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014). These adverse life events often include multiple forms of trauma and victimization, such as childhood abuse and neglect, placing them at an increased risk for the development of emotional and behavioral health problems (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2016).

Four variables were consistent throughout the literature in studying how schools promote the academic and social-emotional well-being of homeless students. These variables were attendance, mobility, self-efficacy, and social-emotional support. Homeless students were more likely to be academically successful if they attended school on a regular basis; were able to remain at one school for an academic school year; were self-motivated; and had access to healthy peer and adult relationships. Professionals that

placed an emphasis on these factors had a greater chance of being effective in their service delivery to homeless students.

School staff should be well versed of how trauma affects students' social, emotional, and academic well-being (Terrasi & Crain de Galarce, 2017). To foster this type of school culture, several federal legislations have been passed to support schools in improving the academic performance of homeless and highly mobile students, such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, Every Student Succeeds Act, and Title I programs. These policies outline accountability standards that schools must adhere to in order to be in compliance with local, state, and federal policies and procedures. These policies urge schools to utilize data to implement evidence-based school-wide strategies to improve student outcomes. These strategies and programs are tailored to address the unique needs of each school's social environment and settings. An effective program that will expectantly improve the academic performance of their students will have components of prevention, monitoring, and intervention (Rahman et al., 2015).

Homeless youth school initiatives should also encourage school staff to build supportive structures and networks to help homeless students acquire skills to improve their educational outcomes. For example, homeless youth programs that foster constructive, supportive interaction and provide links to support networks and services are known to improve student outcomes. Homeless youth benefit from focused programs that build and support their resiliency and coping skills (Rahman et al., 2015). The overarching theme presented in majority of studies on homeless youth was the resiliency of this population. Despite the negative connotations associated with homelessness, such

as poor academic performance, attendance, and social skills; a great number of homeless and highly mobile (HHM) students are able to overcome their circumstance and succeed in all aspects of life.

To help nurture resiliency among homeless youth, the federal government enacted the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. The McKinney-Vento Act conceptualizes homelessness as a series of barriers to educational opportunity and sets out provisions to ameliorate the effect of transience on educational opportunity (Canfield, 2014).

In compliance with this federal legislation, every school district has an appointed homeless liaison. The liaison has the undertaking of ensuring that barriers are removed in order to facilitate academic achievement among children and youth that experience homelessness. The McKinney-Vento Act outlines specific duties that the homeless liaison must carry out in order to accomplish this objective. However, it can be daunting for homeless liaisons, especially for those that serve mostly urban schools, where the percentage of homeless children and youth are likely to be higher, to carry out all of the responsibilities of ensuring the academic success of homeless students. One of the most common concerns among homeless liaisons is that they do not have adequate time to carry out their responsibilities (National Center for Homeless Education, 2018). To expand service delivery, homeless liaisons often collaborate with school based personnel in providing additional direct services to homeless children and youth. The personnel frequently assigned to this role are school social workers.

School social workers are trained professionals that address individual, peer, family, and community risk factors; provide individual and group counseling to address various mental health, peer relations, and social support needs; conduct home-based interventions that focus on supporting families; and facilitate school-community partnerships in order to provide resources otherwise not provided by the school (Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, J., 2008). So it is no surprise that school social workers are usually the gatekeepers in providing services to homeless children and youth.

As a school social worker and former homeless liaison for a Metropolitan Atlanta school district, this researcher experienced first-hand the needs and gaps in service delivery for families experiencing homelessness. The core duties of a homeless liaison are to ensure that the school district is in compliance with the outlined authorized activities of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act. Majority of these authorized activities were related to addressing the enrollment, attendance, and academic requirements of homeless students. With guaranteeing all of these rights, this researcher found that only 50% of homeless students graduated from high school within the school district. It became evident that though beneficial to homeless students, the McKinney-Vento legislation is missing an important factor that could possibly increase the academic performance of homeless students.

It is understood that the McKinney-Vento legislation cannot solve all of the complications associated with homelessness, as it is a multifaceted macro and micro phenomena. One issue that this researcher has noted is that the legislation approaches



homelessness synonymously as an academic deficit and not as a traumatic life event.

Understanding homelessness as a traumatic life event, a more holistic approach could be utilized, which would then change policies and programs and give rise to improved services and interventions. Perhaps the integral piece missing from the McKinney-Vento legislation are interventions that target inter- and intra-personal social and emotional support for homeless students as these types of interventions have been found to increase the academic performance of not just homeless students, but all students that experience poverty.

School social workers are challenged to enhance homeless student's resiliency through direct and indirect services. Accordingly, school social workers must demonstrate how well the services they provide affect the academic and social-emotional well-being of students. In fact, one of the major responsibilities of school social workers is to provide evidence of their effectiveness. To date, however, little research has examined the effect of school social work services on student outcomes (Newsome et al., 2008).

According to Openshaw (2008), there are four basic tasks that are common to all school social workers: (a) consultation and collaboration with other school-based staff; (b) completion of assessments in order to provide direct service, collaborative services, and program development; (c) direct intervention with students, parents, groups, and communities; and (d) assistance with program development. This study seeks to expand on these basic tasks by determining whether a relationship exists between school social

workers' perceived level of effectiveness and their levels of competency, collaboration, and schools' culture in delivering services to homeless students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

An increase in homeless families means an increase in the number of homeless school-aged children. With more than one million children experiencing homelessness each year, homelessness and unstable living arrangements for students are nationwide problems (Baharav, Leos-Urbel, Obradović, & Bardack, 2017). Responding to the needs of homeless and highly mobile students continues to challenge schools and state educational systems (Rahman et al., 2015).

The first responders to the specific needs of homeless students often include school social workers and homeless liaisons. Homeless liaisons have been assigned the responsibility of implementing these services to homeless children and youth as outlined in federal laws such as the McKinney-Vento Act. However, many homeless liaisons have various administrative titles or the population of identified homeless children and youth in their school district is so great that they find it somewhat difficult to address all of their needs. Henceforth, research has shown that school social workers are the primary school-based staff tasked with the responsibility of identifying and responding to the special needs of homeless students (Hendricks & Barkley, 2011). School social work practice within this population regularly revolves around implementing McKinney-Vento services in the areas of identification, school mobility and attendance. However, little attention has been brought to the forefront of the challenges experienced by school social workers in meeting the needs of homeless students.

One problem is that school social workers are not comfortable with their competency of the McKinney-Vento Act. School social workers identification of homeless children remains a challenge, and thus reduces the opportunity for homeless students to receive school social work services (Canfield, 2014). The knowledge of the policies and procedures surrounding homeless students impacts school social workers service delivery and therefore impacts the educational success of this population. School social workers often find themselves unsure about their role and how it corresponds to the requirements of these mandated policies and procedures. However, in order to be effective, school social workers should be well versed in the McKinney-Vento Act and how it influences the educational outcomes of homeless children and youth (Richard & Sosa, 2014; Markward & Biros, 2001).

Another problem that impacts the perceived effectiveness of school social workers in regard to their service delivery to homeless students is their collaboration with internal and external stakeholders in addressing the needs of homeless students. The effective school social worker should function as a collaborative team member with other school personnel, students, parents, the community, and community agencies. Unfortunately, successful collaboration remains difficult to achieve for some school social workers, and the child who needs multiple internal and external supports could potentially end up not receiving any (Markward & Biros, 2001).

Last, one of the major problems in school social workers service delivery to homeless students is the school's culture or how McKinney-Vento "friendly" the school environment is for the homeless student. Schools sometimes may not be receptive of

homelessness students as they present with a myriad of issues related to attendance, behavior, and low academic achievement. School administrative policies, such as the McKinney-Vento Act, that are aimed at ameliorating barriers to the academic success of homeless students, are sometimes interpreted and implemented by school-based administrators that could potentially hinder or facilitate school social work practice with this population (Canfield, 2014).

Teachers also are pivotal in creating a positive school culture for homeless students. Some teachers perceive homeless children as more difficult, which then impacts how they interact with these students. Homeless and highly mobile students may already feel they do not belong, and treating them as outsiders only exacerbates the problem. Teachers working with homeless and highly mobile students can help each other develop more accurate perspectives that empower the teaching and learning process (Moore, 2013). School social workers, more than any other school based staff, understand the challenges facing homeless students. Through the facilitation of professional development, school social workers are in the unique position of sensitizing and enabling the classroom teacher in fostering a more nurturing environment for homeless children and youth (Hendricks & Barkley, 2011).

Policies and programs that are specific to homeless and highly mobile students play a vital role in helping to ensure their academic success. However, it is still not clear whether the existing supports provided by federal, state, and local governments are sufficient to slow the spread of youth homelessness, or prevent such large-scale homelessness, or mitigate its impact on the educational attainment of individuals who

experience intermittent, chronic, or frequent episodes of homelessness. So far they have not succeeded in solving the myriad and complex issues homeless students face (Rahman et al., 2015). Developments in the school-based service delivery now allow for more fluid and comprehensive supports that can be provided to at-risk students across different dimensions of need (i.e., academic, medical, mental health) and at different levels of intensity (i.e., universal/preventative service delivery, legally mandated accommodations) (Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014).

School social worker's practice with homeless students remains circumstantial, dependent upon the school social worker's competency, collaboration, and school culture. Therefore, the level of involvement between school social workers and homeless students remain unclear. As a result, additional research is essential relating to school social worker's implementation of services to homeless students (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether a relationship exists between school social workers' perceived level of effectiveness and their competency, collaboration, and school culture in delivering services to homeless students. The central role of any school social worker is to remove barriers to students' academic success. Homeless students experience various barriers related to their housing stability. It is then the school social worker's position to help alleviate those barriers. Without affective involvement by school social workers, these outcomes are likely to be predictable.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions of this study are as follows:

- RQ1: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their level of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act?
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their skill-set level?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their overall level of competency?
- RQ4: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their frequency of collaboration?
- RQ5: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and the level of school culture?

### **Hypotheses**

By answering the research questions, this study attempts to test the following hypotheses and achieve its overall objective. The null hypotheses for this study are as follows:

- Ho1: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their level of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Ho2: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their skill-set level.
- Ho3: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their overall level of competency.
- Ho4: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their frequency of collaboration.
- Ho5: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and the level of school culture.

### **Significance of the Study**

School social workers play a vital role in the academic performance of homeless youth through the implementation of services provided through the McKinney-Vento Act. Therefore, their perceptions of their practice in the context of the policy provide valuable insight into the implementation of federal legislation. According to Spillane (as cited in Canfield, 2014), generally, how a practitioner understands the needs and

problems facing a population influences policy implementation. The awareness of the needs and policies regarding a population can influence the perception of an issue and affect practice (Canfield, 2014).

This study examined the role of competency, collaboration, and school culture as it relates to school social workers perceived effectiveness in servicing homeless students. Due to the negative impact that homelessness can have on academic performance; it would be beneficial to understand what factors are perceived to either hinder or facilitate practice and what factors might influence perceptions of practice with this population (Canfield, 2014).

This study is significant as there is limited published research that documents the relationship between the efforts of school social workers related to student educational outcomes (Alvarez, Bye, Bryant, & Mumm, 2013). This study expands upon existing research and fill in the gaps in literature by correlating the perceived effectiveness of school social workers service to homeless students as it relates to practice, policy implementation, and factors (attendance, mobility, self-efficacy, and social-emotional support) related to the academic success of homeless students.

This study builds upon two previous studies by Canfield and Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, and Canfield (2014) examined the perceived barriers or facilitators of school social work practice with homeless youth, while Wilkins et al. conducted a study on homeless liaisons in North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee to explore their perceptions of services implemented under the McKinney-Vento Act in their service area.



### **Definition of Terms**

This study focused on the factors that influenced the perceived effectiveness of school social workers service delivery to homeless students. Therefore, it is important to provide uniform definitions that are present throughout this study.

**Academic success** refers to how well a student performs in school; which is measured by end of course grades, grade point average, or scores on standardized tests and benchmarks.

**Attendance** is the frequency of how often a student attends school and or class.

**Collaboration** is defined as how school social workers work with school-based and district level personnel and outside agencies in serving the needs of homeless children and youth.

**Competency** is the measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, and skills (The Council on Social Work Education, 2015).

**Dependent variable:** The dependent variable in this study is perceived effectiveness.

**Factors** include the independent variables, Competency (Knowledge and Skills), collaboration, and school culture.

**Highly mobile** is defined as a student that resides in more than two residences an academic year or enrolls in more than two schools in an academic year.

**Homeless:** The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act defines homelessness as follows:

1. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons 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;
2. children and youths 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; and
3. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.

(Cumming & Gloeckner, 2012, p. 105)

**Homeless liaison** serves as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers, and other service providers. The liaison coordinates services to ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically (United States Department of Education, 2004).

**Independent variables:** The independent variables in this study are competency, collaboration, and school culture.

**Mobility** is the rate and frequency a student relocates to another residence or school.

**Perceived Effectiveness** is defined as self-reported interpretation to the degree of which a targeted problem was resolved in producing a desired outcome.

**School culture** is the set of shared values, beliefs and norms that influence the way educators and administrators think, feel and behave in the school (Doğan, 2017).

**School social worker** is a trained professional employed in a P-12 educational system with the responsibility of removing barriers that impede on a student's academic success.

**Self-efficacy** is one's perceived competence to reach a goal.

**Social and emotional support** includes the exchange of love, trust, and encouragement between at least two individuals.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature provides an overview of the factors that influence school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. Specifically, it provides a historical overview of school social work services; the influence of attendance, mobility, self-efficacy, and social and emotional support on the academic success of homeless students; programs that impact the academic success of homeless and highly mobile youth; and how competency, collaboration, and school culture can influence the effectiveness of school social workers services to homeless students. This review also integrates previous studies conducted on homeless students, the theoretical frameworks utilized to guide the current study, and the role of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, the major policy that governs the rights of homeless children and youth.

#### **Historical Perspective of Homeless Youth**

In the past, homelessness was considered to be a temporary phenomenon found in large metropolitan cities that could be contained. Today, families with children represent the largest population affected by homelessness; and have spread beyond America's metropolitan cities. What is also troubling is that many homeless people also reside in

small towns and rural areas without access to homeless shelters or supportive services (Rahman et al., 2015).

Homelessness first surfaced in the U.S. in 1640, during the early colonial period; during the Civil War (1861-65); the Great Depression of the 1930s; and as a result of natural disasters such as the Great Chicago Fire (1871), the San Francisco earthquake (1906), and the massive flooding of the Mississippi that displaced 1.3 million people in 1927. In all of these eras and situations, the homeless phenomenon was largely assumed to be caused by manmade circumstances or natural disaster. During the early 20th century, the homeless population was relatively small and was largely made up of Caucasian males. After the Vietnam War, the U.S. homeless population became a more visible phenomenon and a concern for U.S. legislators. During the 1970s the U.S. homeless population included women and children, and was generally more racially and ethnically diverse (Rahman et al., 2015).

Rates of homelessness among families with children and youth increased sharply in the 1980s, in part, as a result of federal and state cuts in housing and social services. In 1987, the federal government responded to this crisis with the enactment of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (formerly known as the Stewart B. McKinney Act and was reauthorized in 2001 under the No Child Left Behind Act). This was the first major congressional step regarding the education of homeless students as the federal government recognized that it had a responsibility to assist in improving the educational experiences of homeless children. After the act was reauthorized in 200, it mandated the designation of a state coordinator for homeless students; made it easier for

homeless students to register in new schools; and provided students with free lunch, clothing, school supplies, and other amenities (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012).

After the first wave of research on homeless children and education in the late 1980s, a new wave of research emerged as a consequence of federal legislative data collection requirements. In 2004, states were required to collect and annually report homeless student data and academic outcomes to the U.S. Department of Education's Consolidated State Academic Performance Reports and the Ed Facts initiative. Since 2005, researchers have been able to access extensive academic performance data made available by the U.S. Department of Education, state departments of education, and local educational agencies (Rahman et al., 2015).

These legislative efforts have shaped the role of school educators and professionals in regard to homeless students. Today, researchers and policy makers can track U.S. homeless students' enrollment, attendance, academic achievement on state assessments, and graduation and dropout rates; compare homeless student data nationally and regionally; and evaluate homeless students' performance with housed students, economically disadvantaged students, or advantaged students. With these data, schools are tasked with implementing targeted efforts to remove educational barriers, address their students' human and social conditions, identify and respond to the needs of their students, and build upon their students' innate assets to fulfill their educational objectives and advance their well-being. In essence, educators are called to engage in school activities to promote students' legal right to be educated, and to ensure that all students

have access to the necessary skills and tools that can enable them become contributing adults (Rahman et al., 2015).

### **Homeless and Highly Mobile Youth**

The prolonged economic recession and job layoffs have compounded the economic hardships of low-income communities; concurrently, the rising costs of food, fuel, and housing have distressed the middle class and poor families alike. These difficult economic pressures have resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number of homeless families (Rahman et al., 2015). Moreover, the rates of student homelessness have increased 72% since the beginning of the 2008 economic recession. These rates increased approximately an additional 10% since the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. Therefore, rates of student homelessness are an unprecedented, pervasive, and growing problem in the United States (Sulkowski, 2016).

Subsequently, homeless youth are typically at a disadvantage in relation to demographic, economic and school quality measures. This is even more so for schools in urban districts, as they continue to face varying challenges in meeting the needs of students who experience homelessness. They also have higher mobility rates; with an average of 40% living in a new zip code and 30% enrolling in a new school district, in any given year (Cowen, 2017).

Various school districts across the nation have seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of students experiencing homelessness over the past thirty years. During the 2010–2011 school year, over one million students were identified as homeless under the United States Department of Education definition, a 13% increase over the previous year,

and during the 2012–2013 school year, that number reached to 1,240,925 (Masten, Fiat, Labella, & Strack, 2015).

