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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSTIY, SAN MARCOS

Homeless Education: Supporting Student and Family Resilience in the Face of Poverty  
and Hardship

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Michele Christine Einspar

Committee in charge:

University of California, San Diego

Professor Janet Chrispeels, Chair  
Professor Alison Wishard Guerra

California State University, San Marcos

Professor Katherine Hayden

2010

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University of California, San Diego  
San Diego State University  
California State University, San Marcos  
2010

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and to all the students experiencing adversities such as homelessness in their lives. Resilience literature finds that the development of positive, caring relationships is a crucial protective mechanism that facilitates positive adaptation. I have been fortunate to have many meaningful relationships that have supported my endeavors. Throughout this process, my family was temporarily displaced when San Diego was ravaged by a firestorm in 2007. We were also displaced when we had the misfortune of experiencing a flood in our home. Despite these adversities, I was able to continue to be successful in this program and I also developed a healthy respect for the challenges and barriers families encounter when they become displaced from their home. If it were not for the supportive relationships of my family members, I would not have achieved this accomplishment.

To my husband, your undying support and encouragement kept me motivated to continue to work towards achieving this goal. Your love and sacrifice is the chief reason for my success.

To my mother, Pat Einspar and sister, Patti Einspar, two outstanding professionals in the field of education. Mom, your advice and willingness to edit my paper truly made a difference. Thank you for your interest in my passion and for your support. Patti, your suggestions regarding my study and your respect for my work did not go unnoticed.

To my father, Jim Einspar, an example of what resilience means. I believe a large part of why I chose to study resilience is because of the example you set for us.

You are always working to make yourself better and trying to adapt to life in a positive way. Thank you.

To all students experiencing instability in their lives, may this study make a difference in the quality of programs that provide support for you so that you may experience success in school and in life.

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## VITA

- 1991 Bachelor of Arts, Psychology  
University of California, San Diego
- 1992 Multiple Subject Credential, BCCLAD  
University of San Diego
- 1997 Master of Science, Educational Administration  
National University, San Diego
- 2002 Professional Administrative Services Credential  
National University, San Diego
- 2010 Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership  
University of California, San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Homeless Education: Supporting Student and Family Resilience in the Face of Poverty  
and Hardship

by

Michele Christine Einspar

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Professor Janet Chrispeels, Chair

University of California, San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

2010

In 2005-2006, close to one million homeless children in our nation faced unprecedented challenges trying to access and succeed in public schools. Fortunately, legislation was enacted to support this special needs population. The types of support mentioned in the McKinney-Vento Act include: transportation to and from school, immediate enrollment in school, and access to supplemental programs and school activities. Research on homeless education identify barriers students encounter and suggestions for effective policy and strategies to support them; however, there is a gap in the literature in terms of research identifying effective program components that might facilitate academic success. The literature on resilience identifies protective components that seem to project children facing adversity onto positive pathways, such

as, forming meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, developing community involvement in school, and developing positive family relationships. This dissertation addresses the gaps in literature by exploring the components of district McKinney-Vento programs serving more than 1,000 homeless students and identifies risk factors that exist in school districts with McKinney-Vento programs. Finally, this study documents protective components that exist in McKinney-Vento programs as well as the unique components that exist in programs with a higher percentage of homeless children scoring proficient on the Language Arts (LA) portion of California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test. The goal of this study is to inform school leaders about effective strategies and policies that promote resilience and success in education for students living in poverty and experiencing homelessness. This study finds that district McKinney-Vento programs show evidence of facilitating academic success for homeless students. Components found include the components those identified in resilience literature and are specifically connected to addressing students' socio-emotional, basic and academic needs. Similarly risk factors were identified in all six districts and can be compared to those cited in homeless and resilience literature. Duration of the program also diminished risks and increased positive outcomes. The districts with the greatest academic success as measured by the LA portion of the STAR showed the most evidence of creating positive family connections and focusing on student and family strengths.



## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### *Introduction and Problem Statement*

Homelessness is a social issue that impacts many people. The number of homeless students is greater today than any other day since the Great Depression (Nunez, 2000). In the year 2000, over one million children were identified as homeless (Nunez, 2000). The number of homeless families from 1995 to 2000 increased almost one and a half times the number of families identified in 1995. From 2000 to 2006, the number of homeless children continues to rise. The U.S. Department of Education Federal Data Collection in U.S. Schools confirmed that 914,255 homeless children were enrolled in schools across the United States in 2005-2006 which is a 40% increase from the 2004-2005 data collection (Duffield, Hogback and Julianelle, 2007). This number is a conservative estimate because this total only reflects the homeless children actually enrolled in school and does not include preschool children (Duffield et al., 2007). The types of living situations of homeless students vary from living on the streets to sharing housing. The majority of homeless children share housing with other people (Duffield et al., 2007). These temporary living situations can be uncomfortable, unpredictable and sometimes dangerous and often lead to a high rate of mobility (Duffield et al., 2007). Homeless children who are highly mobile are 35% more likely to repeat a grade and 78% more likely to have poor attendance than children who do not move from school to school (Nunez, 2000). This stressful life and high mobility can have a tremendous negative impact on a child's experience in school.

*Barriers.* The review of literature on homelessness and education reveals that children encounter many barriers when trying to access and succeed in public school. Some of these barriers include: difficulty enrolling in school due to missing paperwork, transportation to and from school, mental and physical health issues, poor nutrition, inconsistent attendance, residential instability and domestic violence (Buckner, Bassuk and Weinreb, 2001; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez and Neemann, 1993; Norum, 1996; Nunez, 2000 Quint, 1994; Rafferty, Shinn and Weitzman, 2004; Rubin, 1996; Stronge, 1993). Many studies address the barriers homeless students encounter when trying to access school and possible strategies to remove these barriers; however, few studies evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies on homeless children in terms of academic achievement (Baggerly, 2004; James & Lopez, 2003; Nabors, 2004; Quint, 1994).

#### *Definition of Homeless*

There are many varying definitions of *homeless* used in the body of research on homeless students. Some researchers assume homeless students to be those students residing in shelters (Buckner, Bassuk, Weinerb & Brooks, 1999; Masten, Miliotis, Graham, Ramirez, & Neeman, 1993; McChesney, 1993; Nabors, Weist, Shugarman, Woeste, Mullet & Rosner, 2004; Nunez, 2000; Nunez, 2001). Other researchers use the definition used in the McKinney-Vento Act, which encompasses a much larger group of students (Burt, Aron, Douglas, Valente, Lee & Iwen, 1999; Duffield, et al., 2007; James & Lopez, 2003; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Wong, Salomon, Elliott, Tallarita & Reed, 2004; Yon, Mickelson & LaNey, 1993). This definition includes children who

do not have a fixed residence and those who live in substandard temporary housing, such as hotels, tents and trailer parks (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Section 725, 2001). Despite the variability in definitions, a common experience for students who experience homelessness is residential instability (Berliner, 2002; Buckner, Bassuk, Weinerb & Brooks, 1999; Buckner, Bassuk & Weinreb, 2001; Burt, Aron, Douglas, Valente, Lee & Iwen, 1999; Duffield, Heyback, Julianelle, 2007; Education for the Homeless Children and Youth Program, 2004; Helm, 1993; James & Lopez, 2003; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Lowe, 2006; Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; McChesney, 1993; Norum, 1996; Nunez, 2000; Nunez, 2001; Nunez, 2005; Penuel & Davey, 1998; Rafferty, 1995; Rafferty, Shinn & Weitzman, 2004; Robertson, 1998; Stern & Tallarita & Reed, 2004; Stronge, 1993b; The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2002; Wong, Salomon, Elliott, 1996) This study will focus on homeless education programs that serve homeless students as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act. This study will be significant in contributing knowledge to educating homeless students as well as students who are living in poverty and experiencing residential instability.

#### *McKinney-Vento Act*

To address the challenges of homeless children, Congress passed the McKinney-Vento Act in 1987 and reauthorized it in 2001. This federal law requires every Local Education Agency (LEA) to have a homeless liaison that ensures that homeless students' rights and needs are addressed (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). Some of these rights include "immediate school enrollment...transportation to and from school of origin...express prohibition against segregating homeless students."

(Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004, p.3). Funding sources include McKinney-Vento subgrants and Title I Part A Reservation Funds (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). With these funds, many schools in collaboration with community agencies have developed programs that promote academic success for homeless children by eliminating barriers homeless students encounter when trying to attend and participate in school. As noted above there are many studies that identify the needs and barriers homeless students encounter and offer suggestions and policy implications for the future; however, few studies have been conducted to assess whether intervention strategies (such as group counseling), inter-agency collaboration or changed school policies to support families contribute to academic success (Baggerly, 2004; James & Lopez, 2003; Nabors, 2004; Quint, 1994).

One of the reasons few data are available may be due to the fact that homeless students are highly mobile, which makes it difficult to obtain and complete research data (Robertson, 1998). However, it has been contended that it is possible to obtain meaningful data from such a highly mobile group (Masten, 1993). Suggestions have also been provided after studying the effectiveness of public policy related to educating homeless students (Stronge, 1993b). Studies that have been conducted suggest that program components such as counseling, policies that facilitate students feeling welcome in school, and collaboration with community agencies impact student achievement in a positive way. These studies, although limited, are significant because they also identify factors that have emerged in the resilience literature.

### *Resilience Education*

Resilience literature theorizes that despite exposure to adversities such as poverty and homelessness children can be successful in school and in life. In one longitudinal study, nearly 70% of impoverished residents exhibited resilience (Werner & Smith, 2001). Resilience scholars have discovered that students who are resilient also have access to certain protective mechanisms that seem to ameliorate exposure to risks such as poverty and homelessness. The protective components identified in resilience literature will serve as the theoretical framework for my study on homeless education programs. These protective components include: meaningful relationships, a sense of belonging, a creating environment, positive community relationships and positive family connections (Bernard, 1993; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Morrison, Brown, Larson and Furlong, 2006; Wang, Haertal, & Walberg, 1996; Werner & Smith, 2001). The components identified in resilience literature on children have also been identified as effective components in successful programs that promote the development of these protective mechanisms in students who face challenges that might prevent them from being successful in school (Bernard, 1993).

Many of the key components described in the literature on homeless education programs can be compared to components identified in resilience research (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1993; Nabors et al., 2004; Norum, 1996; Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 1993b). These components include: counseling, academic support, expedient enrollment, increased access to resources in the community, parent support and collaboration with community agencies to provide

support for homeless students and families (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1993; Nabors et al., 2004; Norum, 1996; Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 1993b). McKinney-Vento programs focus on removing barriers to academic success and effectively identifying protective factors to promote success in school. Some of these strategies include: policy change to facilitate expedient enrollment, providing school supplies for students and implementing effective parent involvement programs (Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 1993b). Other components found in successful McKinney-Vento programs that can also be identified in resilience education include: creating positive environment, focusing on student and family strengths and promoting improved self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bernard, 1993; Brown et al., 2001; Robertson, 1998; Swick, 1996).