Data of Georgia’s homeless student population is collected annually by the Georgia Department of Education-Office of Federal Programs from school districts and state agencies. During the 2015-2016 school year, the state of Georgia reported 39,688 students in grades pre-kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Of these students: 6,816 were residing in hotels/motels; 744 were unsheltered; 28,299 were doubled up; and 3,896 were residing in shelters, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care placement. The racial compositions of these students were: .17% American Indian; .37% Asian; 56.60% African American; 9.50% Hispanic; .04% Pacific Islander; 28.97% Caucasian; and 4.36% two or more races. It was also reported that homeless students in the state of Georgia during the 2015-2016 school year were included 4.69% who were English Language Learners; .70% were migrant; 16.37% were students with disabilities; and 6.90% were unaccompanied youth. These students also had an overall attendance rate of 92.4%. The attendance rate of non-homeless students was 95.4% (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

The Georgia Department of Education-Office of Federal Programs report also noted key trends, patterns, and relationships of homeless students during the 2015-2016 school year. The first pattern that was recognized is that the number of identified homeless students in Georgia increased every year from 2011-12 (34,379) to 2015-16 (39,755). Second, the percentage of students who experienced homelessness varied greatly among districts. Georgia followed the national trend in which the highest



populations of homelessness were represented in the rural and urban school districts and that African Americans and students with disabilities were overrepresented for students who were identified as homeless. Third, homeless students struggled academically with only 17% scoring proficient or distinguished on the End of Grade or End of Course Language Arts Milestones tests. In mathematics, only 14.9% scored proficient or distinguished. Lastly, it was found that homeless students attended school at a slightly lower rate than non-homeless students (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

The accelerated spread of youth homelessness from the heavily populated U.S. urban centers to small American towns, counties, and rural areas has prompted renewed research interest on the impact of family and youth homelessness on public education (Rahman et al., 2015). Results from studies of children experiencing homelessness are mixed, but the preponderance of findings suggests that homelessness is associated with low academic achievement (Cutuli et al., 2013).

Homeless and highly mobile youth (HHM) students face substantial barriers to their academic success. These barriers include a lack of permanent residence, parental absenteeism, transportation challenges, chronic absenteeism, frequent mobility, caregiver instability, feeling socially disconnected, and having limited access to food, clothing, and other basic necessities (Sulkowski, 2016). Homeless students' high mobility also predisposes them to frequent school disruptions and high truancy rates. Over 40 % of homeless youth on average attend two or more schools a year, and with each change in school enrollment their education is set back four to six months (Rahman et al., 2015).

**Attendance**

While there is no universal definition of chronic absenteeism, it is often defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason, whether excused or unexcused. Chronic absenteeism is a widespread problem within our nation's public schools. During the 2013-2014 school year, it was estimated that one in seven U.S. students were chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism is also more susceptible for students that are economically disadvantaged or reside/attend a school that has a high population of economically disadvantaged families. Chronic absenteeism rates of low-income students are often double or triple the rates of their non-low income peers (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017).

Homeless students have a higher absenteeism rate than their non-homeless peers. This rate is essentially twice as high as the overall student population. This is counterproductive to the beliefs of the traditional United States educational system that students should be in class every day and on time in order to reap the benefits of a quality education. However, many students miss school on a regular basis and thereby missing out on valuable instruction. Studies have also shown the correlation between chronic absenteeism and lower standardized test scores, grade point averages, and higher rates of grade retention and dropping out (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017).

A study was conducted in the state of New York on the academic achievement of elementary students by correlating homelessness and chronic absenteeism. The researchers concluded that, on average, homeless students are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism which was associated with lower test scores, an increased risk of being retained, and a higher drop-out rate. Statically, the study found that: (a) homeless

elementary students missed an average of four weeks of school and were almost twice the overall citywide rate for chronic absenteeism; (b) those living in shelter had the highest rate of chronic absenteeism; (c) school transfers greatly increased rates of chronic absenteeism; (d) chronically absent homeless children repeated the same grade at over three times the rate of homeless students who missed fewer than five school days; and (e) homeless elementary students who missed fewer than five days of school passed state assessment tests at about the same rate as their low-income housed peers (Da Costa Nunez, Erb-Downward, & Shaw-Amoah, 2015).

### **Mobility**

Children who move frequently are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, and other risk factors, whereas children who experience homelessness are more likely than others to have changed residences frequently and have high levels of other adversities (Cutuli et al., 2013). Residential instability and extreme poverty are two major factors that influence academic failure. Mobility not only increases the probability of academic failure and drop out, but is also related to health and behavioral problems (Cumming & Gloeckner, 2012). For many homeless and highly mobile students, changing schools is accompanied by a variety of negative emotional, social, physical, psychological, and academic effects (Moore, 2013).

Residential and school instability disproportionately occurs in large urban school districts and among youth from low income families, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and African Americans (Fantuzzo, Leboeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012). In a report on student mobility by the National Academy of Sciences it

was found that high-poverty urban schools can have more than half of their students turn over within a single school year. Unfortunately, schools with a high student turnover rate, not only impact's the transient student population, but also the students who remain enrolled in those schools. In a 2014 report by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement in Georgia it was noted that schools with a high transient student population also had higher percentages of students with disabilities and fewer in gifted educational programs (Sparks, 2016). Additionally, schools with high student turnover rates also tend to have overall lower academic achievement (Comey, Litschwartz, & Pettit, 2012).

Better Homes Fund (as cited in Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003) reported that within a single school year, 41% of students in homeless situations attend two different schools, and 28% attend three or more different schools. The transient nature of HHM youth jeopardizes the consistency of their educational experiences; which includes broken bonds with teachers, friends, relatives, schools and other potentially positive sources of security and opportunity. These stressful effects of mobility also create an atmosphere of low academic achievement of homeless and highly mobile youth (Obradović et al., 2009). To put the effects of school mobility in perspective a group researchers conducted a study and determined that for every additional move a student makes, it could cause a delay in mathematical and reading performance by about a month (Han, 2014).

Julianelle and Foscarinis (2003) described the academic and social outcomes of homeless students who are highly mobile into three categories: unrecognized educational needs, unmet educational needs, and lack of stable social relationships. Unrecognized

educational needs of homelessness students occurs when school staff or parents are unable to appropriately identify the mental, social, or academic needs of the student due to the frequent changes in schools. This causes an inability of schools to accurately collect needed data on student that would identify the areas of need for additional educational support. On the other hand, their educational needs could be misinterpreted due to the stressors caused by homelessness which could result in an inappropriate educational setting. Unmet educational needs occur when a school or parent has identified an educational need for the student, but the school is unable to initiate targeted programs as the student may have enrolled in another school. This also occurs when there is a delay in transferring the student's school records which may indicate participation in special education programs. The lack of stable social relationships describes the effect of school mobility on homeless students. Whenever a student attends a new school, they have to become acquainted with a new building, teachers, classmates, and new rules, all of which could become overwhelming. As a defense mechanism, some homeless student may hesitate to establish relationships with teachers and their peers for fear of gaining a supportive network and having to leave them behind.

Student mobility must be addressed in a way that protects the educational trajectory of students affected by frequent moves. While some states and local districts have designed programs to alleviate the obstacles facing highly mobile students, their attempts have not produced the large-scale results needed to significantly increase academic achievement levels. In response to this form of transiency and its' impact on academic achievement, schools have been tasked with alleviating known educational

barriers experienced by homeless youth through the implementation of various policies, such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This Act attempts to decrease school mobility by providing transportation assistance for the remainder of the school year to encourage students to remain at their school of origin (the school the student was enrolled in before the student became homeless) despite the location of their current residence (Canfield, Nolan, Harley, Hardy, & Elliott, 2015).

### **Self-Efficacy**

Albert Bandura, the father of the social learning theory, believes that self-efficacy lies at the core of human functioning. Bandura defined self-efficacy as the degree to which a person is subjectively convinced of their ability to effectively meet the demands of a particular situation. It also affects an individual's choice of activities, effort, and persistence. Basically, if a person has strong beliefs of self-efficacy they will exert greater motivational effort in trying to master a situation and persist longer in overcoming an obstacle. Regarding a specific task, people with low self-efficacy may avoid it, while those with a high self-efficacy are more likely to take the task head on. In order to succeed, individuals need a strong sense of task-specific self-efficacy, tied together with resilience in order to overcome life's challenges (Artino, 2012; Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2001).

This is particularly true for homeless youth as some struggle internally with emotions and self-perceptions that can interfere with their resilience and ability to manage on their own. As studies have shown, this can lead to engaging in high-risk behaviors as a means of coping and survival as homeless youth are known to exhibit low

self-esteem and engaging in substance use; typically at rates higher than their non-homeless peers (Maccio & Schuler, 2011).

It is generally understood that a homeless individual has a lack of resources, whether it is related to housing, employment, or health. In order to overcome these obstacles and become self-sufficient, it requires a sense of resiliency and self-efficacy on the homeless individual's part to withstand the likelihood of repeated failures and challenges. However, homeless persons cope with their lack of resources in various ways. As efficacy beliefs affect how people think, motivate themselves, and make decisions, researchers are utilizing the theoretical framework of self-efficacy to help answer the question as to why some homeless individuals are able to attain the goals they set while others remain in a state of disrepair (Epel, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 1999).

Another perspective that is analogous to the self-efficacy framework is the empowerment theory. This theory is much like the strengths perspective as it focuses on the individual's or groups' strengths, resources, and wellness rather than their weakness, deficits, and illness in regards to social issues. Zimmerman (as cited in Eisman et al., 2016) proposed three components of psychological empowerment: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral. Intrapersonal refers to how individuals think about themselves in relation to their social environments. This component provides an aspect of the individual's initiative, confidence, and motivation to engage in behaviors aimed at achieving goals. Interactional refers to understanding the social and capital resources that are needed to achieve one's goals. This component may include supportive relationships with adult mentors, as they can assist youth in developing self-efficacy and coping skills

to overcome obstacles. Lastly, the behavioral component refers to actions taken to attain goals.

Experts on the theoretical framework of self-efficacy often describe it as task-specific confidence and believe it to be a vital component of motivation and learning. Over the past three decades, researchers have conducted studies on the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. From the various studies that have been conducted it was determined that “students with high self-efficacy in various academic domains choose to engage in tasks that foster the development of their knowledge, skills, and abilities in those areas; exert effort in the face of difficulty; and persist longer at challenging tasks (Artino, 2012, p. 80).” Studies have also shown that a student’s self-efficacy may be a more significant predictor of motivation and academic achievement rather than actual skills. From this belief, scholars have suggested that teachers not only foster knowledge and skill attainment, but to also incorporate activities and an environment that promotes a healthy self-efficacy (Artino, 2012).

### **Social and Emotional Support**

One of the greatest determinants of academic achievement of homeless students is access to social and emotional support provided by relatives, peers, school personnel, and community members. Specifically, results point to the importance of self-management and growth mindset as protective factors for HHM students and suggest the benefit of targeting these skills to promote positive school outcomes for this vulnerable population. However, more research is needed to develop a better understanding of how exposure to



specific policies or interventions may foster social-emotional learning for high-risk student populations and improve their educational success (Baharav et al., 2017).

Homelessness can disrupt a family's social network as they may be disconnected from their family, friends, teachers, and community. Perhaps one of the most damaging effects of residential instability is that it may cause families to be isolated from their viable social and emotional resources (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater, & Haber, 2012). Studies have found that persons without a supportive social network are at risk for psychological and physical problems as they lack an essential factor that can only be fulfilled through interpersonal relationships (Carton, Young, & Kelly, 2009). Cook-Craig and Koehly (2011) provided information on the importance of social support among homeless families: (a) there is an association between social support and fewer episodes of homelessness; (b) social support serves as an important factor in the re-stabilization of homeless families; and (c) a lack of social support is one of the most significant barriers to getting out of homelessness.

Emerging research suggests that homeless youth who are able to access different sources of social support experience improved outcomes across several domains. Research with populations other than homeless youth has generally conceptualized family and kin as providers of bonding capital. Family is often the main source of bridging social capital among homeless youth. Home-based peers (i.e. friends these youth had prior to becoming homeless) and professional staff are other crucial sources of bridging social capital for these youth. These relationships are generally more resourceful

(instrumentally) and provide secure models of attachment and a sense of belonging for these youth (emotionally) (Barman-Adhikari, Bowen, Bender, Brown, & Rice, 2016).

As part of a longitudinal social network panel study of homeless youth utilizing drop-in centers in Los Angeles, California, a sample of 1,046 youth ages 13–24 was surveyed between October 2011 and June 2013. The researcher found that youth who were residing in the street was consistently linked to having less emotional and instrumental support from all sources of social support, with the exception of instrumental. Youth who identified as Caucasian were more likely to report having emotional support from street-based peers, while youth who identified as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and questioning/queer) were less likely to report having instrumental support from homebased peers. In addition, youth who were homeless longer had limited support from bridging relationships (i.e. they were significantly less likely to report having emotional support from home-based peers and family). Traveling or transient youth were significantly less likely to report having instrumental support from their street-based peers. Regarding youths' victimization experiences, youth exposed to physical abuse prior to leaving home were more likely to report having emotional support from home-based peers and street-based peers, but were less likely to report having emotional support from family. Street victimized youth were significantly more likely to report having emotional and instrumental support from all sources of support, suggesting that youth with previous exposure to street victimization may in fact seek various forms of support as a potential coping mechanism (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2016).

Perhaps the most influential constituent of supporting resiliency among HHM youth is having a close relationship with a competent adult (Sulkowski, 2016). Rahman et al. (2015) believed the following:

With the appropriate support, many homeless youth can develop positive attributes, strong social skills, and a sense of purpose. Structural external support can contribute to the positive development of protective social skills and a sense of purpose among homeless youth. Intervention programs that provide supportive permanent connections have been definitively shown to benefit homeless youth. Recognition and support of homeless youths' positive attributes can increase their capacity to become well-functioning adults. (p. 701)

### **Evidence-Based Programs**

There are many layers to the phenomena of homelessness, as it is triggered by several factors and impacts the individual, families, and communities in various ways. Therefore, interventions targeted at homelessness need to be addressed more holistically. Unfortunately, most of the interventions that homeless individuals receive are fragmented, only taking into account a few of the cause and effect variables of homelessness (e.g., substance abuse and housing or employment and housing). One of the main variables that some organizations do not include in their service delivery is the role that social and emotional support plays in resiliency among homeless individuals (Kilmer et al., 2012).

To promote school-wide resiliency, educational institutions should implement evidence-based interventions in order to address the unique needs of their school. To

date, relatively little research exists on the effectiveness of any interventions designed to promote school success or learning in HHM students (Masten et al., 2015). Much work needs to be done to educate school communities about ways to deal with the prevalence of complex trauma associated with homelessness and high mobility, its manifestation in schools, and the development of trauma-sensitive environments (Terrasi & Crain de Galarce, 2017).

Scholars have advocated for school social work reform efforts, such as engaging in primary prevention strategies, promoting the adoption of evidence-based practices, and using schoolwide interventions that target contextual changes (Kelly et al., 2015). Research-based practices that have been proven to enlighten the educational experience of urban schools are social-emotional learning programs and trauma-informed care approaches. Social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed care (TIC) are often discussed, researched, and practiced as separate fields. However, in the context of students experiencing homelessness, the two fields have interrelated characteristics that when addressed in tandem, can help a student succeed in school. For many students, homelessness is a traumatic event in and of itself. While everyone can benefit from the continual growth of social-emotional skills, students experiencing homelessness need an approach that is trauma-sensitive in order to be successful (New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, n.d.).

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

For years, students that were in need of academic and behavioral support received remediation or specialized education services outside of the classroom. However, this

method seldom improved the needs of the students that were exhibited inside the classroom. However, integrating social and emotional learning opportunities into well-planned instruction may provide students with an opportunity to learn, practice, and generalize new social skills in an authentic and meaningful way. Unfortunately, SEL programs are still being neglected to this day because of traditional academic emphasis on the three “R’s” of reading, writing, and arithmetic in the American educational system. Components of social and emotional development are critically associated with academic and life success (Morris, McGuire, & Walker, 2017; Konishi & Park, 2017).

In today’s 21st century classroom, it is imperative that leaders understand that a combination of academic and social and emotional learning is crucial for achieving the educational goals of students; especially those in at-risk categories (homelessness, race, socioeconomic status). This is imperious as a significant population of children comes to school with insufficient skills in behavioral and emotion regulation, social awareness and communication (Martinsone, 2016).

A well-established body of research finds that children living in poverty have a higher risk of developing a variety of social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Children who are homeless face all the adversities that children in poverty face, along with the additional risks associated with unstable housing. Living in persistent poverty impacts every area of a child’s life, from lack of basic needs such as nutrition, regular health and dental care, and adequate clothing, to lack of opportunities for positive social development, psychological, physical, and educational well-being (Thistle-Elliott, 2014).

The idea of social-emotional learning has been brought to the attention of educators by Daniel Goleman (1995) in his elaboration of the concept of emotional intelligence (previously developed by Leuner, 1966; Greenspan, 1989; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). According to Martinsone (2016),

Emotional intelligence includes the ability to identify and regulate one's emotions in an appropriate way as well as to recognize and tolerate emotions of others. The ability to behave adequately, to manage one's emotions and overcome difficulties not only leads to personal satisfaction and psychological well-being, but also strengthens one's sense of belonging and increases motivation. (p. 58)

As a population, homeless students often display extensive and unmet social-emotional and academic needs. Fortunately, developments in the school-based service delivery now allow for more fluid and comprehensive supports that can be provided to at-risk students across different dimensions of need (i.e., academic, medical, mental health) and at different levels of intensity (i.e., universal/preventative service delivery, legally mandated accommodations). Therefore, in light of existing laws and emerging service-delivery paradigms, mental health and educational professionals now possess a range of options to help support homeless students at school (Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014).

One of those options has been the implementation of school-wide social and emotional learning programs; which has played a critical role in positively impacting the academic, social, and emotional success of students. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which children develop their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving, to achieve important life tasks. SEL is made up of five

competencies: (a) Self-Awareness: knowing one's own feeling, evaluating one's own competence realistically and developing self-reliance; (b) Social Awareness: understanding other people's emotions, comprehending their points of view by respecting different opinions, and interacting with them positively; (c) Self-Management: managing emotions to do something easily, being persistent with accomplishing a goal, not losing ambition when confronted with troubles, and continuing to work; (d) Relationship Skills: using emotions to communicate effectively, maintaining this communication healthfully and in cooperation, being resistant to negative social pressure, trying to resolve conflicts, and asking for help when needed; and (e) Responsible Decision Making: considering all possible factors when making a decision, reaching appropriate conclusion by taking into consideration different points of view, and taking responsibility for decisions (Konishi & Park, 2017; Arslan & Demirtas, 2016).

Research over the past two decades has revealed overwhelming positive results for SEL implemented in k-12 schools. A meta-analysis including 213 rigorous studies and over 270,000 students demonstrated that students who received SEL programs performed better than students who did not. They showed an eleven percentile-point gain on measures of academic achievement and similar significant improvements in conduct and discipline, prosocial behavior, and/or emotional distress (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). This also proves that academic growth and student behavior are intricately linked. Schools that systematically address both academic and social-emotional learning have shown increased student achievement when compared to schools that do not address both factors (Morris, McGuire, & Walker, 2017).

In 2011, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (as cited in Morris, McGuire, & Walker, 2017) found that systematic attention to SEL increased students' capacity to learn. Students demonstrated an increase in academic achievement and social-emotional skills; improvement in attitudes toward themselves and positive social behaviors; and decreased conduct problems and emotional distress. These findings were consistent across K-12 grade levels, school locations, and in schools serving diverse communities, suggesting that this approach has promise for all learners, when implemented effectively.

Educators play a tremendous role in providing social and emotional learning to students who may not obtain these skills from their homes or communities. Therefore, by implementing SEL programs in schools, the program becomes an integral part of the education process thus promoting sustainability. The integration of academic and social-emotional learning is an approved approach for developing each student's full potential (Martinsone, 2016).

### **Trauma-Informed Care**

Youth homelessness is an experience of trauma, loss, and instability, which categorizes them as a vulnerable and at-risk population. This vulnerability and exposure to trauma can have a huge impact on their academic achievement. In order to help alleviate barriers, schools and social organizations must begin to provide holistic wrap-around services that address the psychological, physical, emotional, social, and academic needs of homeless youth (Duffield & Cohen; 2017).



Childhood trauma is a significant concern that adversely impacts its victim's health, social, emotional, and cognitive development. In the United States an estimated 26% of children will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four years old. National data suggest that one in four school aged children has experienced a traumatic event. This number is even higher for youth residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods and racial/ethnic minority youth who are at increased risk for chronic or ongoing exposures. Exposure to multiple adverse and traumatic childhood experiences has been shown to be associated with poor attention and impulse control, difficulties regulating emotions, aggression, and self-harming behavior that impedes children's ability to interact with others and function in the classroom (McConnico, Boynton-Jarrett, Bailey, & Nandi, 2016).

Traditional systems of education have not been structured to address the unique needs of children who have experienced trauma. Experiencing toxic stress has the ability to significantly impact the development of healthy attachment and the ability to feel safe, trust others, and feel a sense of power or control over one's self and life. A trauma-sensitive classrooms framework takes this fact into consideration and results in systems creating policies and practices that empower, build resiliency, and support the optimal development of children and their families impacted by trauma (McConnico et al., 2016).

Within the past five years, there has been a growing interest in how trauma affects students and how schools can respond by improving their educational practices. Trauma-informed schools is an umbrella term for several different approaches which share some core proposals for change but otherwise can vary widely. An effective trauma-informed

care approach is one that: understands that compassion has the power to heal; places priority on the power of relationships in order to create change; and that assuring safety should be a right of all children (Vitopoulos, Kielburger, Frederick, McKenzie, & Kidd, 2017).

A trauma-informed school can be characterized as providing a safe environment for students and staff, free from physical harm and re-traumatization; a genuine collaboration between school and parent, community, and agencies; and acknowledgment of the role that violence has in the lives of children. The aim of having a trauma-informed care service delivery model is that an emphasis is placed on skill building and acquisition rather than symptom management. For example, intervention models that target homelessness itself as the core problem (with focus on housing, employment, and school engagement) are criticized for overlooking the influences of trauma and mental health on the situations and choices of youth (Wilson & Nochajski, 2016).

The provision of a trauma-informed care service delivery model requires change in organizational cultures so that the school is not only safe for students, but for staff and administrators as well. This requires a school cultural shift in management of conducting day-to-day business (Wilson & Nochajski, 2016). Regardless of the root of the trauma, those working in a capacity to support children can benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of how trauma affects child development and what intervention efforts have been effective in helping children heal. Schools interested in becoming trauma-responsive must partner with early care and education programs to design a continuum of support services across the prenatal through college age spectrum. In addition,

assessment at any age must include a thorough exploration of an individual's early childhood experiences and, if applicable, interventions that respond to the developmental impact that likely occurred at the time of trauma exposure (Walkley & Cox, 2013).

### **Historical Overview of School Social Work**

The school social work profession emerged out of the settlement house movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beginning in Boston, MA; Hartford, CT; and New York, NY, in the early 1900s. During this time, the practice of school social work formed from policies surrounding compulsory school attendance. School social workers at this time were known as “visiting teachers” who enforced the attendance laws through home visits and other interventions (Johnson & Nealis, 2014). It was not until 1913 that the first Board of Education initiated and financed a formal visiting teacher program, placing visiting teachers in special departments of the school under the administration and direction of the superintendent of schools; with Chicago Public Schools employing their first school social workers in 1919 (Allen-Mearns, 2017).

During the 1930s, the practice of school social work began to shift from enforcing the compulsory attendance laws and serving as the community liaison to providing case work services for students. School social workers began to focus on the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students. Casework that addressed student’s behavioral, social, and emotional needs became the main function of school social workers from the 1940s to the 1960s (Peckover, Vasquez, Housen, Saunders, & Allen, 2012).

The inequality of schools due to racial segregation brought forth various attacks and policies in regards to the public school system. The public discussions on school

reform during this time also brought out a change in practice for school social workers (Allen-Meares, 2017). Relationships between schools and their communities became a primary area of concern. Although many school social workers continued using social casework as a framework for practice, an emphasis on relationships between schools and their communities began to build (Peckover et al., 2012). The enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965; which is a law that ensures equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of their background, also shaped the role of school social workers. ESEA was significant in that it expanded the role of the school social worker by providing additional responsibilities and funds to offer those services (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

During the 1970s the number of school social workers increased; with an emphasis on role responsibility being placed on family, community, collaborating with other school staff, and the education of handicapped pupils (Allen-Meares, 2017). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA) was passed ensure that all students, regardless of their disability, would have access to a free and appropriate public education. EAHCA influenced the practice of school social work by describing their role as completing social histories, providing individual and group counseling, mobilizing community resources, and linking home and school to help students' adjustment (Richard & Sosa, 2014). In 1976, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) developed the first standards for school social-work services, which were grouped into three areas: attainment of competence, organization and administration, and professional practice (Allen-Meares, 2017).

In the 1980s school social workers were included as “qualified personnel” in Part H of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, the Early Intervention for Handicapped Infants and Toddlers, and the Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (Allen-Meares, 2017). National organizations supporting school social work grew in the 1990s. The increasing challenge of educating more diverse and disadvantaged students motivated the establishment of national standards for practice and qualification requirements for the practice of school social work (Richard & Sosa, 2014). The NASW has been at the forefront in establishing these guidelines and standards in the form of the Code of Ethics for social workers, as well as specific standards for school social workers. Over the years, the NASW standards have been revised to contextualize this field of practice within new knowledge, new policies, and laws (Allen-Meares, 2017).

For centuries, the common purpose of school social workers was to address the needs of impoverished children in order for them to obtain a meaningful educational experience. The running moniker was that the school social worker served as the link between the school, home, and community. To stay abreast of current indicators that are impacting youth and their academic performance, the profession of school social work now includes a special emphasis on mental health services for school children suffering from social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Joseph, Slovak, & Broussard, 2010; Sabatino, Alvarez, & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011).

### **School Social Work**

School social workers are trained professionals that are employed in a P-12 educational system. Most states require that a school social worker have at least a Master of Social Work Degree; with some states also requiring licensure as a Master or Clinical Social Worker. The central job responsibility of a school social worker is to help remove barriers that impede on a student's academic success. This task is completed through direct and indirect services provided to the student, their family, community, or school. School social work is distinguished from other school-based professions by its emphasis on serving marginalized and oppressed populations. The theoretical frameworks that drive this profession are anchored in the Afrocentric Perspective and the Social Capital Approach (Richard & Sosa, 2014).

Generally, school social workers support student learning via clinical casework, primary prevention, and response to intervention (RtI) by way of direct service, service coordination, and advocacy. School social workers provide a comprehensive approach in working with students and their families in the areas of attendance; social and emotional issues; behavior; mental health; academic support; homelessness; economic issues; and medical assistance (Richard & Sosa, 2014; Huffman, 2012).

A school social work practice model was created by the School Social Work Association of America in 2008. Kelly et al. (2015) developed and distributed an updated national school social work survey to assess the utilization of the school social work practice model that was created in 2008. The researchers' goal was to update knowledge of school social work practice by examining how practitioner characteristics, practice

context, and practice choices have evolved since the previous 2008 survey. The model contains three broad practice goals for school social workers: (a) to provide evidence-based educational, behavioral, and mental health services; (b) to promote a school climate and culture conducive to learning; and (c) to maximize access to school and community-based resources.

In relation to the first goal of the application of evidence-based programs, it was found that school social workers are using resources to identify evidence-based programs; implementing supports across the multi-tiered model (RtI); and using at least some tools to evaluate practice with some regularity. The second goal which encourages school social workers to promote a school culture that is conducive to learning, the researchers examined the differences between the respondents' actual and ideal time spent on the three levels of intervention. It was concluded that this practice feature is being implemented less frequently by school social workers. The third goal concentrated on school social workers maximizing access to school and community-based resources. It was found that a majority of the respondents reported engaging in the provision of family and community supports frequently. The researchers concluded that this service was provided more by school social workers than any other service and what distinguishes them from other school support staff (Kelly et al., 2015).

Franklin, Kim, and Tripodi (as cited in Huffman, 2012) conducted a study to determine the impact social workers had on the emotional, behavioral, and academic conditions of at-risk students. It was found that students who had a school social work intervention were less likely to have outward behavior resulting in discipline at school

and are less likely to suffer from depression. This shows how essential school social workers are in the academic setting as they are in the position to help students, families, and the school develop social competence and increase the school's responsiveness to the needs of students and the community (Huffman, 2012).

Schools need school social workers to provide equal opportunity to students who experience oppression, marginalization, trauma, or crisis, in order to reduce the number of students not reaching their full social and academic potential (Huffman, 2012). The responsibility for preparing knowledgeable and competent school social workers falls on undergraduate and graduate educational institutions and the senior administration in P-12 schools in the form of access to professional development. A properly educated school social worker learns how to practice in diverse settings with multidisciplinary teams in order to address the array of challenges that their students are faced with that impedes their academic achievement (Sabatino, Alvarez, & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011).

### **Competency**

The Council on Social Work Education (2015) defines competency as measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, and skills. The goal of this approach is to demonstrate the integration and application of competencies in practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The competency components of knowledge and skills were emphasized in this study as it relates to the perceived effectiveness of school social worker's practice with homeless students. "Knowledge is the understanding of facts, truths and principles gained from formal training and/or experience. Application and sharing of one's knowledge base is critical to



individual and organizational success. A skill is a developed proficiency in mental operations or physical processes that is often acquired through specialized training; the execution of these skills results in effective job performance (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, n.d.).”

### **Knowledge**

Social workers utilize their professional knowledge and skills to help children who are at risk, who are having difficulties, or who are disabled succeed in school (Openshaw, 2008). One of these at-risk populations are African Americans students, as they experience a higher rate of poverty and homelessness when compared to other minorities and Caucasians. This attribute requires school social workers to be culturally competent when working with this population. Culturally competent school social work practice addresses the needs of a diverse population by enabling practitioners to gain skills, knowledge, and the ability to work with students from various cultures and backgrounds (Canfield, 2014).

In order for school social workers to be effective in serving homeless students; the school social worker must be comfortable in their knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act and their role in identifying homeless students, assessing their needs, and being able to ascertain any barriers and facilitators of their service delivery. School social work practice with this population revolves around the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act; however, knowledge on the rights and services under this Act remains a challenge for some school social workers; which reduces the opportunity of homeless students receiving school social work services (Canfield, 2014).

Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) found that many homeless liaisons were unaware that they had been designated with this role by their school district and had little knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. This finding is particularly important as the awareness of the needs and policies regarding a population can influence the perception of an issue and affect practice. Since experience is linked with practice competence and knowledge, different levels of licensure may result in varying levels of awareness for the needs of a given population. Practitioners with higher levels of licensure may be more cognizant of the needs of a population, the supports offered in a given service area, and the aspects that affect a given outcome, thus influencing perceptions of barriers and facilitators to practice (Canfield, 2014).

Often times, school social workers are unaware of their role in impacting the academic success of the homeless students in their school. The McKinney-Vento Act outlines specific duties that the school and or district must carry out in regards to homeless students: (a) identify through school-based personnel or other outside agencies; (b) enroll, and have full and equal opportunities to succeed in school; (c) refer to health care, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other appropriate services; (d) inform of the educational and related opportunities available to them; (e) refer for transportation assistance, when deemed appropriate; (f) facilitate professional development workshops for school personnel and community agencies on the rights and services of the McKinney-Vento Act; (g) display posters and brochures on the McKinney-Vento Act at locations frequented by families and youth experiencing homelessness; (h) collect data regarding the services homeless students receive and their

academic outcomes; and (i) have written guidelines and procedures on the identification, enrollment, and dispute process for homeless students. Through the use of McKinney-Vento grant funds or Title I set aside, homeless liaisons are able to allocate funds to purchase or pay for clothing; school supplies; fees associated with extra-curricular activities; immunizations and other medical and health related services; counseling; and other educational services, such as tutoring and summer enrichment programs (National Center for Homeless Education, 2018).

Homeless students often come to the attention of school social workers because of concerns about learning disabilities, behavior concerns, attendance or a decline in academic performance (Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005). When providing direct service to homeless children and youth, school social workers must communicate with students, their caregivers, and the school in order to identify the risk and protective factors associated with each concern in order to gain a better understanding of each factor's role in the presenting problem (Canfield, 2014). School social workers are an integral piece in working with homeless students as they provide the needed understanding and support in helping these students overcome barriers that exist due to nontraditional family circumstances (Huffman, 2012).

As school social workers play a vital role in the implementation of services rendered under the McKinney-Vento Act, their perceived effectiveness of their practice in the context of their knowledge is imperative. School social workers should be knowledgeable of the barriers or facilitators that affect their practice of working with homeless students as this provides insight into the implementation of the McKinney-

Vento Act itself (Canfield, 2014). One way school social workers are able to identify these barriers and facilitators is through the use of formal and informal assessments.

School social workers can improve the identification of both students and resources to determine the effectiveness of services. They can conduct needs assessments and determine whether interventions meet those needs. Perhaps more important, school social workers are challenged to measure multiple methods of intervention and determine which ones work best in particular situations and under certain circumstances (Markward & Biros, 2001). School social workers need to be knowledgeable about various resources and how to connect homeless students and their families with the appropriate services (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

In order to improve their knowledge of practice with homeless students, there is a growing need for continuing education programs for school social workers who are beyond entry level (Sabatino, Alvarez, & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). To increase knowledge and compliance, schools need to educate school social workers on their function and roles in order to overcome barriers to appropriate service delivery. When homeless liaisons and school social workers are knowledgeable; they are able to play their key roles of parent and staff educator and system advocate. Purposeful awareness-raising efforts would help increase compliance with McKinney-Vento requirements, as well as decrease stereotyping and other negative attitudes toward homeless students and families that impede their emotional and academic growth (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

**Skills**

Since the 1980s, education reform, through the passage of federal, state, and local policies has greatly impacted the roles and responsibilities of school social workers (Peckover et al., 2012). Though, for some time, the primary focus of school social work has been to provide links between the home, school, and community by removing barriers towards academic success for students. School social workers use their skills to understand the needs of the community and serve as advocates for students and their families. This is to ensure that students receive the maximum benefit from public education and other internal and external supportive services. This builds on the historical context of school social work and identifies strategies and best practices, such as response to intervention (RtI) and social and emotional learning (SEL), that can be utilized under current federal policies to address the growing needs of students (Johnson & Nealis, 2014).

All services rendered by school social workers should unmistakably support the academic achievement of students. Due to their specialized training in systems theory, leadership, advocacy, coordination, and collaborations, school social workers have the expertise to align their services that support RtI and SEL in schools. These programs can be expanded by the school social worker and in partnership with other school support staff. Together, they can capitalize on their schools' delivery of educational services to maximize positive behavioral, developmental, and academic outcomes (Johnson & Nealis, 2014).

Alvarez, Bye, Bryant, & Mumm (2013) conducted a study of the nation's 100 largest school districts. The study focused on the number of school social workers a district employed in relation to the district's graduation rate. It was found that the number of school workers in a school district positively influences the number of students who graduated high school, even while controlling for poverty. However, as a limitation, the study did not address the impact of specific school work interventions and how this may or may not have contributed to the increase in the graduation rate.