#### *Purpose Statement and Rationale*

Many of the studies address barriers to success that students encounter in school, show how homelessness impacts academic achievement and attribute low academic achievement among homeless students and students in poverty to residential instability (Buckner, et al., 2001; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1993; Norum, 1996; Nunez, 2000; Quint, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2004; Rubin, 1996; Stronge, 1993). Lacking in the research are studies that evaluate the effectiveness of key components that facilitate academic achievement for homeless students.

I am interested in the connection between poverty, homelessness and academic achievement and how school administrators can facilitate academic success for these students. As the homeless liaison for my school district, I have found that much of the research conducted on homeless families validates my observation that many of our

homeless students have bounced around from school to school, many within the boundaries of the district. I have also observed that the most challenged families appear to be those who are highly mobile both in school and residency. Thus, it is important to identify key factors that contribute to academic success of highly mobile students living in poverty. This study strives to reveal components identified in research on resilience as key mechanisms that contribute to academic success of students living in poverty and inform administrators and policy makers about the components that contribute to student resilience thus increasing the potential for quality in education outcomes and opportunities for these students. This study on homeless education programs provides important information to districts on how to support all students who live in poverty and experience challenges similar to those faced by students who are homeless.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions that guide my study are:

1. What are components of McKinney-Vento programs in districts serving more than 1,000 homeless students?
2. What are the risk factors that confront McKinney-Vento children and families that may inhibit academic success?
3. What protective components identified in the resilience literature can be found in McKinney-Vento programs?
4. What components and characteristics exist in McKinney-Vento programs that have higher rates of academic success as measured by the language arts portion of the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test?

I hypothesize that programs that provide support for homeless families by implementing policies as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act and include components as identified in resilience research contribute to stability in school and academic achievement among homeless youth.

### *Overview of Methods*

This study utilizes a multiple case study design. The first part of the study consists of an analysis of an existing survey report administered electronically to homeless liaisons in California LEAs and is submitted annually by McKinney-Vento coordinators. This study analyzes the data gathered from the 2007-2008 report. The survey addresses key components of each LEAs' homeless support programs (herein referred to as McKinney-Vento programs). Included in the survey is a narrative describing successes of each McKinney-Vento program written by the McKinney-Vento coordinator. Responses to the survey are linked with identified districts' homeless student academic achievement data to see if there is a relationship between survey responses and student achievement. The state coordinator for the McKinney-Vento program serves as a key informant to the study, enabling a richer understanding of the survey data.

Although the survey provides a statewide picture, to fully understand how McKinney-Vento may be working to stabilize students' school environment, I also conduct in depth interviews with local educational agency (LEA) McKinney-Vento coordinators in six school districts with McKinney-Vento programs. Particularly important will be to understand how the LEA coordinator works with other agencies



and how students and their families are being assisted to develop resilience in the face of hardship. I also attempt to corroborate data gathered from the homeless liaisons by interviewing a principal and counselor from a school at each LEA. Finally I conduct a document analysis of the selected districts' Request For Applications (RFAs) which presents a detailed program description. I organize and analyze data gathered from the interviews and documents by coding the data using HyperResearch software to develop key themes across cases.

### *Significance of the Study*

Although there is a wealth of research identifying barriers homeless students encounter in school and recommendations for specific policies and strategies to implement at schools, there has been little research undertaken to explore key components of successful programs that support homeless students. Furthermore, no study has connected components of a McKinney-Vento program to key components identified in Resilience Education. The results of this study will contribute to the field of research in education by informing leaders and practitioners of successful strategies used with students who are facing economic hardship and poverty.

### *Organization of the Study*

Chapter One presents an introduction to the study and the theoretical framework that guides the study. Chapter One also introduces the study's significance and the questions for research. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on homeless education as well as the components identified in resilience research that guide the study. Chapter Three provides the methodology that is used to explore McKinney-Vento programs serving more than 1,000 homeless students in California. Chapter Four

displays the results of three of the six districts and explores the program components, risk factors, protective components of each districts as well as the specific components and characteristics of the district that had the highest rate of success in this study as measured by the language arts (LA) portion of the STAR test. Chapter Five presents a cross-case analysis of all six districts involved in the study by exploring similarities and differences of program components, characteristics, risk factors, protective components as well as characteristics of the districts that had higher success rates as measured on the LA portion of the STAR test. Chapter Five also explores the role of the principal in terms of successful implementation of McKinney-Vento programs in schools. Finally, Chapter Six provides an overview of the study, a review of major findings and implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

In 2005-2006, close to one million homeless children in our nation faced unprecedented challenges trying to access and succeed in public schools (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). This literature review will address discrepancies in the definition of homelessness and establish the definition that will be used for this study. This chapter will also introduce resilience research as a theoretical lens for reviewing the literature on homeless education and synthesize studies that have analyzed legislative and academic support programs. Finally, this chapter will lay the groundwork for studying and understanding in what ways support programs affect the school lives of homeless children and their families. The findings from this study will inform policy makers and administrators about program designs and components that seem to contribute the most to student resilience and thus improve the potential for increased equality in educational outcomes and the well being of homeless students.

The review of literature on homelessness and education reveals that children encounter many barriers when trying to access and succeed in public school. Some of these barriers include: difficulty enrolling in school due to missing paperwork, transportation to and from school, mental and physical health issues, poor nutrition, inconsistent attendance, residential instability and domestic violence (Buckner, et al., 2001; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1993; Norum, 1996; Nunez, 2000; Rubin, 1996; Quint, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2004; Stronge, 1993). Many studies address the barriers homeless students encounter when trying to access school and

possible strategies to remove these barriers; however, few studies explore the ways in which these programs and their strategies influence homeless children in terms of developing their resiliency and potential for increased academic achievement.

In addition, the body of literature that addresses homeless student needs and barriers encountered when trying to receive an education reveals a discrepancy regarding the definition of homelessness. Several researchers conducted quantitative studies on homeless youth identified as those currently residing in shelters (Baggerly, 2004; Bowman, Bundy & Peoples, 2000; Buckner, 1999; Buckner et al., 2001; Masten et al, 1993; Masten et al., 1997; McChesney, 1993; Nabors et al., 2004; Nunez, 2000; Nunez, 2001; Rafferty et al., 2004; Rubin, 1996; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2006; Yon, 1993). Other scholars identify homeless students as defined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Berliner, 2002; Burt et al., 1999; Education for the Homeless Children and Youth Program, 2004; James & Lopez, 2003; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Section 725, 2001; Penuel, 1998; Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998; Stern & Nunez, 2005; Stronge, 1993a; Stronge & Popp, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, Elementary and Secondary Education Division, 2002; Wong et al., 2004). The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless youth as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004, p. 2). This also includes those “sharing housing...due to loss of housing...living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds... living in...shelters; abandoned in hospitals; or awaiting foster care placement...” (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004, p. 2). Although definitions vary, there is a wealth of research which does

recognize *residential instability* as a key factor connected to a homeless child's negative experience with school, namely academic failure (Buckner, 2001; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1997; Nabors et al., 2004; Norum, 1996; Nunez, 2000; Quint, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2004; Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 1993).

Many of the studies addressing barriers students encounter in school, show how homelessness impacts academic achievement and contributes to low academic achievement among homeless students and students in poverty. The focus of this literature review will be to review the definition of homelessness, discuss the needs of homeless students and address the issues they face as well as effective programs, including legislative support, and strategies designed to support homeless students in school that have been researched and implemented. This literature review will also explore the theoretical framework of resilience literature and introduce similarities between protective factors identified in resilience research and effective strategies discussed and evaluated in homeless education research. Although all studies discussed in this chapter incorporate different methodologies and reveal different conclusions, it is evident that homeless students face unprecedented challenges related to accessing and succeeding in school. This literature review will lay the groundwork for evaluating the effectiveness of support programs, inform policy makers and administrators about successful programs that improve academic achievement for homeless students and introduce research on resilience as a theoretical framework for identifying positive, protective factors in educating homeless students.

## Definition of Homelessness

The body of research on homeless children reveals that there are many definitions of homelessness. A review of the studies addressing the specific and diverse needs of homeless children, academic programs and legislation that support them, reveal a discrepancy regarding the definition of homelessness. Thirty-four articles reviewed include a description of homeless, while six studies only referred to the population as *homeless* and did not provide a description. In both quantitative and qualitative studies researchers defined the term *homeless*. The variation of definitions of homelessness used in the literature fall into three different categories: a) living in a shelter, b) McKinney-Vento definition, and c) highly mobile. This section will review the varying definitions and how results of the research are impacted by the definition as well as establish the definition that will be used for this study.

### *Living in a Shelter*

Much of the literature on homeless children considers a homeless student to be one who is living in a shelter. For example, a case-control study compared *housed* and *homeless* groups of children to identify potential risk and protective factors as well as consequences of homelessness (Buckner et al., 1999). The homeless group was identified through children and parents currently residing in shelters. The housed group were recruited through families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The housed group included families who had their own apartment as well as those who were sharing housing. This piece of methodology impacts the ability to generalize the results only to children living in shelters. It is important to note that the housed comparison group consists of children who are considered homeless under the

federal McKinney-Vento definition because some of these children are sharing housing and may lack consistent, stable housing. Masten et al. (1993) also identifies homeless families as those residing in shelters. The methodology of this study limits the validity of the results because ten percent of the low-income population reports being homeless at one point in time in their lives, but they are not categorized as homeless in this group (Masten et al., 1993). Low-income families and children living in shelters encounter similar risks in terms of mental health issues and both groups had experienced homelessness at one point in time. This study limits the results only to those children living in shelters as homeless, however both groups in this study could be considered homeless and are encountering adversity due to their living situation. Implications for studying children who reside in shelters also narrows the focus of results to students who actually may have more stable housing than those living in low-income housing. Although the results are useful for children living in shelters, they may not be useful for the broader population of homeless children who experience more instability than their peers who are living in a shelter.

#### *McKinney-Vento Definition*

A somewhat broader definition of homelessness is provided in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Reauthorized January 2002, which defines homeless children as:

individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence ...and includes (i) 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; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; (ii) 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... (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned, buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children... who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances in clauses (i) through (iii). (*Section 725, Definitions*).

This federal law provides a much broader definition of homeless than the definition used in the studies by Masten et al. (1993) and Buckner et al. (1999). The implications for a broader definition enable researchers to look at a broader population of students who may be suffering similar challenges despite the fact that their living situation is different. The federal law does establish a common thread between different living situations being that children experiencing homelessness have unstable living situation. This common thread in the definition is crucial for applying results to a broader population of students living in poverty and experiencing an unstable residence.