In many ways, teachers, counselors, social workers, other personnel encountered by HHM students and their parents represent the best opportunities for these highly disadvantaged families to connect with the educational resources and protective influences crucial to the success of these children (Masten et al., 2015). Baharav et al. (2017) listed eight provisions schools and districts can implement in order to improve the conditions for HHM students, which include: (a) evaluating student outcomes; (b) considering schools with high concentrations of homeless students; (c) reviewing and revising policies that might disproportionately impact homeless students; (d) addressing enrollment barriers; (e) developing services for homeless preschoolers; (f) supporting homeless students' access to college and career; (g) developing and facilitating collaboration and coordination with various service providers; and, (h) assigning school liaisons to support homeless students on school sites.

It is crucial that schools proactively identify and reach out to students of homeless and highly mobile families as schools can consistently provide the stability, connectedness, and support that these students need. By doing this, it can promote

academic achievement and resiliency among this vulnerable population (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010). In fact, homeless youth who have access to support (human and financial capital) are less likely to experience stress; and those who receive emotional support may have more positive self-evaluations and a stronger self-efficacy (Haye et al., 2012).

Without social support from adults and peers, students' self-esteem can suffer as researchers have frequently identified self-efficacy as a core component of youth empowerment programs. Although empowerment strategies may benefit all youth, this approach may be especially useful for youth experiencing homelessness. Empowering youth with limited access to major resources may help them develop hope and the coping skills needed to become resilient students and adults (Eisman et al., 2016; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003).

Therefore, schools are vital institutions that aid in fostering a positive self-efficacy in its student population. School leaders build upon effective programs and alleviate barriers to student academic achievement. They also create an atmosphere where teachers have a sense of instructional efficacy. In this environment, teachers view their students as being capable of academic success and set challenging academic standards and provide support when needed. In contrary, low-achieving schools often have school leaders that function more as disciplinarians. In this environment, teachers often do not expect much academically from their students and may write them off as being unteachable. Students in these schools often have low self-efficacy and a bleak sense of academic achievement (Santrock, 2003).

Homeless students that attend school consistently see educational outcomes similar to housed students. This highlights the vital importance of the school's role in helping all students attend school regularly. This can be done by schools engaging the student body, parents, and larger community by incorporating programs that are aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism. Steps that a school can take in alleviating this multidimensional problem is to facilitate before and after school activities, mentorship, immediately notifying parents when a student is absent from school, and linking families with resources that address their non-academic needs (Da Costa Nunez, Erb-Downward, & Shaw-Amoah, 2015).

### **Collaboration**

Homeless children and youth experience various shortcomings related to their residential status. One of the greatest forms of impact is related to their academic performance. In order to lessen the negative effects of youth homelessness, schools must collaborate with students, parents, and community agencies to ensure that these youth are provided with additional academic and social support. This type of collaboration is typically facilitated through a homeless liaison or school social worker (Wilkins, Mullins, Mahan, & Canfield, 2015).

In order to be effective in their field of practice in working with homeless students, school social workers must not work in isolation, but have ongoing collaboration with specific individuals. Effectiveness in this role stems from how well they interact with other professionals such as school counselors, psychologists, teachers, administrators, homeless liaisons, and other school staff; homeless students and their



families; and community organizations. It is imperative that school social workers foster a collaborative effort in working with homeless students to ensure that the student is provided with a support system that creates the best atmosphere for student learning and development (Bye & Alvarez, 2007).

Parents are an integral member of the collaborative team when working with homeless students as they can often provide additional information that may not be known or readily available at the school. This is especially true for younger homeless students who may not be able to express their needs, strengths, and barriers in regards to their social and academic well-being. For that reason, school social workers should involve homeless students' parents when making decisions on their behalf. School social workers also collaborate with parents by referring the family to community organizations that address issues not covered by the school such as housing, employment, or medical needs. These resources also alleviate barriers that impede the academic success of children who experience homelessness.

Effective school social workers collaborate with representatives from community agencies in order to provide homeless students with wraparound services aimed at reducing barriers to the student's learning. The term wraparound services refers to a system in which services are family-based and coordinated so that the family does not have to go from agency to agency to track down the help it needs (Bye & Alvarez, 2007). By acting as a conduit of information, school social workers identify community resources, develop an information-sharing relationship between the school and outside

organizations, and keep administrators updated; homeless children and youth will have greater access to an appropriate education (Markward & Biros, 2001).

School social workers should also collaborate with school staff in the form of facilitating professional development trainings to staff on student homelessness. Teachers are the professionals who students spend most of their time with during the school day. Teachers are also the chief personnel in educating the students. However, many teachers may not be aware of how homelessness affects student's behavior, academic, and social needs. School social workers can provide school staff with information on the specific issues faced by homeless students and how those issues may be manifested academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and developmentally. School social workers can specifically address how teachers can support the academic success of homeless students by providing a nurturing, positive, and understanding environment. School social workers should also inform staff on the rights and services provided to homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Act in order to access various resources. Increasing teachers' sensitivities to the unique needs, interests, and capacities of homeless students could possibly increase the academic achievement of homeless students (Fram & Altshuler, 2009).

### **School Culture**

The role and function of a school social worker can vary across states, districts, and even schools within the same district. Each school has a unique culture that makes it necessary for school social workers to be adaptive in practicing in diverse environments and with diverse students. Role development is a combination of both a social worker's

competence and the perception of the school's culture (Richard & Sosa, 2014). School culture is the set of shared values, beliefs and norms that influence the way educators and administrators think, feel and behave in the school. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to the school's culture (Doğan, 2017). The fundamental components of school culture include interpersonal relationships between staff and the students and behavioral norms that stimulate feelings of safety. When students have positive relationships with teachers and school staff they tend to feel connected to the school, avoid unsafe and disruptive behavior, and perform well academically (Hopson, Schiller, & Lawson, 2014). Therefore, school culture impacts the effectiveness of the student and practitioner (Doğan, 2017).

Social processes within the school culture also influence student academic performance (Hopson et al., 2014). Sometimes school may be the only sense of stability a homeless student may experience. Schools may also serve as one of the few sources where homeless students are exposed to positive productive adults. With school staff members serving as formal or informal mentors to homeless students; it increases the likelihood of that student graduating from high school. This form of rapport highlights how academic achievement can be amplified due to interventions aimed at a student's social and emotional needs (Mizerek & Hinz, 2004).

Within the past twenty years, schools have been under extreme pressure in meeting nationwide standardized academic goals. This pressure is even more intimidating for schools in urban communities as they tend to fall on the lower end of meeting those academic objectives. Schools are required to account for students who are not performing

well. In the end, educators are often blamed for these students. However, policymakers often do not take in to consideration the increasing challenges that students face on a daily basis that impacts their academic performance (Berardi & Morton, 2017).

An understanding of the homeless student's needs and behaviors invites schools to take a different approach in addressing the various needs of this sub group of students (Berardi & Morton, 2017). The first step in this process must be for school social workers to develop a welcoming school environment for homeless families (Fram & Altshuler, 2009). At the very least, and if feasible, the school social worker should advocate for homeless students to remain at their school of origin even if permanent housing has been obtained outside of the school's attendance zone. The school social worker should also arrange transportation assistance in order for the student to be transported to and from school. This creates a sense of stability for the homeless student (Bye & Alvarez, 2007). Other ways that school social workers can create a school culture that supports homeless students is by: ensuring homeless students are identified and notified of their rights; allowed to immediately enroll in school even if normally required documents are missing; advocating for fees to be waived in order for the student to participate in extracurricular activities; and facilitating social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care programs.

School staff should be trained in how to respond to children who have suffered trauma. This is imperative in order to ensure that students are comfortable and feels safe in the classroom so that they can perform at their utmost potential (Berardi & Morton, 2017). Practicing in the framework of the trauma-informed care model, the school social

worker works collaboratively with the student, teacher, parent, school administrators, and community agencies. Creating a trauma-informed school culture is an ongoing process, as there may be constant changes from student transiency to high teacher turnover.

Though, it is the school social worker's responsibility to be a catalyst, educator, and advocate of creating a trauma-informed school culture. In order to create this type of school culture, the school social worker must facilitate ongoing in-service trainings with school staff on trauma of homelessness and how it may impact the student's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being. The school social workers provide staff, especially teachers, in how to interpret students' behaviors as potentially trauma reactive, as opposed to purposefully and consciously oppositional; how to respond to behaviors in non-triggering ways; and how to create classroom environments that foster every student's sense of safety, respect, and support (Siegal, 2015).

School social workers can make vital steps toward improving school-based service delivery efforts for the homeless students they serve by providing a consistent and caring environment between teachers and students. Knowing that teachers care builds self-esteem and makes students more likely to regularly attend school and put more effort into their schoolwork. Teacher support and peer acceptance have a positive influence on attitudes toward school among children who experience more school mobility (Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014; Moore, 2013).

The effective school social worker should also engage parents, maintaining awareness that they too may have trauma in their backgrounds that could possibly influence how they interact with their children. Trauma-informed school social work

means including trauma assessment in the process, educating parents, supporting them empathically, linking them with needed resources, and helping parents form support networks around shared concerns (Siegal, 2015).

School social workers help create a positive school culture in several ways for homeless students and their families. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between positive school culture and a higher degree of school success. Conceptually, school culture plays an important role in the construction of a school's educational policies, the practice of school social work, and the effectiveness of school social workers. School social workers should be cognizant of their school's culture as it can support or weaken their perceived effectiveness when working with homeless students and their families (Doğan, 2017).

### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act**

#### **Overview of the Policy**

Homelessness and unstable living arrangements for students are nationwide problems, with more than one million youth experiencing homelessness each year. Schools around the country, particularly in urban districts, continue to face many challenges in meeting the needs of students who experience homelessness. Previous studies have shown that these students are at risk for academic and behavioral problems and other challenges related to repeated school changes, frequent absences, and other barriers to school access (Masten et al., 2015).

Out of these challenges arose the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. This Act was adopted in 1988 and reauthorized in 2002, under the No

Child Left Behind Act and in 2015, under the Every Student Succeeds Act. The McKinney-Vento Act was deemed the first systematic attempt to address the needs of the homeless as it provides federal funding to local educational agencies through a grant application process that ensures that all school aged homeless students have access to a free and appropriate public education. The Act defines homelessness as an individual who lacks a fixed, adequate, and regular nighttime residence; that includes youth living in hotels, emergency and transitional shelters, doubled up with friends and or family members, and living in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., cars, parks, abandoned buildings) (Weisman, 2012).

The McKinney-Vento Act also requires each local educational agency to appoint a designated homeless liaison to manage their district's McKinney-Vento Homeless Program. The federal law also mandates that each school district report the number of homeless and unaccompanied youth enrolled in their school to the state department of education who will then give a full count of the number of homeless and unaccompanied youth in the state to the U.S. Department of Education. Funding through the McKinney-Vento legislation is intended to assist the liaisons in removing barriers that may impede on a homeless students academic performance or access. This legislation allows the liaison to advocate on behalf of homeless students by: immediate enrollment in school, whether it be in their school of origin or the school zoned for their current address; transportation assistance to and from school; and by not segregating these students based on their homeless status (Masten et al., 2015).

Even though the number of homeless and unaccompanied youth is underreported, the nation's homeless school-age population has increased by 41% over the past few years. This recent growth in the number of homeless students has intensified the need to provide effective programs for homeless students and has increased the need to evaluate the academic efficacy of such programs (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012).

School social workers are usually the gatekeepers of the McKinney-Vento program, functioning as a homeless liaison in central offices or as school-based personnel implementing the authorized activities for homeless youth and their families. Therefore, school social workers are on the frontline of addressing the growing problem and challenges experienced by homeless students. These problems that school social workers often notice when overseeing the problem are in the areas of service delivery, identification, and high mobility (Weisman, 2012).

Funding received under this Act may not be used to create alternative programming for eligible students, but only to expand upon or improve services as part of the regular academic program (Weisman, 2012). One study investigating this phenomenon found that 32% of homeless liaisons reported that lack of coordination between liaisons and school staff complicates school-based service delivery. Similarly, in a survey of homeless liaisons in the state of New York, evidence was found that some school personnel purposely do not identify homeless students or refer them for services because of the stigma associated with being labeled homeless; concerns they had about the confidentiality of these students educational records; and concerns that referring these



students would not result in a significant increase in the services they receive (Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014).

Another study conducted by Miller (as cited in Uretsky & Stone, 2016) discussed the challenges in defining and identifying students who are homeless and shows that existing data, particularly data generated from shelter systems, likely underestimate the extent of homelessness among students. In practice, national estimates of student homelessness are typically calculated using district counts of students participating in McKinney-Vento homeless programs. Although district-level administrative data likely underestimate the extent of student homelessness, they do capture a broad range of unstable housing arrangements that further represents the experiences of homeless students.

Current federal initiatives require that state and local education agencies be held accountable for the education of highly mobile students; however, they only address specific portions of the highly mobile population. While these laws are intended to better serve a troubled population, they target only specific groups of students, leaving a significant portion of the population underserved. Because of strict district zoning requirements and a lack of transportation, homeless youth must often change schools as a result of a residential move. It is estimated that some students must transfer schools five or six times before finding a stable residence. In some cases, students may be eligible to attend their school of origin despite a move; however, they may still find that any slight disruption caused by the move, including short term absence, leaves them weeks behind or with the loss of a semester's worth of credit (Weisman, 2012).

Overall, the homeless student population is on the rise, with no signs of lessening. At the same time, local and state educational systems are continually finding it challenging to respond to the needs of homeless and unaccompanied youth, even with the enactment of federal legislations like the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. Though perplexing, these federal initiatives are of critical importance, and their aim to address the needs of the growing number of homeless students remains of value to this vulnerable population. These programs play a vital role in expressing U.S. federal resolve to provide homeless students with services and supports to address their unique educational, social, and economic conditions (Rahman et al., 2015).

### **Historical Analysis**

The continued alarming rise in the numbers of American homeless families and youth has inspired several federal targeted initiatives to support the education of homeless children and youth (Rahman et al., 2015). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is legislation that was enacted as the first federal response to homelessness in 1987. This legislation was originally called Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, but was renamed following the deaths of Representative Stewart B. McKinney (Republican) and Bruce Vento (Democrat), who were the chief sponsors of this legislation. There were various emergency programs implemented under this Act such as shelter programs, transitional housing programs, permanent housing programs, as well as physical and mental health care coverage for the homeless. In addition to this, the McKinney-Vento legislation also enacted programs for the education of homeless children and adults, and expanded food assistance to those experiencing homelessness

and those close to being homeless. Most significantly, during this time, this legislation established a federal definition of homelessness (Better, 2012).

Before the McKinney-Vento legislation of the 1980s, there was the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and the Runaway and Homeless Youth program (RHY) which were in response to the rising number of homeless Americans during the 1970s. The establishment of the RHY was actually the first federal program that focused on homeless individuals regardless of age. In 1977 the RHY program became the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); it remains the sole federal program that services unaccompanied homeless youth. RHYA provides grants to states and local communities to fund street outreach programs, counseling, drop-in centers, food, clothing, shelter referrals, transitional housing, education support, and mental and health services (Rahman et al., 2015).

In 1990 the Act was amended to establish that no barriers could be put in place to prevent homeless children from enrolling in school. Also, at this time, state education departments were allowed to begin to award grants for the removal of barriers of kids enrolling in school. This means that they were able to receive grant funding to develop before and after school programs, tutoring, and mental and physical health programs. Again in 1994 the Act was amended. At that time, the services were extended to cover homeless children in pre-school and homeless students who attend faith-affiliated schools. In 2001, McKinney-Vento was reauthorized through the No Child Left Behind Act. This reauthorization expanded the definition of homelessness, strived to decrease

school mobility and provide services to homeless students without segregating them from students with permanent housing (Better, 2012).

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (HEARTH) revised the age of homeless youth to 21 and redefined school and supportive services available to homeless youth. The HEARTH Act offered federal guidelines to ensure that homeless youth have access to school and shelter programs administered by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and HUD (Housing and Urban Development) programs until age 21. In January 2011, HUD, the main federal funding agency for homeless shelters, expanded the definition of homeless youth to include those 21 years of age, with special provisions for homeless youth with developmental delays and/or physical, mental, and emotional disorders (Rahman et al., 2015).

Over the past four decades, legislation regarding the services and rights of youth experiencing homelessness has undergone various revisions in order to service the unique needs of this population. As the nation continues to increase in population, interlaced with a fluctuating economy, service providers, advocates, and politicians are sure to make additional revisions in the years to come.

### **Social Analysis**

Homeless and highly mobile students are at a higher risk of academic failure and other long-term negative outcomes. Additionally, many homeless students have disabilities and experience academic and social-emotional problems that jeopardize their success in school and beyond. Some of the negative outcomes for children who

experience homelessness include poor school performance, hunger/food insecurity, poor physical health, poor mental health, exposure to violence, and juvenile delinquency. However, in spite of these problems, research indicates that homeless youth do not receive adequate evaluation, intervention, or other needed services to support their complex needs. Without assistance in place to help youth experiencing homelessness, they remain at an even further disadvantage than their housed peers (Wilkins et al., 2015; Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014).

The effects of student mobility permeate the classroom environment and, in turn, the education of non-mobile, stable students. Data from one study show that stable students attending schools with high mobility rates suffer academically, while another confirmed that high school students attending schools with high turnover rates produced test scores that were significantly below average. Perhaps the most significant impact of mobility is felt in the structure and curriculum of the classroom (Weisman, 2012).

Studies have also shown that children experiencing homelessness are more likely to also experience behavioral and emotional problems. Emotionally, these youth have higher rates of aggression and non-compliance, shyness, dependent behavior, withdrawal, anxiety, and depression when compared to the housed counterparts. In addition to this, it has been found that children experiencing homelessness have lower self-esteem, lack peer acceptance, and often carry much shame related to their homeless situation. Homeless children also experience much stress because of a lack of stability. For these reasons, homeless and highly mobile youth also have higher rates of mental health issues.