There are several studies that incorporate the federal definition of homeless as defined in the McKinney-Vento Act and expand on that definition. In his research analyzing homeless programs across the United States, Stronge (1993b) also addressed the discrepancy of the definition of homeless. When this qualitative study was conducted, Stronge (1993b) believed that this federal law did not completely answer exactly who was considered homeless. An analysis of state homeless plans revealed that 35 plans had devised nine different definitions broader than the McKinney-Vento definition (Stronge, 1993b). The focus of this study is on the analysis of homeless programs across the nation in terms of a program's ability to provide appropriate services for homeless students.



Norum (1996) refers to homeless youth as those who “lacked a permanent and safe place to live” (p.6). The focus of this article is primarily on older children who are unaccompanied by an adult and who have run away from home. Norum (1996) discusses the challenges homeless youth have in accessing public school and challenges the notion that every child has equal access to a free education in public schools particularly if they are runaways and living on the streets.

A discrepancy of the definition also exists among federal agencies that support homeless families. The U.S. Conference of Mayors established that there is a need for agencies to collaborate on the definition of homelessness (Lowe, 2006). At the Annual Winter Meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors, Mary Ellen Hombs, the Deputy Director of the U.S. Interagency Council of Homelessness found that after speaking with several federal agencies that there are five different definitions of homelessness being used among nine agencies (Lowe, 2006). When a discrepancy exists between agencies, communication regarding the needs of homeless families can become difficult. For example, one agency may provide resources and another agency may not due to the discrepancy in the definition. The common theme throughout all definitions is the lack of suitable, stable housing. If organizations that serve homeless families and researchers that study homelessness utilized this common theme of instability as a method for defining homelessness, communication would go smoothly and resources and results would be more readily applicable for this population.

### *High Mobility*

A common thread interwoven throughout most definitions of homelessness in the literature discussed in this paper would be terminology indicating high mobility, such as: *residential transience* (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003) *residential instability* (Bassuk, Browne & Buckner, 1996 as cited by Buckner et al., 2001, p.48) *geographic mobility* (Buckner, et al., 2001, p. 48), those placed in “limbo care-in foster care, kinship care, or informally with friends and relatives” (Nunez, 2000, p. 65) and *poverty nomads* (Nunez, 2000). Nearly all the literature reviewed addresses the issue of high mobility amongst homeless families. Whether children are in a shelter, doubled-up, living in a hotel, living in substandard housing, unaccompanied, or in foster care, they all seem to experience the challenge of frequent moves and frequent changes in school.

The focus of my study will be on identifying components that facilitate success in education with homeless students. For the purpose of my study, I will use the definition used by the McKinney-Vento Act. The data will be acquired from data that are submitted to the Homeless State Coordinator, who is responsible for ensuring that all LEAs are aware of the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act, which includes understanding who is homeless and implementing strategies to support these students. Existing McKinney-Vento programs are aware of who their homeless students are and have identified them in their annual report to the state coordinator.

### Resilience as a Theoretical Lens

The literature on resilience offers a theoretical lens for exploring effective components of programs supporting homeless students. Both scholars of homeless education and resilience address challenges that students encounter when dealing with

adversity. Resilience researchers refer to these challenges as risks and homeless education researchers refer to these challenges as barriers. Both risk and barriers are similar because they can inhibit students from experiencing success. Research in the field of resilience also has many similarities in terms of the solutions, recommendations and findings offered in the body of research on homeless education. This section defines resilience and addresses risk factors identified in resilience research as well as barriers identified in homeless education research. In addition, this section also introduces strategies for success as well as the limited research that has evaluated successful strategies and utilize the research on resilience as a vehicle for understanding how programs that facilitate resilience can facilitate academic success. Intervention programs that focus on eliciting resilience in children empower leaders in education to become change agents where hope and optimism are alive and where leaders can influence a positive outcome with effective interventions that mitigate negative adversities in life, such as homelessness (Benard, 1993; Werner & Smith, 2001).

#### *Definition of Resilience*

A student who is resilient is one who, despite adversities and stress in life, manages to experience success in school and in life (Bernard, 1998; Brown, Caston, Bernard, 2001; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McMillan & Reed, 1993; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Morrison, Brown, D’Incau, O’Farrell & Furlong, 2006; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1996; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1998). Resilience researchers caution that the definition can be somewhat “amorphous” and it is important to recognize that resilience is a developmental construct (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Resilience is a process of positive adaptation despite being confronted with

adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). This construct is composed of dynamic protective mechanisms that can facilitate success and is developed through the interaction of the environment, factors and processes that lead to the positive adaptation of exposure to risks, such as homelessness (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1998). This study focuses on the resilience in terms of achieving success in education, which includes academic achievement as well as socio-emotional stability.

The literature on resilience also discusses the history of how schools in our nation have attempted to diagnose and support “at-risk” youth in our schools. The term “at-risk” came about in the 1980’s when schools focused on identifying students as problems that needed to be fixed which demonstrates a rather negative focus on children (Bernard, 1998; Morrison, Brown, D’Incau, O’Farrell & Furlong, 2006). Approaching children as beings with deficits rather than strengths is, in itself, a deficit model (Bernard, 1993). This procedure of identifying risks is modeled after an application used in the field of medicine when doctors identify the sequelae and then prescribe a treatment plan for curing the illness or disease (Brown, 2001). This model focuses on the potential for failure in order to provide appropriate interventions to avoid this failure. This risk model assumes that these risk factors are a direct cause of a child’s inability to succeed. The consequence is that many students become labeled “at-risk” when they have not demonstrated any failure (Brown, et al. 2001). However, it is important to understand and identify these risks in order to study how children respond to these risks because the definition of resilience involves how students adapt to these risks and achieve success (Rutter, 1987). Now understanding resilience as a dynamic process, the remainder of this chapter will focus on identifying the risks that create

adversity and barriers to homelessness as well as the ameliorating components that facilitate academic resilience.