Unfortunately, less than one third of the homeless children with mental health issues receive help to treat those issues (Betters, 2012).

While students experiencing homelessness have difficulties achieving academic success in school, they also encounter educational barriers prior to registering and enrolling into a school. Even though McKinney-Vento legislation is meant to ensure an appropriate public school education to youth experiencing homelessness, barriers to receiving an education do still exist for these students and families. Such as providing proof of residency, guardianship, medical records, and transportation needs. These requirements may be difficult for homeless family to provide to the school as they are often not able to show proof of residency or pertinent documents may have been misplaced or lost due to frequent moves. However, McKinney-Vento legislation allows a grace period for the families to bring in missing documentation while allowing the student to immediately enroll in school (Betters, 2012).

Homeless youth may also experience a social stigma related to their homelessness, sometimes even more so for students that are residing in shelters. There may also be negative factors associated with living in a shelter besides the stigma. These factors include the possibility of the shelter being noisy and crowded. If a child is living in a place that is noisy and crowded, many activities could be negatively affected including the ability to do homework, to concentrate on doing that homework, and the ability to sleep well and wake up rested. Also, constant mobility between shelter and other places where homeless families reside can have a great impact on students including being able to succeed academically (Betters, 2012).

## **Economic Analysis**

Homelessness carries a financial cost for local municipalities and the federal government. Poverty among children carries an estimated cost of \$500 billion a year and reduces the nation's Gross Domestic Product by 1.3 % annually. Besides the loss of potential earnings for homeless individuals and the loss of state and federal tax revenues, U.S. taxpayers often shoulder the cost of meeting the basic needs of the homeless population, which includes funding and covering the expense of the local homeless population's medical treatment, hospitalization, incarceration, and police intervention, as well as emergency and short-term homeless shelters. On average, the cost of medical treatment for one homeless individual is \$2,444 more than for a non-homeless individual. The annual cost of an emergency shelter bed is approximately \$8,067 more than the average annual cost of a federal housing subsidy (Rahman et al., 2015).

While there have been great benefits since the passage of the McKinney-Vento legislation, however, problems have been cited when pertaining to serving the actual needs of homeless youth. One of the major problems with this legislation is funding. The federal government provides grants to all states that want to take part in helping educate homeless children. The U.S. Department of Education awards funding through the McKinney-Vento Act to states by utilizing a specific formula, and in order to receive federal funds, states are obligated to meet certain requirements. The Act outlines authorized activities in which funding can be utilized, but the allocations, or actual dollar amount has historically been well below what has been authorized. Proponents of this

legislation advocate for additional funding in order to meet the diverse needs of its students (Better, 2012; Crook, 2015).

The amount of funding that a state receives under the McKinney-Vento Act is based on the proportion of funds allocated by Congress each year. Funds earmarked specifically for homeless students, are very limited considering the high number of homeless students attending U.S. public schools. Allocations to support McKinney-Vento homeless programs have not kept up with inflation or demand for services. As a result, only \$45.93 per homeless child is allocated per year as of 2008. Given the residential, financial, and transportation barriers in the paths of homeless children, it is doubtful that \$45.93 per child per year will assist in providing for an adequate education (Crook, 2015).

A less obvious effect of mobility is the strain that it places upon a school board's budgeting strategy. Highly mobile students are more likely to transfer during the academic year, after annual budgets have been allocated, thereby imposing an economic strain on districts to fund the special needs of new students. Staff decisions based on class size and funds for special services, such as English as a Second Language programs, are determined before the start of the school year, often leaving little room for adjustment. Beyond the larger budgeting issues, schools identify other financial impacts that result from more practical oversights, such as the failure of students to return textbooks when they transfer out of a school (Weisman, 2012).

In all, given the stringency of the federal government, funding is on the downturn, whereas the needs and increased number of homeless school-age children and youth are



growing. Thus, transportation costs may be underfunded or not funded at all given the economic constraints of local school districts. This means that homeless liaisons, school social workers or other personnel that provides direct services to homeless youth may be required to complete tasks without the monetary backing for support (Canfield & Teasley, 2015).

### **Policy Evaluation**

Overall, the various and well-intended federal educational initiatives that span several decades were streamlined to address the necessity to educate the entire US public student population regardless of ethnicity, social status, or disability. Since 2002, school districts, administrators and teachers have been held accountable for improving educational outcomes for all students, including homeless students. In the meantime, the failure of federal legislative mandates to include concrete measurements or assessments of what works, what does not, and why; the creditable objective of these homeless programs will remain elusive. In general, these federal initiatives lack a comprehensive and coordinated plan of action or clear expectations to meet the academic and social needs of homeless students. For example, the funding that homeless programs receive for homeless program coordinators and homeless liaisons has little control on how much time coordinators spend on McKinney-Vento related activities such as collecting reliable data and implementing homeless youth education plans. Fundamentally, federal homeless youth initiatives have overlooked to ensure federal supports provided to homeless youth programs are clearly earmarked for their purpose (Rahman et al., 2015).

Another negative outcome of the McKinney-Vento legislation is that research on the extent of the policy's implementation is lacking as children and youth experiencing homelessness continue to be under-identified, provided with inadequate services, and denied admittance to schools (Wilkins et al., 2015). Hendricks and Barkley (2012) conducted a study and determined that the McKinney-Vento legislation may not align with the needs of these students. They believe, as previous researchers have also determined, that the legislation has made valuable contributions to certain aspects of education but it fails to make a significant positive impact on the academic achievement of homeless students. They also stated that the legislation primarily focuses on facilitating students' access to school, primarily through ease of enrollment and transportation, rather than on the quality and continuity of their actual school and instructional experiences (Uretsky & Stone, 2016).

There have also been positive effects from the passage of McKinney-Vento legislation. One positive has been that this policy has brought to light the rising problems associated with youth homelessness. In addition to this, it has also provided comprehensive emergency assistance to the homeless, and explicitly addressed the needs that were experienced by homeless children. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, removed any residency requirements for children to enroll in school. It also created a position within each state for an individual to coordinate money and services for homeless and highly mobile students (Betters, 2012).

A National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty survey after the Act's 1995 amendment revealed that service providers reported significant improvements in

residency requirements, record transfer delays, and lack of transportation (Wilkins et al., 2015).

The analysis of legislation governing the rights and services of homeless individuals and families outlined publicized mandates to assist with this population. One could argue that these legislations are or have not effectively met the needs of the ever growing population of homeless youth. It is estimated that 75% of homeless students drop out before graduating from high school. In addition, despite the regulations under the McKinney-Vento Act, several barriers still exist that hamper the educational success of homeless students. These include removing school procedural barriers, providing homeless students transportation services to their school of origin, and meeting the educational and basic needs of homeless students. All the same, several positive outcomes have been realized due to these federal legislations, these include an increase in awareness of the special needs of homeless students, and a rise in the number of homeless students enrolled in U.S. school districts (Rahman et al., 2015).

### **Proposal for Policy Reform**

No single law comprehensively addresses the array of needs expressed by homeless youth, yet several laws can be invoked to help support these students. Competently using provisions in the laws and practices discussed previously, local educational agencies can make important strides toward improving school-based service delivery efforts for the homeless students in their district. School personnel must also focus more intently on the unique circumstances displayed by each homeless student they encounter. Ultimately, through this and through having the best interest of each homeless

student in mind, schools are well positioned to help one of the most vulnerable and underserved student populations (Sulkowski & Joyce-Beaulieu, 2014).

The negative effects of homelessness, such as increased anxiety, emotional distress, feelings of hopelessness, poor social skills, and poor behavioral adjustment in school, require additional supports and services beyond immediate school enrollment and removal of educational barriers. School-based interventions that help students living in homeless situations develop coping skills and positive relationships with teachers and peers help counteract some of the negative impacts of insecure housing (Thistle-Elliott, 2014). As previous studies have shown, school-wide social-emotional learning programs and trauma-informed care approaches can increase the academic, social, and emotional well-being of even the most challenging student. It would be beneficial for the McKinney-Vento legislation to align such programs as authorized activities so funding could be utilized in this capacity.

As policy makers consider system and school-wide strategies for supporting HHM students, it will be helpful for local school district's to consider the student-focused analyses which point to the high concentration of HHM status in certain schools, grades, and ethnic groups, as well as variation in the types of housing arrangements and duration of HHM status. Importantly, social and emotional learning capabilities relate to greater academic success for HHM students. However, more research is needed to develop a better understanding of how exposure to specific policies or interventions may foster social and emotional learning for high-risk student populations in order to improve their educational success (Baharav et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation research focused on select factors associated with the perceived effectiveness of school social workers in providing services to homeless students.

Theories that were used in this study included the Afrocentric Perspective, Expectancy Theory, and Job Characteristics Theory. These theories were utilized after reviewing the literature on perceived job effectiveness. These theories can be used concurrently to emphasize the strength of African Americans (population significantly impacted by research topic) and the impact of the environment on their functioning. Together, they provide a helpful and broad framework of intervention in the lives of African Americans (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004).

The first theoretical approach incorporated in this study was the Afrocentric Perspective, which has roots in the Atlanta University School of Social Work, is a social work paradigm with universal characteristics that can be used to uplift oppressed groups and advance spiritual and moral development in the world. From an Afrocentric perspective, the major sources of human problems in the United States are oppression and alienation. Oppression is defined as a systematic and deliberate strategy to suppress the power and potentiality of people by legitimizing and institutionalizing in-humanistic and person-delimiting values such as materialism, fragmentation, individualism, and inordinate competition (Schiele, 1996). Homeless and highly mobile families fall into the category of oppressed and alienated persons. Government policies and social norms continue the cycle of these persons being marginalized by decreasing funding and access to social services, enforcement of unethical housing and zoning practices, creating barriers to employment, and shaping of inequitable public schools.

According to the Afrocentric Perspective, all people should be guaranteed equitable opportunities in order to maximize their talents and skills. Everyone is believed to have the civil and moral right to work, decent housing, and adequate food and clothing. Within this framework, poverty is intolerable. This is because in traditional African philosophy, the emphasis is on securing the collective welfare of everyone in the community (Schiele, 1997). Students more often spend more time at school than with their families. The school serves as a major catalyst in supporting the academic success of its students in order for them to be productive adults. Within this philosophy, school social workers have a key role in ensuring that homeless students receive an equitable educational experience. This is accomplished by alleviating barriers that impede on a homeless student's academic and social well-being.

Research has shown that HHM students often experience high levels of stress and exposure to traumatic events when compared to their stably housed peers. To assist with the stress caused by oppressive environments, school social workers must be willing to support them in coping with and confronting these environmental factors and the resultant lack of resources. This support must include developing a better knowledge and understanding of stress and its impact on the social, emotional and academic well-being of HHM students. School social workers can assist these students in addressing these psychosocial stressors and their sources by utilizing an Afrocentric theoretical perspective. These theories allow for a closer look at both the internal and external factors impacting the lives of HHM students. The result is a more accurate assessment of

the needs of this population and relevant environmental influences (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004).

By aligning with cultural and community strengths, school social workers can assist HHM students in their self-determination and connection to their community. Operating from this Afrocentric perspective, school social workers express a commitment to social justice and service while respecting the dignity and worth of its students. This also leads the school in a fight against racism and oppression while addressing the general health and mental health needs of this group through an integrated empowerment, ego psychological, and Afrocentric approach to treatment (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004).

Previous studies also found that resiliency among HHM students were mostly dependent upon that student forming a professional relationship of understanding and trust with at least one mature adult. This is also true when using an Afrocentric perspective approach. Within this framework, emotional distance is seen as unproductive because it prevents the complete development of a trusting, authentic helping relationship. The demonstration of positive feelings by the adult cues the HHM student being helped that the adult does indeed care about their life. This perception of caring provides the foundation for the relationship to be viewed and practiced as a sacred and special one. It leads to the formation of a shared consciousness between the adult and student (Schiele, 1996).

In today's public educational system, school social workers are faced with a plethora of challenges. Perceived effectiveness for school social workers is contingent on

a myriad of issues ranging from competency of the McKinney-Vento Act and collaboration between pertinent stakeholders to working in various school cultures. It is essential to understand how school social workers perceive their work and the rewards they receive for it. One theory that could explain this is the Expectancy Theory (Estes & Polnick, 2012; Nimri, Bdair, & Bitar, 2015).

The founding father of the Expectancy Theory is Victor Vroom. Through this theory, Vroom attempts to explain employees' motivation through understanding the perception the effort put into work to the reward they receive in return. In other words, employees will be motivated to work harder if they believe their effort will result in good performance, and that performance will lead to a reward, and that reward will satisfy a need worth the effort (Nimri, Bdair, & Bitar, 2015).

Expectancy theory is a theory both of behavioral choice and motivation (Baumann & Bonner, 2016). It is based on the notion that individuals have choices, and they make decisions based on which choice they perceive will lead to the best outcome (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). In this theory, employees evaluate their competency (knowledge and skill-set) regarding their work performance and the type of rewards that they will receive as a result of successful performance. Therefore, individuals make every effort to achieve highly desired outcomes, which is their motivating factor (Göksoy & Argon, 2015). The Expectancy Theory is made up of three motivating factors, expectancy, instrumentality and valence.

Vroom described expectancy as an action-outcome association; as it is the employees' expectation that a certain effort on their part will lead to a specific



performance. It is the degree to which an individual believes their abilities will lead them to goal achievement or job effectiveness (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). This can be determined by the employees' self-efficacy, goal difficulty, and perceived control. Self-efficacy is an employee's self-assessment of their capability to perform a task. Goal difficulty affects the employee's perception of the attainability of the goal; the more difficult a goal, the less the expectancy. The perceived control of the job leads to an employee's development of ownership and responsibility thus leading to higher motivation (Nimri, Bdair, & Bitar, 2015).

Instrumentality is the perception that a given outcome of performance on the employee's part will lead to them receiving an anticipated reward (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). Instrumentality is composed of three variables, trust, control, and policies. Trust refers to who decides the reward and its receiver. It is essential that there must be control of the decision making process in case there is no trust. Lastly, policies should provide the foundation and clearly state how performance will lead to a specific reward (Nimri, Bdair, & Bitar, 2015).

Valence is the degree to which an employee has a preference for a given outcome. It is the value of the reward as perceived by the employee. This is determined by the needs, goals, values, preferences, and sources of motivation of the employee (Nimri, Bdair, & Bitar, 2015). Vroom defines valence as the perception of anticipated satisfaction. Valence can be positive (the attainment of the reward is desired) or negative (the attainment of the reward is something an employee wishes to avoid (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018)).

The Expectancy Theory can be applied to school social workers effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. Within the framework of the current research, motivation is linked with the school social worker's competency, collaborative efforts, and impact on school culture; performance is associated with perceived effectiveness; and reward is related to the academic and social well-being of homeless students due to interventions on part by the school social worker.

This theory aids in understanding what motivates school social workers and how they make decisions regarding various behavioral alternatives. For example, school social workers make decisions based on the degree to which they value the outcomes of their efforts in providing services to homeless students (valence). Understanding the degree to which school social workers value these outcomes play a key factor in predicting effort (instrumentality). Understanding the expectancy theory can help school social workers more accurately predict job effectiveness or performance by knowing whether they believe that they can achieve success (expectancy) (Estes & Polnick, 2012).

The Expectancy theory can also be used by school social workers to influence school culture as it can be utilized to predict job effectiveness for school social workers. Generally, employees are motivated on the first day of work, but could gradually lose their enthusiasm due to a school's culture. It is up to school social workers and their supervisors to ensure ongoing motivation. In this respect, school social workers need supervisors with the required skill-set and knowledge to motivate their employees in order to increase perceived effectiveness. It is imperative that supervisors of school social workers have the necessary capability to train and provide pertinent information on the

various roles and policies that guide practice with homeless students (Göksoy & Argon, 2015).

The ability to accurately predict and assess school social worker effectiveness is imperative to understanding and influencing the school social worker role and policies as it relates to service delivery to homeless students. Organizational outcomes are dependent on the individual performance of the school social worker (Parijat & Bagga, 2014). This would be evident by employee evaluations in the areas of knowledge, skill-set, and collaborative efforts in determining the school social worker's overall effectiveness (Estes & Polnick, 2012).

Overall, expectancy theory research has supported the idea that employees choose to alter inputs based on preferences among desired outcomes and the probability of attaining those outcomes at an effective level (perceived job effectiveness). Studies have shown that each component of expectancy theory (expectancy, instrumentality, and valence) is an important factor in determining the extent to which an employee is motivated to increase or decrease work productivity (Estes & Polnick, 2012)

The third theoretical perspective utilized in this study was The Job Characteristics Theory. This theory was developed by organizational psychologists J. Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham (Oxford University Press, 2017). This theory attempts to describe the relationship between job characteristics and individual responses to work (Faturachman, 2016). The major objectives of the Job Characteristics Theory are to explain how properties of the organizational tasks employees perform affect their work attitudes and

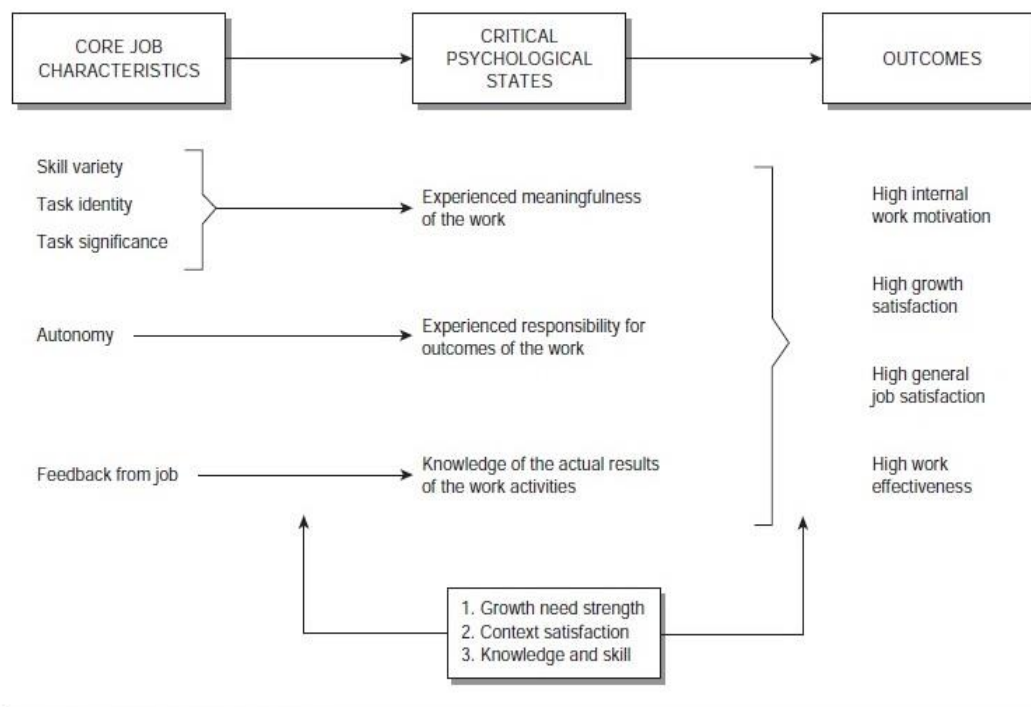
behavior, and to identify the conditions under which these effects are likely to be strongest (Psychology, n.d.).

This theory predicts work-related outcomes (i.e. job effectiveness) to be influenced by five core job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) through three critical psychological states (experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results). The five core job characteristics are defined as followed: (a) skill variety is the degree to which a job requires a variety of skills and talents; (b) task identity relates to the degree to which the job requires the employee to be involved with all aspects of the job (providing holistic services); (c) task significance focuses on the degree to which the job contributes to the lives of others; (d) autonomy refers to the degree to which the job provides substantial independence and freedom to the employee in scheduling their work or in determining the procedures to be used in the job; and (e) feedback is the degree to which the employee is aware of their work outcomes. The three critical psychological states of employees are defined as: (a) experienced meaningfulness of the work is the degree to which the employee feels that the work has meaning to oneself and others; (b) experienced responsibility for outcome of the work is the degree to which the employee experience personal responsibility for the outcomes of the work; and (c) knowledge of results of the work activities refers to the degree to which employees know how successful their work has been (Blanz, 2017).

Skill variety, task identity and task significance should be most strongly associated with experienced meaningfulness of the work. Autonomy is predicted to be

most strongly associated with experienced responsibility for work outcomes. Feedback from the job itself is predicted to be most strongly associated with knowledge of the actual results of work activities. The psychological states are then expected to influence the levels of affective and behavioral outcomes. All three psychological states must be present to get the largest positive response in the outcome variables (Champoux, 1991).

If certain characteristics are present in a job, then employees will be motivated when they perform well and this internal reinforcement serves as an incentive for continued job effectiveness (Saavedra & Kwun, 2000). The Job Characteristics Theory also list three characteristics of employees that are pertinent in regulating between the core job characteristics and the critical psychological states (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Model of job characteristics theory.

Source: Psychology (n.d.), Job Characteristics Theory.

These characteristics are growth need strength, context satisfaction, knowledge and skill. According to the job characteristics theory all three of the critical psychological states must be experienced by an employee in order to cultivate desirable outcomes (i.e. high work effectiveness) (Faturachman, 2016).

The Job Characteristics Theory is relevant to the practice and perceived job effectiveness of school social workers. As with the Expectancy Theory, the application of this theory should be implemented by school social work supervisors, especially when providing feedback on job performance (Blanz, 2017). When school social workers receive this type of feedback it provides some understanding of how effectively they are performing their identified tasks. Generally, school social workers who are competent (those with the knowledge and skill-set) will perform well and have positive feelings regarding their job effectiveness and those who do not have the knowledge and skill-set to perform certain tasks will have a negative perspective on their job effectiveness (Faturachman, 2016).

How school social workers collaborate with others is also a key factor in the Job Characteristics Theory. According to this theory, jobs that provide opportunities for its employees to interact with various internal and external stakeholders have been found to significantly influence job attitudes, work motivation, and overall self-perceived job effectiveness (Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

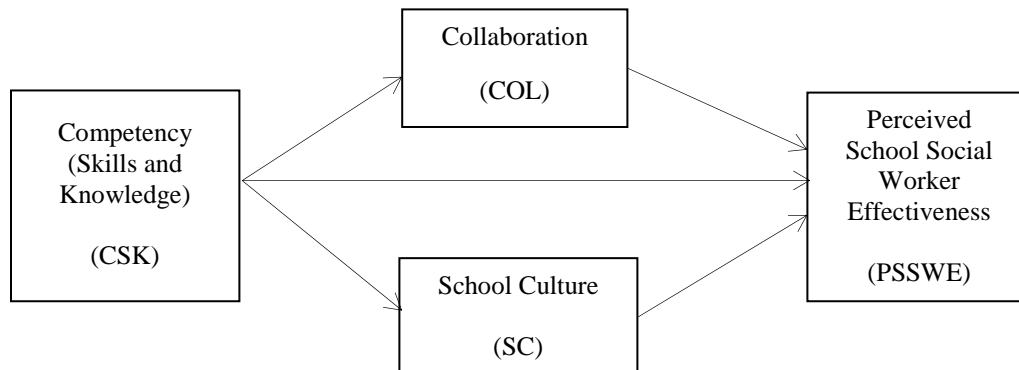
The primary objective of this chapter is to present the research methods utilized to conduct this study. This study served the purpose of determining whether a relationship exists between school social workers' perceived level of effectiveness and their levels of competency, collaboration, and schools' culture in delivering services to homeless students. The following are included in this section: research design; description of the site; sample and population; instrumentation; treatment of the data; and limitations of the study.

#### **Research Design**

A quantitative descriptive research design was utilized in this study that examined select factors associated with school social workers' perceived level of effectiveness in delivering services to homeless students. This research design conceptualized the influence of school social worker effectiveness by one or more of the following factors: competency, collaboration, and school culture.

The purpose of descriptive research is to describe behaviors, situations, events, and results. This type of research may be conducted through observations, case studies, or survey research. This study relied on the use of surveys to collect from the sample. Surveys allow researchers to shape data by controlling what questions are asked and answered (Purdy & Popan, 2018).

Figure 2 illustrates a conceptual model believed to explain factors associated with school social workers' effectiveness in their service delivery to homeless students.



*Figure 2.* Conceptual model of factors associated with perceived school social worker effectiveness.

The above explanations may be shown in the form of the following six statistical models. Each model represents a structural equation.

1.  $CSK \rightarrow COL$
2.  $CSK \rightarrow SC$
3.  $CSK \rightarrow PSSWE$
4.  $COL \rightarrow PSSWE$
5.  $SC \rightarrow PSSWE$
6.  $CSK + COL + SC \rightarrow PSSWE$

### **Description of the Site**

The site for this study consisted of school social workers in the Metropolitan Atlanta area affiliated with the organization, School Social Workers Association of Georgia (SSWAG). SSWAG is a non-profit organization of certified school social



workers who are trained to provide support services to school children (School Social Workers Association of Georgia, n.d.). SSWAG membership is divided into regions, which are referred to as districts. District 4 comprises the most school districts that are located in metropolitan Atlanta. Therefore, District 4 school social workers will be the priority site utilized to distribute the instrument. District 4 school districts include: Atlanta Public Schools; City Schools of Decatur; Clayton County Public Schools; DeKalb County School District; Fulton County School System; Henry County School District; Newton County School District; and Rockdale County School District. There are approximately 172 District 4 school social workers (Turner, 2018).

### **Sample and Population**

A nonprobability purposive sampling (also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling) was utilized for this study. This type of sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when selecting the population that is to be studied. Purposive sampling techniques are further categorized to include: maximum variation (heterogeneous); homogenous; typical case; extreme (deviant) case; critical case; total population; and expert sampling. This study relied on homogenous purposive sampling (samples that are chosen by the researcher because they have similar or identical traits) as only school social workers in District 4 were selected to complete the survey. This technique of sampling provides the researcher with the justification to make generalizations from the sample that is being studied (Sharma, 2017). The sampling frame consists of certified school social workers that primarily service District 4, are members of SSWAG, and actively work with homeless students.

## **Instrumentation**

A self-administered survey entitled “School Social Workers’ Perceived Effectiveness Survey” (see Appendix A) was constructed by adapting the McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Scale by Canfield et al. (2012); facilitating focus groups with Metropolitan Atlanta school social workers and homeless liaisons; and through consultation with the research advisor at Clark Atlanta University. The final form of the instrument consists of thirty questions divided into six sections. Section I solicits the respondent’s demographic information. Questions in this section provide information for the presentation of a demographic profile of the respondents of the survey. This section includes questions related to gender, ethnicity, age, education level, and licensure and certification level. Section II pertains to the School Social Worker Experience. This section’s questions include job title; number of years employed as a school social worker; number of years in the social work profession; current school setting; number of schools currently assigned to; socioeconomic status of schools served; and frequency of provision of services to homeless students.

Sections III through VI encompass the independent variables of the study: competency (knowledge and skills), collaboration, and school culture. Section III consists of four questions regarding School Social Workers Knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. The purpose of this section is to measure school social worker’s knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act. This section is measured using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree. Section III has a response range of 5 to 25. Section IV consists of five questions that

solicits information pertaining to School Social Worker's Skill-set, specifically, the frequency of services provided to homeless students. This section is measured using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Occasionally; 4 = A Moderate Amount; 5 = A Great Deal. Section IV has a response range of 5 to 25. Section V consists of four questions and solicits responses in the area of School Social Worker's Collaboration. This section is utilized to determine the frequency of collaboration between school social workers and other school staff and parents of homeless students. This section is measured using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Occasionally; 4 = A Moderate Amount; 5 = A Great Deal. Section V has a response range of 4 to 20. Section VI consists of four questions in the area of School Culture. Here, questions were designed to determine the extent of the relationship between how McKinney-Vento "friendly" a school is and the school social worker's perceived effectiveness. This section is measured using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree. Section VI has a response range of 4 to 20.

### **Focus Group and Pilot Study**

A series of focus groups were conducted before the instrument was finalized. A "single focus group" was developed to gather qualitative information from participants in understanding the types and new perspectives of service delivery to homeless students by school social workers. The focus groups also assisted the researcher in developing the current quantitative survey questionnaire.

A phone interview was conducted with a Metropolitan Atlanta homeless liaison on September 13, 2018. This interview provided insight into the types of services that

homeless liaisons provide that attributed to the academic and social well-being of homeless students. The results of this interview aligned with statistics from the literature review which indicated that homeless students who have access to a strong support network are more likely to succeed academically.

The first focus group was held on September 18, 2018 with four Metropolitan Atlanta school social workers. The purpose of this focus group was to determine the types of services provided to homeless students by school social workers and the barriers and facilitators of their service delivery. All of the participants believed that they have a significant role in impacting the academic success of homeless students. However, their responses were split on how often they provided services to homeless students. Regarding their knowledge and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act, their responses varied from “need more clarity” to “very comfortable.” The barriers mentioned by the participants included McKinney-Vento eligible students who are not being identified as homeless; lack of school attendance; high mobility and transiency; and having a high demand of students to serve. The facilitators of service delivery identified by the participants included providing transportation assistance; facilitating support groups for homeless students to help with transitions; referring the student/family to outside agencies for clothing, housing, and employment; and collaborating with school-based and community stakeholders. Overall, this focus group termed their service delivery to homeless students as “aggressive advocacy” due to the high demand and multilevel of services needed to support these students.

The survey instrument was pilot tested on November 13, 2018 in a group of four representative respondents (these respondents were not included in the first focus group). Results from piloting the survey identified redundancy and length concerns. Respondents suggested that several questions be combined or omitted due to redundancy. This resulted in 10 questions being combined into five, and five questions being omitted altogether in Sections III through VI. The respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the length of the survey, as the first draft had a total of 38 questions. Respondents suggested that the response options be altered from a 6-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale. Section IV: School Social Worker's Skill-set, was suggested to be altered from a level of agreement scale to a frequency scale. A final review of the instrument was conducted in consultation with the research chair.

### **Reliability Analysis**

Reliability is a term used to describe the quality of measurement of variables and refers to the consistency of a measurement instrument (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2007). This study conducted a reliability analysis with the Cronbach's Alpha model for 18 scale items—Knowledge, Skill-set, Collaboration, and School Culture. This type of reliability analysis measures internal consistency between 0 and 1; with .8 or higher being categorized as having good internal consistency (reliability). As shown in Table 1, the overall reliability of this study as measured by Cronbach's alpha is 0.850. Therefore, it is determined that the scale items were consistent with a good level of reliability.

Table 1

*Reliability Analysis Items: Total Statistics*

	Scale Mean If Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correction Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cornbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
<b>Knowledge</b>					
Q13: I am comfortable with the training that I have received on the McKinney-Vento Act.	64.52	90.354	.370	.729	.846
Q14: I am comfortable with my knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act.	64.53	89.783	.413	.875	.844
Q15: I am aware of my school district's policies and procedures in servicing homeless children and youth.	64.25	92.497	.342	.735	.847
Q16: I am knowledgeable of the assessment process for determining student homeless eligibility.	64.34	92.105	.350	.673	.847
Q17: I have received formal training on the McKinney-Vento Act (in-service, professional development, conference, etc.).	64.63	87.338	.438	.566	.843

(continued)

	Scale Mean If Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correction Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cornbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
<b>Skill-set</b>					
Q18: I make referrals to housing, employment, medical and other community agencies on behalf of homeless students and their families.	64.78	86.909	.523	.634	.839
Q19: I link homeless students with transportation services in order for them to get to and from school (i.e. school bus, public transit cards, or taxi).	64.58	87.022	.548	.520	.838
Q20: I provide case management services (i.e. attendance, behavior, and academics) to identified homeless students.	64.74	88.032	.493	.543	.840
Q21: I provide or link identified homeless students with resources that target their self-efficacy and social-emotional well-being.	65.09	85.451	.636	.771	.834

(continued)

	Scale Mean If Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correction Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cornbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q22: I provide homeless children and youth with resources that reduce the stigma of being homeless while attending school.	65.13	86.809	.507	.654	.840
<b>Collaboration</b>					
Q23: I collaborate with school staff by facilitating professional development meetings on the academic and social-emotional needs of homeless students.	65.56	81.760	.618	.658	.833
Q24: I collaborate with other school support staff (i.e. counselor, psychologist, lead teacher for special education) to address educational needs of homeless students.	64.81	84.993	.626	.709	.834
Q25: I collaborate with my district's homeless liaison in identifying and providing services to homeless students in my school(s).	64.39	86.996	.606	.572	.836

(continued)



	Scale Mean If Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correction Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cornbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q26: I involve parents in making decisions for a homeless student.	64.34	89.126	.471	.457	.841
<b>School Culture</b>					
Q27: Our school encourages homeless students to remain at their school of origin for the remainder of the school year even if they have obtained permanent housing.	64.71	91.475	.319	.290	.848
Q28: It is easy for a homeless student in my school(s) to immediately enroll in school even without the normally required documents (i.e. proof of residency, immunizations, or previous school records).	64.71	91.903	.327	.375	.848
Q29: Information on the definition and services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act is placed at schools,	64.65	91.925	.377	.397	.846

(continued)

	Scale Mean If Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Correction Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cornbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
shelters, hotels, and other communal locations in my service area.					
Q30: Homeless students in my school(s) participate in school- based social- emotional learning and trauma-informed care programs.	65.54	95.843	.099	.197	.858

### **Treatment of the Data**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the data at two levels: descriptive and inferential. The analysis included descriptive statistics in the form of frequency distribution and cross tabulation. Frequency distributions of independent variables were used to develop a demographic profile of school social work respondents. Inferential statistics were conducted to test the hypothesis under the study. Crosstabs were run to examine the relationship between the dependent and each of the independent variables. Lastly, the nonparametric test, Spearman's Correlation Coefficient, was run to determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were two limitations of the study related to nonprobability sampling and the reliance of self-reporting data. The scope of this study was limited to SSWAG District 4 school social workers. This form of non-probability sampling means that it can be difficult to defend the representativeness of the sample. As such, the respondents do not represent the entire population of school social workers. Therefore, the results must be interpreted to the population that is in close proximity of the study sample. The second limitation of this study is similar to that of any study based on self-reporting data, in making responses subject to response bias. That is, the degree of validity and reliability of self-reported data depends on the accuracy of respondents' willingness and ability to provide responses.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the study in order to examine select factors that impacted the levels of perceived effectiveness of school social workers in providing services to homeless students. The data analysis was conducted at three levels. The first section presents descriptive findings associated with demographic information and school social work experience. The second section utilized crosstabs to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, perceived effectiveness, and each of the independent variables (competency, collaboration, and school culture). The third level of analysis was analytical procedures which tested the hypothesis under this study. This section used Spearman's Correlation Coefficient to determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables.

#### **Descriptive Analysis**

##### **Demographic Information**

A total of 103 respondents participated in this study. The majority of participants were female, representing 85.4% of respondents, while males made up 12.6% of the respondents. The ethnic make-up of the respondents are as follows: 72 identified as African American (69.9%); 21 as Caucasian (20.4%); 5 as Hispanic (4.9%); 2 as Other (1.9%); and 1 as Asian (1.0%). Respondent's age was regrouped into four categories: 27 to 38 (27.2%); 39 to 50 (41.7%); 51 to 62 (15.5%); and 63 to 74 (9.7%).