### Barriers and Risks

In order to identify the protective mechanisms in resilient students, it is necessary to identify the risk factors that students encounter. There are many similarities to adversities identified in resilience and homeless education research. The most pervasive risk identified in resilience research is poverty, which also is a barrier for homeless children (Wang, et al., 1998). The types of risks students in poverty encounter can be placed into three different categories: biological, environmental, and cumulative (Masten et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993). It is important to note that homelessness is a risk factor and can lead to other risk factors just as easily as other risk factors can lead to homelessness. For example, drug abuse may lead to homelessness and homelessness can lead to drug abuse. Figure 1 illustrates my hypothesized model on how these risk factors interact and Table 1 displays an overview of the risks homeless students encounter using categories described in resilience research. This section will address risk factors discussed in the literature using these three categories.

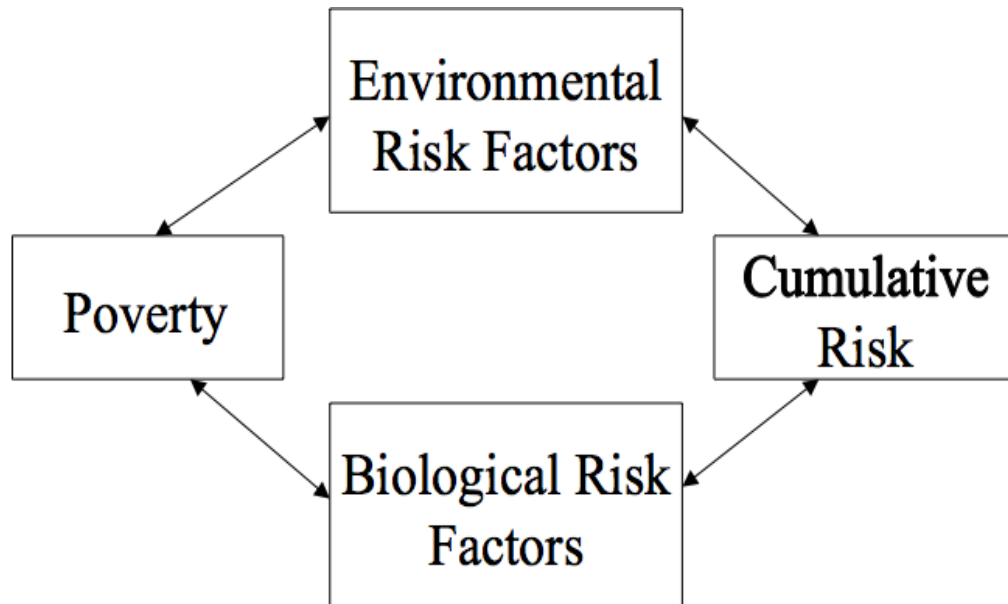


Figure 1 *Function of Risk Factors*

Table 1

*Risk Factors Associated with Poverty*

Biological	Environmental	Cumulative
Perinatal stress Gender Ethnicity Mental health issues Physical health issues	Domestic violence Family instability Drug abuse Mental health issues with primary caregiver Negative school environment High Mobility	A combination of biological and/or Environmental risk factors that perpetuate more risk factors

#### *Biological Risk Factors*

There are many biological risk factors addressed in resilience literature. The definition of a biological risk factor includes any factor that is related to the child's physical being, such as: gender, ethnicity, physical and mental status.

Gender is noted as a risk factor because research has shown that males tend to have a higher rate of disorder when they are exposed to family instability (Rutter, 1987). This may be attributed to how a boy responds to family strife as well as the reported level of exposure a boy has to family stress as compared to a girl (Rutter, 1987).

Perinatal stress and a child's physical and mental health are identified as a risk factor in resilience research (Masten et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993;). If a child has experienced pre or post partum stress, their chances of mental and physical health issues increase (Werner & Smith, 2000). Homeless education research does address the fact that shelter life leads to a high level of stress in mothers (Buckner et al., 1999). Other physical risk factors mentioned in homeless education research are the multiple health issues children experience while homeless. Asthma is the most common health risk (Nunez, 2000). Other health issues include: ear infections and stomach problems (Nunez, 2000). These health-related issues as well as poor nutrition and dental problems are barriers to school attendance and success (Buckner et al., 2001; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Masten et al., 1997; Norum, 1996; Quint, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2004; Stronge, 1993b). These pervasive health risks also lead to increased environmental risks such as hospitalization and separation from parents (Nunez, 2000; Rutter, 1987).

Ethnicity can also impact a child's vulnerability to risk factors. A quantitative study of 73 children in a Minneapolis shelter evaluating the potential educational challenges of homeless youth found that African American children were reported to have more academic and behavioral problems than the American Indian children, who

appeared to be at a lower risk (Masten et al., 1997). This may be due to social adjustment problems in the classroom due to cultural incompatibility between teacher expectations and student behavior (Taylor, 1991).

### *Environmental Risk Factors*

High mobility is an environmental risk factor that homeless students often encounter when trying to access school (Buckner et al., 2001; Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Masten et al., 1997; Norum, 1996; Quint, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2004; Stronge, 1993b). High mobility is also identified as a key barrier impacting the academic achievement of homeless students (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). Homeless students often encounter frequent moves. Sometimes a child will move from school and cannot attend school because the family lacks the resources to provide transportation to school. The U.S. Department of Education identifies transportation as the number one barrier for homeless students (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). Data on the effect of mobility on students was drawn from stories presented at the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in 2002, personal accounts from educators working with homeless students, and essays submitted for the LeTendre scholarship contest. From these stories themes that emerged included: unrecognized educational needs, unmet educational needs and lack of stable social relationships (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). Although the data collection methodology was not specified, the stories are compelling examples of how student transiency can have a negative impact on education, even of relatively successful students.

Buckner et al. (2001) also conducted a case-control study hypothesizing a connection between homelessness and academic achievement. The researchers



collected data for three years from children and mothers of homeless families and non-homeless low-income families in Worcester, Massachusetts, using interviews as well as multiple criterion-referenced evaluation instruments such as the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test Screener (WIAT-S; Psychological Corporation, 1992a) to assess academic achievement as it relates to intelligence. Data on student's negative experience with life and social support network were also collected by conducting interviews with the children and their mothers. After evaluating the results, Buckner et al. (2001) found no connection with homelessness and academic achievement, but did find a connection between high mobility and low academic achievement.

Another quantitative study that researched the connection between academic achievement and homelessness was a comparative analysis by Rafferty, et al. (2004) between homeless and low-income students' cognitive and academic test scores. This study also used data from mother and student interviews. Mother interview data is used because the majority of homeless families with children consist of single mothers (Buckner et al., 2001; Rafferty et al., 2004). Barriers were evidenced measuring cognitive data, grade retention and academic achievement using norms-referenced tests: the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children- Revised (WISC-R; Wechsler, 1974), Degrees of Reading Power Reading Test (DRP: Touchstone Applied Science Associates, 1988), and the Metropolitan Achievement Test-Revised (MAT-R; Harcourt Educational Measurement, 1986). Researchers found no difference in intelligence test scores between homeless and housed groups. Nevertheless, homeless students had a higher rate of grade retention and scored lower on reading tests. This study also found higher rates of mobility in the homeless group as compared to the housed group

(Rafferty, et al., 2004). Overall, these quantitative and qualitative studies suggest that residential instability is a strong predictor for academic failure in homeless students.

Other environmental stressors that are often associated with homelessness include substance abuse (Masten, et al., 1993; Nabors, et al., 2004; Quint, 1994; Rubin, 1996; Stronge, 1993b). Roadblocks homeless children encounter stem from a negative school environment and include denial of enrollment due to missing paperwork, lack of an appropriate place to do homework and segregation from mainstream activities (Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 2004). Homeless children are also much more likely to witness domestic violence and to suffer from family instability and separation from parents (Nunez, 2000). These life burdens have a negative impact on school attendance, school performance and everyday social interactions.

Risk factors can also be identified by looking at the type of homelessness a child encounters in their life. Robertson (1998), a researcher and school administrator, used a narrative research style and interviewed key members of the school and community to obtain a better understanding of the lives of homeless students. The interview data and the analysis were written in a highly accessible style, and painted a clear picture of issues of homelessness in the community as well as the perspective of individuals who interact with homeless families on a regular basis (a hotel custodian, a shelter director, a school clerk and a church/shelter employee). Homeless families are categorized in a type of hierarchical manner ranging from people who are temporarily displaced and highly motivated to find housing to those who have given up, or are mentally ill, or abusing drugs and alcohol and/or social deviants (Robertson, 1998). All of these living situations are identified as environmental risk factors in resilience research.

Other environmental barriers exist in negative school environments. Stronge's research used quantitative and qualitative data to assess how public policy impacted access and success with education as it relates to homeless youth as well as analyzed how homeless youth were able to access school and experience academic success. The quantitative part of the study surveyed state coordinators' perspective on the barriers of access and success. The second qualitative component involved a case study of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) over an eight month period where problems of service delivery to homeless youth are documented (Stronge, 1993a). State coordinators' survey data showed that barriers to success, such as lack of transportation, were more predominant than barriers to access such as enrollment. Although the state coordinator survey showed barriers to success, school district observation of day- to- day activity in the schools as well as parent interviews, revealed that access was more of a barrier for students, specifically issues related to inter district transfers and immediate enrollment in school.

Sadly, homeless children often experience discrimination, which is an obvious barrier to academic success. Discrimination is a risk factor that is tied to a negative school environment. A qualitative sociohistorical study documented how Benjamin Franklin Day (B.F. Day) School was once a bureaucratic social systems that kept poor people poor (Quint, 1994). There are disturbing differences between the *Orca* and mainstream education program at B.F. Day Elementary School in Seattle. The *Orca* program taught gifted and talented students. The majority of the students identified in the *Orca* program came from stable middle class living environments. The mainstream population consisted of many homeless and lower income students who were known as

the *Day* students. The two groups were completely segregated on the campus. The *Orca* students received an enriched curriculum whereas the *Day* students were constantly involved in classroom management instead of enrichment due to repeated fights and emotional outbursts in the classroom. The majority of the *Day* students were identified as *at-risk* for failure (Quint, 1994). In addition, the first and second graders were sent to other schools to comply with racial balancing laws (Quint, 1994). The composition of programs at B.F. Day is a perfect example of social separation of marginalized students in an educational setting. At B.F. Day homeless children were the new minority group being victimized by segregation and discrimination in schools today. The implications of this study suggest the need to be attentive to segregation and marginalization of children in schools. By separating students living in poverty, schools deny students the basic right of equal access to the curriculum, which creates an environmental barrier for academic success.