Regarding educational level, 4 respondents had a Bachelor of Social Work Degree (3.9%); 67 had a Master of Social Work Degree (65.0%); 15 had an Educational Specialist Degree (14.6%), and 15 had a Doctoral Degree (14.6%). The majority of respondents only held a master's level state certificate (48.5%). The remaining participants were licensed at various levels: 27.2% were Licensed Clinical Social Workers; 15.5% were Licensed Master Social Workers, and 6% held other licensures. As detailed in Table 2, the typical respondent in this study was an African American female, Master level social worker, between the ages of 39 and 50.

Table 2

*Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=103)*

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative (%)
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	13	12.6	12.9
Female	88	85.4	100.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
African American	72	69.9	71.3
Caucasian	21	20.4	92.1
Hispanic	5	4.9	97.0
Asian	1	1.0	98.0
Other	2	1.9	100.0
<b>Age</b>			
27-38	28	27.2	28.9
39-50	43	41.7	73.2
51-62	16	15.5	89.7
63-74	10	9.7	100.0

(continued)

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative (%)
Education Level			
BSW	4	3.9	4.0
MSW	67	65.0	70.3
Ed.S.	15	14.6	85.1
Doctoral	15	14.6	100.0
Licensure/certification level			
MSW only	50	48.5	50.0
LMSW	16	15.5	66.0
LCSW	28	27.2	94.0
Other	6	5.8	100.0

### **School Social Work Experience**

School social workers comprised the majority of respondents at 91.3%, while 6.8% were homeless liaisons. However, there were a couple of respondents who were their school district's sole school social worker and homeless liaison. In this instance, the respondents chose school social worker as their primary title. The number of years employed as a school social worker varied: 34% have been school social workers between 1 and 9 years; 37.9% for 10 to 19 years; 21.4% for 20 to 29 years; and 2.9% for 30 to 39 years. The number of years in the social work profession also varied among respondents: 21.4% had 1 to 11 years of experience in the social work profession; 41.7% had 12 to 23 years of experience; 25.2% had 24 to 35 years of experience; and 6.8% had 36 to 47 years of experience.

The majority of respondents were employed urban and suburban settings, at 47.6% and 40.8% respectively. In regards to the number of schools served: 15 of the respondents are assigned to 1 school; 12 are assigned to 2 schools; 37 to three schools; 14 to four schools; and 23 are assigned to five or more schools. A great deal of respondents

served students in the lower socioeconomic status bracket: 49.5% are assigned all Title I schools; 39.8% are assigned to some Title I schools; and 8.7% are not assigned to any Title I schools. This is also aligned to respondent's frequency in providing services to homeless students: 43.7% responded a great deal; 28.2% responded a moderate amount; 21.4% responded occasionally; 3.9% responded rarely; and 1.0% responded never (see Table 3).

Table 3

*School Social Worker Experience (n=103)*

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative (%)
What is your title:			
Homeless liaison	7	6.8	6.9
School social worker	94	91.3	100.0
How many years have you worked in School Social Work:			
1-9	35	34.0	35.4
10-19	39	37.9	74.7
20-29	22	21.4	97.0
30-39	3	2.9	100.0
How many years have you worked in the Social Work Profession:			
1-11	22	21.4	22.4
12-23	43	41.7	66.3
24-35	26	25.2	92.9
36-47	7	6.8	100.0
In what school social work setting do you primarily work:			
Rural	3	2.9	3.0
Small town	6	5.8	9.0

(continued)

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative (%)
Suburban	42	40.8	51.0
Urban	49	47.6	100.0
On average, how many schools do you serve:			
one	15	14.6	14.9
two	12	11.7	26.7
three	37	35.9	63.4
four	14	13.6	77.2
five or more	23	22.3	100.0
What is the socioeconomic status of the schools you serve:			
All Title I schools	51	49.5	50.5
Some Title I schools	41	39.8	91.1
No Title I schools	9	8.7	100.0
How often do you provide services to homeless students:			
Never	1	1.0	1.0
Rarely	4	3.9	5.0
Occasionally	22	21.4	26.7
A Moderate Amount	29	28.2	55.4
A Great Deal	45	43.7	100.0

### **School Social Worker Perceived Effectiveness**

Variables for this study were recoded to determine the range levels of perceived effectiveness among school social workers as it relates to their competency, collaboration, and school's culture when providing services to homeless students. The overall competency value was achieved by computing and recoding values for the subscales Knowledge and Skill-set. In regards to school social worker's knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act and their acquired skill-set in providing services to homeless students; 14.6% of respondents reported low effectiveness, while 44.7% and 35.9%



reported moderate and high effectiveness, respectively. In collaborating with pertinent stakeholders, 3.9% of respondent's reported low effectiveness in this area, while 45.6% reported moderate effectiveness, and 47.6% reported high effectiveness. Only two (1.9%) of respondents perceived to have low effectiveness in providing services to homeless students based on their school's culture. However 59 (57.3%) respondents reported moderate effectiveness and 39 (37.9%) reported high effectiveness in serving homeless students conducive to their school's culture (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Overall Perceived Effectiveness*

Variables		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative%
Effectiveness with Competency				
5-11	Low	15	14.6	15.3
12-18	Moderate	46	44.7	62.2
19-25	High	37	35.9	100.0
Effectiveness with Collaboration				
4-9	Low	4	3.9	4.0
10-15	Moderate	47	45.6	51.0
16-20	High	49	47.6	100.0
Effectiveness with School Culture				
4-9	Low	2	1.9	2.0
10-15	Moderate	59	57.3	61.0
16-20	High	39	37.9	100.0

Crosstabs were run to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, perceived effectiveness, by each of the independent variables: (a) competency (knowledge and skills); (b) collaboration; and (c) school culture. Raw scores were recoded into ordinal data for each variable. A total of 13 respondents indicated a low level of overall perceived effectiveness for all three independent variables; 55 respondents indicated a moderate level; and 31 respondents indicated a high level of overall perceived effectiveness.

### **Competency**

Twelve (12.1%) respondents reported an overall low level of competency; of these respondents, seven reported a low level of overall perceived effectiveness, five reported a moderate level, and none reported a high level of overall perceived effectiveness. A total of 49 (49.5%) respondents reported a moderate level of competency; of these respondents, six reported a low level of overall perceived effectiveness, 41 reported a moderate level, and two reported a high level of competency. Thirty-eight (38.4%) respondents reported a high level of competency; of these respondents, zero reported a low level of overall perceived effectiveness, nine reported a moderate level, and 29 reported a high level of overall perceived effectiveness. This suggests that the more competent (knowledge and skill-set) the school social worker is, the greater their perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Perceived Levels of Competency (Knowledge and Skill-Set)*

			Competency				
			23-31	32-40	41-50		
			Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Overall Perceived	41-55	Count	7	6	0	13	
Effectiveness	Low	% within Overall Perceived	53.8%	46.2%	0.0%	100.0%	
		Effectiveness					
		% within Competency	58.3%	12.2%	0.0%	13.1%	
			% of Total	7.1%	6.1%	0.0%	13.1%
	56-70	Count	5	41	9	55	
		Moderate	% within Overall Perceived	9.1%	74.5%	16.4%	100.0%
			Effectiveness				
		% within Competency	41.7%	83.7%	23.7%	55.6%	
		% of Total	5.1%	41.4%	9.1%	55.6%	
71-85	Count	0	2	29	31		
	High	% within Overall Perceived	0.0%	6.5%	93.5%	100.0%	
		Effectiveness					
	% within Competency	0.0%	4.1%	76.3%	31.3%		
	% of Total	0.0%	2.0%	29.3%	31.3%		
Total		Count	12	49	38	99	
		% within Overall Perceived	12.1%	49.5%	38.4%	100.0%	
		Effectiveness					
		% within Competency	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	12.1%	49.5%	38.4%	100.0%		

**Collaboration**

A total of four (4.0%) respondents reported a low level of collaboration with pertinent stakeholders; with 100% indicating a low level of overall perceived effectiveness. A total of 38 (38.4%) respondents reported a moderate level of collaboration; of these respondents, eight reported a low level of perceived effectiveness, 30 reported a moderate level, and none reported a high level of perceived effectiveness.

Fifty-seven (57.6%) respondents reported a high level of collaboration. Among these respondents, one reported a low level of overall perceived effectiveness; 25 reported a moderate level; and 31 reported a high level of perceived effectiveness. This shows that the higher the collaboration level, the higher the level of overall perceived effectiveness (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Perceived Levels of Collaboration*

			Collaboration			Total
			5-9	10-14	15-20	
			Low	Moderate	High	
Overall Perceived	41-55	Count	4	8	1	13
Effectiveness	Low	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	30.8%	61.5%	7.7%	100.0%
		% within Collaboration	100.0%	21.1%	1.8%	13.1%
		% of Total	4.0%	8.1%	1.0%	13.1%
	56-70	Count	0	30	25	55
	Moderate	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	0.0%	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
		% within Collaboration	0.0%	78.9%	43.9%	55.6%
		% of Total	0.0%	30.3%	25.3%	55.6%
	71-85	Count	0	0	31	31
	High	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Collaboration	0.0%	0.0%	54.4%	31.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	31.3%	31.3%
Total		Count	4	38	57	99
		% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	4.0%	38.4%	57.6%	100.0%
		% within Collaboration	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	4.0%	38.4%	57.6%	100.0%

## School Culture

In regards to school culture, 9 (9.1%) of the respondents indicated that their primary school had a low level; 71 (71.7%) indicated a moderate level; and 19 (19.2%) indicated a high level of school culture. Among the respondents who reported a low level of school culture, six reported an overall low level of perceived effectiveness, three reported a moderate level of effectiveness, and zero reported a high level of perceived effectiveness. The 71.7% of respondents who indicated a moderate level of school culture; seven reported a low level of overall perceived effectiveness; 49 reported a moderate level, and 15 reported a high level of perceived effectiveness. Among the respondents who reported a high level of school culture; none reported a low level of perceived effectiveness; three reported a moderate level; and 16 reported a high level of school culture. This suggests that the lower the school culture, the lower the perceived effectiveness and that higher the school culture, the higher level of perceived effectiveness (see Table 7).

Table 7

### *Perceived Levels of School Culture*

			School Culture			
			7-11	12-16	17-20	Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
Overall Perceived	41-55	Count	6	7	0	13
Effectiveness	Low	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	46.2%	53.8%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within School Culture	66.7%	9.9%	0.0%	13.1%
		% of Total	6.1%	7.1%	0.0%	13.1%

(continued)

		School Culture			
		7-11	12-16	17-20	Total
		Low	Moderate	High	
56-70	Count	3	49	3	55
Moderate	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	5.5%	89.1%	5.5%	100.0%
	% within School Culture	33.3%	69.0%	15.8%	55.6%
	% of Total	3.0%	49.5%	3.0%	55.6%
71-85	Count	0	15	16	31
High	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	0.0%	48.4%	51.6%	100.0%
	% within School Culture	0.0%	21.1%	84.2%	31.3%
	% of Total	0.0%	15.2%	16.2%	31.3%
Total	Count	9	71	19	99
	% within Overall Perceived Effectiveness	9.1%	71.7%	19.2%	100.0%
	% within School Culture	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	9.1%	71.7%	19.2%	100.0%

### Analytical Procedures

Spearman's Correlation Coefficient or Spearman's Rho was the statistical non-parametric test used to answer the research questions posed in Chapter I. This type of test measures the strength of a monotonic relationship between paired data with constraints between -1 and 1. The guide used to determine the strength among the variables is categorized as: .00 – .19 (very weak); .20 - .39 (weak); .40 - .59 (moderate); .60 - .79 (strong); and .80 – 1.0 (very strong) (Statstutor, n.d.). This guide was referenced in order to determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable, school social worker perceived effectiveness and the independent variables, competency, collaboration, and school culture. Research questions and hypotheses were reintroduced to the test to further clarify the rest results.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their level of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act?

Ho1: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their level of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act.

As shown in Table 8, a Spearman's Rho test was run to determine the relationship between school social worker's overall perceived effectiveness and their skill-set. There was a positive moderate correlation between these two variables ( $= .404$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a significant relationship between these two variables. Respondents with higher overall perceived effectiveness tended to have greater knowledge (training received on the McKinney-Vento Act, awareness of district's policies and procedures regarding homeless students, and assessing homeless eligibility) of the McKinney-Vento Act.

Table 8

*Results of the Correlation between Overall Perceived Effectiveness and Knowledge*

		Overall Perceived Effectiveness		Knowledge
Spearman's rho	Overall Perceived Effectiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.404**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	99	99
	Knowledge	Correlation Coefficient	.404**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	99	101

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RQ2: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their skill-set level?

Ho2: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their skill-set level.

As shown in Table 9, a Spearman's Rho test was run to determine the relationship between school social worker's overall perceived effectiveness and their skill-set. There was a positive strong correlation between these two variables ( $r = .656$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a significant relationship between these two variables. Respondents with higher overall perceived effectiveness tended to have a greater overall skill-set (making referrals to community agencies, linking homeless students with transportation services, providing case management services, and linking homeless students with resources that target their self-efficacy, social-emotional well-being, and reduces the stigma of being homeless) in providing services to homeless students.

Table 9

*Results of the Correlation between Overall Perceived Effectiveness and Skill-Set*

			Overall Perceived Effectiveness	
			Effectiveness	Skill-Set
Spearman's rho	Overall Perceived Effectiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.656**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	99	99
	Skill-Set	Correlation Coefficient	.656**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	99	101

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



RQ3: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their overall level of competency?

Ho3: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their overall level of competency.

As shown in Table 10, a Spearman's Rho test was run to determine the relationship between school social worker's overall perceived effectiveness and their overall level of competency. There was a positive strong correlation between these two variables ( $= .699$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a significant relationship between these two variables. Respondents with higher overall perceived effectiveness tended to have greater overall competency (knowledge and skill-set).

Table 10

*Results of the Correlation between Overall Perceived Effectiveness and Competency*

			Overall Perceived	
			Effectiveness	Competency
Spearman's rho	Overall	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.699**
	Perceived	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	Effectiveness	N	99	96
	Competency	Correlation Coefficient	.699**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	96	98

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RQ4: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their frequency of collaboration?

Ho4: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their frequency of collaboration.

As shown in Table 11, a Spearman's Rho test was run to determine the relationship between school social worker's overall perceived effectiveness and their frequency of collaboration. There was a positive strong correlation between these two variables ( $= .654$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a significant relationship between these two variables. Respondents with higher overall perceived effectiveness tended to have a greater frequency of collaboration (facilitating professional development meetings and collaborating with school staff, the district homeless liaison, and parents).

Table 11

*Results of the Correlation between Overall Perceived Effectiveness and Collaboration*

			Overall Perceived	
			Effectiveness	Collaboration
Spearman's rho	Overall Perceived Effectiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.654**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	99	99
	Collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	.654**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	99	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RQ5: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and the level of school culture?

Ho5: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and the level of school culture.

As shown in Table 12, a Spearman's Rho test was run to determine the relationship between school social worker's overall perceived effectiveness and school culture. There was a positive strong correlation between these two variables ( $= .609$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating a significant relationship between these two variables.

Respondents with higher overall perceived effectiveness tended to have a greater school culture (school encourages homeless students to remain at their school origin, easy for homeless students to enroll in school immediate enrollment of homeless students, placement of McKinney-Vento media, and homeless student participation in social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care programs).

Table 12

*Results of the Correlation between Overall Perceived Effectiveness and School Culture*

			Overall Perceived Effectiveness	
			Overall Perceived Effectiveness	School Culture
Spearman's rho	Overall Perceived Effectiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.609**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	99	99
	School Culture	Correlation Coefficient	.609**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	99	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship between perceived school social worker effectiveness and the school social worker's perceived competency (knowledge and skills), level of collaboration, and school culture. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed in this study. This study provides insight of these select factors and how they influence school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students.

A total of 103 school social workers and homeless liaisons who serve the metropolitan Atlanta area voluntarily participated in the study by completing the "School Social Worker Perceived Effectiveness Survey" that was disseminated via email. This study also relied upon snowball sampling, as school social workers who were members of the organization School Social Workers Association of Georgia distributed the survey via email to school social workers within their respective school districts. Surveys were also physically administered during local and state meetings with school social workers.

Data analysis was conducted a two levels. The first level included descriptive findings associated with the demographic variables and school social work experience. The second level of analysis included running crosstabs and Spearman's Correlation Coefficient to determine the relationship and strength of relationship, respectively,

between the dependent variable, perceived effectiveness and each of the independent variables, competency, collaboration, and school culture.

Summary and conclusions of the research finding are presented in this chapter. Additionally, implications for future research and implications for the school social work profession are also presented.

The research study was designed to answer five questions concerning factors associated with school social worker perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students:

- RQ1: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their level of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act?
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their skill-set level?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their overall level of competency?
- RQ4: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their frequency of collaboration?

RQ5: Is there a relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and the level of school culture?

The following were the null hypotheses:

Ho1: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their level of knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act.

Ho2: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their skill-set level.

Ho3: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their overall level of competency.

Ho4: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and their frequency of collaboration.

Ho5: There is no significant statistical relationship between school social worker's perceived level of effectiveness in providing services for homeless students and the level of school culture.

Some of the major findings of this study revealed that the typical respondent was an African-American female, master level social worker (MSW certification only),

between the ages of 39 and 50. In regards to school social work experience, the typical respondent was a school social worker (91.3%) having 10-19 (37.9%) years of school social work experience and 12-23 (41.7%) years social work experience. The majority of the respondents were assigned to three (35.9%) all Title I (49.5%) schools in urban settings (47.6%). The school social work experience profile was consistent with the reported frequency of school social workers providing services to homeless students; in which 43.7% reported that they spend a great deal of their time providing services for homeless students. Only five respondents indicated that they never (one) or rarely (four) provide services to homeless students.

Approximately 75% of the respondents reported high levels of knowledge; suggesting that they perceived to have received adequate training on the McKinney-Vento Act, are aware of their district's policies and procedures as it relates to homeless youth, and are knowledgeable of the assessment process for determining the homeless eligibility. This is a major finding as perceived knowledge strongly influences the other variables of skill-set, competency, collaboration, and school culture. Without knowledge, homeless students are at risk of not receiving sufficient services and interventions that could positively impact their academic success.

Along with knowledge, skill-set was a variable utilized to compute an overall competency score. Ninety-three percent of respondents reported moderate (47.6%) and high (45.6%) levels in the area of skill-set. This suggests that the respondents are providing homeless students with adequate services that target their academic and social and emotional well-being, such as making referrals for housing, medical, and

employments; linking homeless students with transportation services; and providing additional resources that reduce the stigma of being homeless while attending school. With the variables knowledge and skill-set combined to create an overall competency score, 49.5% reported moderate levels of competency and 38.4% reported high levels of competency when compared to overall perceived effectiveness (a total of approximately 88%). This research indicates that as the competency level increases so does school social worker perceived effectiveness.

Findings from this study also indicate the need for school-wide competency in providing services to homeless students. A vast majority of school social workers are transient, as they are assigned to more than one school. Homeless students and families who present to the school for services may not always have readily access to their assigned school social worker. It is the school social worker's responsibility to ensure that all staff are competent in the McKinney-Vento Act and resources available for these students in order to decrease gaps in service. This also aids in homeless students having a "day-to-day" advocate and not relying only upon the school social worker's competency in addressing their myriad of needs.

Approximately 57% of respondents reported a high level of collaboration in relation to perceived effectiveness. This finding suggest that school social workers are collaborating with other support staff, such as homeless liaisons, counselors, and psychologists; involving parents in making decisions for homeless students; and facilitating professional development meetings on the academic and social-emotional needs of homeless students in order to meet the needs of homeless students.



Another major finding was that 71.7% of respondents reported a moderate level of school culture. Responses to the school culture subscale questions can be examined further by reporting the highest percentage from each question: 34% of the respondents agree that homeless students can remain at their school of origin for the remainder of the school year even if permanent housing is obtained; 43.7% of the respondents agree that it is easy for a homeless student to enroll in school even without the normally required documents; 43.7% of respondents agree that information on the McKinney-Vento Act is placed at communal locations frequented by potential homeless families; and 36% neither agree or disagree that homeless students in their school participate in school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed care (TIC) programs.

Homeless students having access and participating in SEL and TIC programs align with two of the school social work practice model goals that were created by the School Social Work Association of America: (a) to provide evidence-based educational, behavioral, and mental health services and (b) to promote a school climate and culture conducive to learning. Though majority of the respondents assist in creating a positive school culture for homeless students; based on this study, school social workers could improve their perceived effectiveness and the academic and social well-being of homeless students by ensuring homeless students participate in SEL and TIC programs, as these have been proven to have a positive correlation with overall success for this population.

School social worker's low participation in facilitating SEL and TIC programs may be due to the restrictive parameters and lack of available funding of the McKinney-

Vento Act. This Act places a strong emphasis on school access and academic interventions for homeless students; with very little mention of linking these students with social and emotional supportive interventions. This finding is crucial as studies have shown that one of the greatest impact on student achievement is ensuring students have access to a support system and interventions. This may also be linked to the 50% high school drop-out rate for homeless students. It would be beneficial to show the relationship between high school graduation and frequency and level of school-based supportive interventions.

As the number of homeless students have increased over the years and schools have made a priority of identifying and serving homeless students; more school districts have been applying for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth grant annually. With school districts applying for funding from an already limited allotment, this has ample implications on service provisions at schools targeted to serve homeless youth. For example, a school district whose previous allocation may have been \$200,000 may now only receive an allocation of \$78,000 as the funding is being distributed to more school districts. This lack of funding impacts services that are implemented in serving the needs of homeless students in the areas of access to additional academic and social-emotional support.

This study found a positive strong correlation between school social worker perceived effectiveness and skill-set (.656), competency (.699), collaboration (.654), and school culture (.609). There was a positive moderate correlation between school social worker perceived effectiveness and knowledge (.404). The conclusions drawn from the

findings of this research suggest that all of the independent variables showed a significant positive correlation with the dependent variable.

### **Implications for Future Research**

An effort was made to address the multifaceted factors that impact the level of school social workers perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. However, there remain applicable implications for future research in this field of study.

Therefore, the following recommendations are presented:

1. This study focused on the school social worker's perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. Future research is needed on perceived school social worker effectiveness from the homeless student/homeless parent point of view.
2. This research highlighted an area of growth in which school social workers link homeless students with SEL and TIC programs. It would be beneficial for future research to show how these and similar programs impact the academic and social-emotional well-being of homeless students.
3. The highest percentage of perceived effectiveness was in the subscale of school culture in which majority of the respondents reported that they work in schools that create a positive environment for homeless students. Future research is needed to determine who has the greatest influence in impacting the school's culture as it relates to homeless students.
4. The school social work practice model that was created by the School Social Work Association of America was briefly discussed in this study. Further

research could be conducted to determine school social worker's knowledge and application of the model.

5. It would be beneficial for future research to determine the relationship between school social work interventions and the academic outcomes of homeless students.
6. Future research is also needed in showing the relationship between the level of McKinney-Vento services implemented and student outcomes. This will aid in determining the need for policy expansion or improvement.

### **Implications for the School Social Work Profession**

School social workers have the privilege and responsibility in being a vital member in advocating and servicing the needs of homeless students to ensure that they achieve to their highest potential. This type of support is garnered through direct and indirect service, service coordination, and advocacy in an academic setting (Joseph, Slovak, & Broussard, 2010). The findings from this study concluded that select factors, competency (knowledge and skill-set), collaboration, and school culture significantly influence school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. Implications of these findings are relevant for school social workers that practice in urban school districts in the state of Georgia and policy makers.

This study found that school social workers' perceived effectiveness increased across all variables when school social workers are engaged and perceived to have high levels of competency, collaboration, and work in a culturally competent school environment when providing services to homeless students. From an Afrocentric

Perspective, the school social worker practices in the area of social justice by removing barriers that further alienate and oppress homeless students. It is probable that schools, especially in urban areas, will continue to deal with the impact that homelessness has on students, families, and communities. In the educational setting, it is imperative that school social workers take leadership in advancing and reforming practice and policy with this population.

School social work practice is outcome driven, but there are limited studies that actually show the relationship between school social work practice and student outcomes, even more so with homeless students. School social workers must remain vigilant in lobbying and understanding major policies that impact their practice with homeless students, such as the McKinney-Vento Act. School social workers are an instrumental factor in determining the future success of this Act (Canfield & Teasley, 2015). Though majority of the respondents indicated that they had moderate and high levels in regards to their knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act, yet there is much more to learn in how this policy impacts the practice of school social work.

School social workers need high-quality and reliable data not only to help them to develop interventions and policies to improve the academic achievement of homeless children but also to support their role as advocates for improved services for homeless students (Hendricks & Barkley, 2011). As such, school social workers should be proficient in evidence-based programs that can show the relationship between school social work interventions and student outcomes. This provides data driven and tangible evidence on the essential role of the school social worker when providing services for

homeless students. This in turn could increase the number of school social workers per school district as administrators gain more understanding and value the work of this profession.

This study has major policy implications as it relates to the rights and services of homeless individuals. The policy that this study was grounded in was the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act and how school social workers service homeless students in compliance with this legislation. Previous studies have determined that this legislation has made valuable contributions to certain aspects of education but it struggles to make a significant positive impact on the academic achievement of homeless students. This could be related to the fact that the McKinney-Vento Act primarily focuses on facilitating students' access to school, chiefly through ease of enrollment and transportation, rather than on the quality and continuity of their actual school and instructional experiences (Uretsky & Stone, 2016). It is crucial that policy makers evaluate the various barriers and facilitators of academic success for homeless students in order for policy reform with this population be positively transformative, purposeful, and outcome driven.

## APPENDIX A

### Survey Questionnaire

#### School Social Workers' Perceived Effectiveness Survey

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Dear Participant:

I am a student in the Ph.D. Program at the Whitney M. Young, Jr. School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University. I invite you to participate in a study involving school social workers services with homeless students. The purpose of the study is to learn more about factors that influence school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. The findings will be in an analysis of my dissertation. I would appreciate your cooperation. The questionnaire will take only five minutes to complete. Please relate your responses to your primary or base school. Choose only one answer for each question. Please respond to all questions. Again, thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sandra Alexia Jones May 2019

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#### **Section I: Demographic Information**

1. What is your gender:
  - 1) Male
  - 2) Female
  
2. What is your ethnicity:
  - 1) African American
  - 2) Caucasian
  - 3) Hispanic
  - 4) Asian
  - 5) Other
  
3. What is your age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is your education level:
  - 1) BSW
  - 2) MSW
  - 3) Ed.S.
  - 4) Ph.D./Ed.D./DSW

5. What is your licensure/certification level:
- 1) MSW only
  - 2) LMSW
  - 3) LCSW
  - 4) Other

**Section II: School Social Work Experience**

6. What is your title:
- 1) Homeless Liaison
  - 2) School social worker
7. How many years have you worked in **School Social Work**: \_\_\_\_\_
8. How many years have you worked in the **Social Work Profession**: \_\_\_\_\_
9. In what school social work setting do you primarily work:
- 1) Rural
  - 2) Small town
  - 3) Suburban
  - 4) Urban
10. On average, how many schools do you serve:
- 1) one
  - 2) two
  - 3) three
  - 4) four
  - 5) five or more
11. What is the socioeconomic status of the schools you serve:
- 1) All Title I schools
  - 2) Some Title I schools
  - 3) No Title I schools
12. How often do you provide services to homeless students:
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal

**Section III: School Social Worker's Knowledge**

13. I am comfortable with the training that I have received on the McKinney-Vento Act:
- 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree
14. I am comfortable with my knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act:
- 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree



15. I am aware of my school district's policies and procedures in servicing homeless children and youth:
  - 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree
  
16. I am knowledgeable of the assessment process for determining student homeless eligibility:
  - 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree
  
17. I have received formal training on the McKinney-Vento Act (in-service, professional development, conference, etc.):
  - 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree

**Section IV: School Social Worker's Skill Set**

18. I make referrals to housing, employment, medical, and other community agencies on behalf of homeless students and their families:
  - 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal
  
19. I link homeless students with transportation services in order for them to get to and from school (i.e. school bus, public transit cards, or taxi):
  - 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal
  
20. I provide case management services (i.e. attendance, behavior, and academics) to identified homeless students:
  - 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal

21. I provide or link identified homeless students with resources that target their self-efficacy and social-emotional well-being:
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal
22. I provide homeless children and youth with resources that reduce the stigma of being homeless while attending school:
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal

**Section V: School Social Worker's Collaboration**

23. I collaborate with school staff by facilitating professional development meetings on the academic and social-emotional needs of homeless students:
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal
24. I collaborate with other school support staff (i.e. counselor, psychologist, lead teacher for special education) to address educational needs of homeless students:
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal
25. I collaborate with my district's homeless liaison in identifying and providing services to homeless students in my school(s):
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal
26. I involve parents in making decisions for a homeless student:
- 1) Never
  - 2) Rarely
  - 3) Occasionally
  - 4) A Moderate Amount
  - 5) A Great Deal

**Section VI: School Culture**

27. Our school encourages homeless students to remain at their school of origin for the remainder of the school year even if they have obtained permanent housing:
- 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree
28. It is easy for a homeless student in my school(s) to immediately enroll in school even without the normally required documents (i.e. proof of residency, immunizations, or previous school records):
- 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree
29. Information on the definition and services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act is placed at schools, shelters, hotels, and other communal locations in my service area:
- 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree
30. Homeless students in my school(s) participate in school-based social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care programs:
- 1) Strongly Disagree
  - 2) Disagree
  - 3) Neither Agree or Disagree
  - 4) Agree
  - 5) Strongly Agree

**Thank you for your participation!**

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to Participants



Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work  
Clark Atlanta University

#### A Study of Select Factors Associated with School Social Workers' Perceived Effectiveness in Providing Services to Homeless Students in Metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a study that seeks to explore the factors that are associated with school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students. This study consists of a 30 question questionnaire, which takes only five minutes to complete. The findings will be used in an analysis for my dissertation.

Participation in this study is voluntary. All responses will remain anonymous. Please do not write your name on the survey. There is no identifiable information included in this survey, aside from some very general questions in the demographic section. There are no known risks or personal benefits to participants who choose to participate in this study. However, it is anticipated that those who participate in this study will help research in the field of school social work and working with at-risk students.

If participants have questions about the study, they can contact the principal investigator, Sandra Alexia Jones by email at [sandra.jones@students.cau.edu](mailto:sandra.jones@students.cau.edu). Participants may also contact Dr. Gerry White, research advisor in the School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University at 404) 880-6905. Please note: by participating in this questionnaire, you are giving consent to the principal investigator to analyze your responses for the investigator's dissertation research.

Thank you,

*Sandra Alexia Jones*

Sandra Alexia Jones

## APPENDIX C

### Letter of Request to Organization

December 10, 2018

Dr. Terriyln Rivers-Cannon  
President of School Social Workers Association of Georgia

Dear Dr. Rivers-Cannon:

Thank you for speaking with me earlier to discuss the research project for my doctoral dissertation. As mentioned previously, I am a doctoral candidate at Clark Atlanta University Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work. I have completed all of my course requirements and I am now in the process of completing my dissertation for a Ph.D. in Social Work.

The title of my dissertation is, A STUDY OF SELECT FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS IN PROVIDING SERVICES TO HOMELESS STUDENTS IN METROPOLITAN ATLANTA GEORGIA. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the self-reported level of school social workers' effectiveness in providing services to homeless students as it relates to one or more of the following factors: Competency (Skills and Knowledge), Collaboration, and School Culture.

District 4 of the School Social Workers Association of Georgia is the primary location for this study as this region is comprised mostly of school districts in the Metropolitan Atlanta area. The surveys will be distributed and secured through Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool used to conduct survey research, evaluations and other data collection activities

As you are aware, research and outcomes drive funding and shape policy. By conducting this study with school social workers, there will be a unique opportunity to articulate the influence of select factors associated with school social workers' perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students as it relates to school social work practice, policy implementation, and educational outcomes.

Finally, it is my intent to collect data over the next two weeks and be prepared to share preliminary results in March. I am enclosing a copy of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter, instrument, and letter to participants. If you should have any additional questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at [sandrea.jones@students.cau.edu](mailto:sandrea.jones@students.cau.edu).

Respectfully,

*Sandrea Alexia Jones*  
Sandrea Alexia Jones

## APPENDIX D

### SSWAG Research Permission Form



#### SSWAG RESEARCH PERMISSION FORM

Dr. Terriylm  
Rivers-Cannon  
President

Vacant  
Vice President

Dr. Cynthia  
Turner  
Past President

Erin Woodcock  
Treasurer

Chrystal Gillis  
Secretary

Dr. Denise Scott  
District 1

Dr. Katrina  
Cooper  
District 2

La Chandra  
Brundage  
District 3

Crystal Williams  
District 4

Heather  
Anderson  
District 5

Terrell Smith  
District 6

Jeffery Levy  
District 7

Dr. Blanca Booker  
District 8

Destiny Silich  
District 9

Roshell Prince  
District 10

**January 15, 2019**

**Sandra A. Jones  
DeKalb County Public School System  
School Social Worker**

#### **To Whom It May Concern:**

**Sandra A. Jones has my permission to conduct research with the members of the School Social Workers Association of Georgia (SSWAG). Ms. Jones's research will be used to ascertain how School Social Workers perceived effectiveness in providing services to homeless students in the Atlanta Metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia. Therefore exploring the self-reported level of school social workers' effectiveness in providing services to homeless students as it relates to one or more of the following factors: Competency, collaboration and school culture.**

**This permission is given with the understanding that the proposed study will be conducted in accordance with the Clark Atlanta University guidelines. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [trcannon@atlanta.k12.ga.us](mailto:trcannon@atlanta.k12.ga.us) or call me at (678) 523-5417.**

Sincerely,

  
**Dr. Terriylm Rivers-Cannon, President  
School Social Workers Association of Georgia  
(2017 – 2019)**

School Social Workers Association of Georgia exists to improve the quality of services to students so as to enhance their individual and educational potential.

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter



CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
Institutional Review Board  
Office of Sponsored Programs

December 9, 2018

Ms. Sandra Jones <sandra.jones@students.cau.edu >  
School Social Work  
Clark Atlanta University  
Atlanta, GA 30314

RE: A Study of Factors that Influence School Social worker's Perceived Effectiveness in  
Providing Services to Homeless Students.

Principal Investigator(s): Sandra Jones  
Human Subjects Code Number: HR2018-12-827-1

Dear Ms. Jones:

The Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your  
protocol and approved of it as exempt in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Your Protocol Approval Code is HR201812-827-1/A  
Type of Review: Expedited.

This permit will expire on December 8, 2019. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent  
upon the annual submission of a renewal form to this office.

The CAU IRB acknowledges your timely completion of the CITI IRB Training in Protection of  
Human Subjects – "Social and Behavioral Sciences Track".

Your CITI certification expires on June 26, 2020.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6337.

Sincerely:

Paul I. Musey, Ph.D.  
Chair, IRB  
Human Subjects Committee

223 James P. Brawley Drive, S.W. \* ATLANTA, GA 30314-4391 \* (404) 880-8000

*Formed in 1988 by consolidation of Atlanta University, 1865 and Clark College, 1869*

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