Exposure to stressful events at home is also an environmental risk factor identified in resilience research. Masten et al. (1993) conducted a quantitative study comparing the socio-emotional risks of 159 homeless children residing in shelters and 62 low-income children. The study utilized multiple instruments such as the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983) and Symptom Checklist 90-Revised (SCI-90-R; DeRogatis, 1977) and questionnaires to both groups. The study found that homeless children had higher exposure to stressful events and less access to resources, but there appeared to be less difference between the two groups in terms of identified behavior problems. These results can be compared to the results of Buckner et al.'s (2001) study because of the narrow definition of the homeless group and the

possibility that some students in the comparison group may also be considered homeless by the McKinney-Vento definition. The research team notes several limitations to the study including the fact that identified mental health issues could be attributed to genetics.

### *Cumulative Risk Factors*

Cumulative risk factors such as those identified in environments and stressful experiences, as well as biological risk factors can lead to a negative chain of reactions where multiple risk factors perpetuate more risk (Masten et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993). Students identified in Robertson's (1998) study seem to have been impacted by multiple risk factors and caught up in a negative risk cycle. Students in this study had very low attendance rates and consequently academic data on only 50% of students identified as homeless were available for analysis (Robertson, 1998). The other records were missing either because the next school never requested records, or because the student never returned to school (Robertson, 1998). Academically, all 11 students were failing school and nine students scored average on intelligence test scores. The study does not list the assessment used to measure intelligence. Homeless students caught up in a negative risk cycle are clearly more likely to fail in school (Rafferty et al., 2004; Robertson, 1998). Although the narrative study is compelling, there is a potential limitation of researcher bias because the researcher/interviewer is also the school administrator. However, a rich description of barriers homeless students encounter in school is evident in the interview data (Robertson, 1998). The 11 students with academic data all experienced barriers with attending school, averaging an absence rate of 22 days during the year (Robertson, 1998). Interview data also suggest low self-

esteem and difficulty establishing close relationships as barriers encountered by homeless children (Robertson, 1998).

### *Robustness of Findings*

Although there was considerable variability in the methodology of these quantitative and qualitative studies, the findings were similar in terms of identifying barriers to academic achievement. All studies point to high mobility in school and residential instability as a significant barriers to academic success. The geographic location varied from the East (Rafferty et al., 2004; Buckner et al., 2001), Midwest (Masten et al., 1993), South (Robertson, 1998) and Northwest (Quint, 1994). The quantitative studies focused primarily on data gathered from the students (Rafferty et al, 2004; Buckner et al., 2001; Masten et al.,1998) whereas the qualitative studies gathered data not only from homeless students, but also from the people who support these students (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003; Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998). The qualitative studies gathered data using interviews and observations. The quantitative studies used multiple measures, including interviews with students and their mothers to understand the barriers to academic achievement as well as standardized, norms-referenced tests to obtain academic and cognitive data on students (Rafferty et al, 2004; Buckner et al., 2004; Masten et al., 1993). Although each study considered separately has limitations, the studies collectively identified high mobility as a key risk factor to academic failure. These common findings add cohesiveness to the findings. My study will add to this growing research based by examining homeless programs established under McKinney-Vento in California to help meet the needs of these highly mobile students.

### Protective Mechanisms and Strategies for Success

Despite a child's exposure to adversity, resilience scholars contend that students have the capacity to succeed, and those that do succeed despite adversity have certain attributes that facilitate their success (Brown, et al., 2001). In addition to personal attributes, these students also have protective mechanisms in place to cope with adversity (Masten et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987; Wang, 1998). Resilience researchers advocate that schools and programs must foster an environment where student strengths are embraced and protective mechanisms identified in resilience research are used in order to facilitate student success (Wang, 1998). These mechanisms are protective because they lower the impact of the risk, maintain a high self-esteem and create opportunities for success (Rutter, 1987). The protective mechanism is thought to eliminate the potential negative additive affect of exposure to multiple risk factors (Rutter, 1987). These mechanisms are crucial during times of transition because they can direct the student onto a positive pathway that adapts successfully to risk exposure (Rutter, 1987).

The focus of resilience research is on the identification of the processes that protect against risk (Rutter, 1987). These protective processes can be compared to immunizations because the child still may be exposed to the risk, but is armed with protective mechanisms to positively adapt to the exposure (Rutter, 1987). The body of research has found common protective mechanisms that facilitate resilience. These mechanisms are dependent on context as well as the characteristics of the child. The relationship between the context and the child is transactional (Doll & Lyon, 1998). In

other words, the protective mechanism can link resilient behavior and the resilient behavior can trigger the protective mechanism (Doll & Lyon, 1998). For example, a child who positively engages adult care providers can facilitate a positive relationship and an adult care provider who is positive can elicit positive behaviors in the child. This process involves a positive relationship between family/community, student and school. The results of this positive process can lead to academic success and a positive self-concept. In addition, a student's positive self-concept and academic success can help create positive interactions from the family/community and school (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Masten, et al., 1990; Pianta & Walsh, 1998; Rutter, 1987). It is important to note that protective mechanisms connected to resilience are only associated with resilience, not a causal influence of resilience (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Figure 2 illustrates my interpretation on how the process of the development of protective mechanism can function to elicit positive self-concept and academic success.

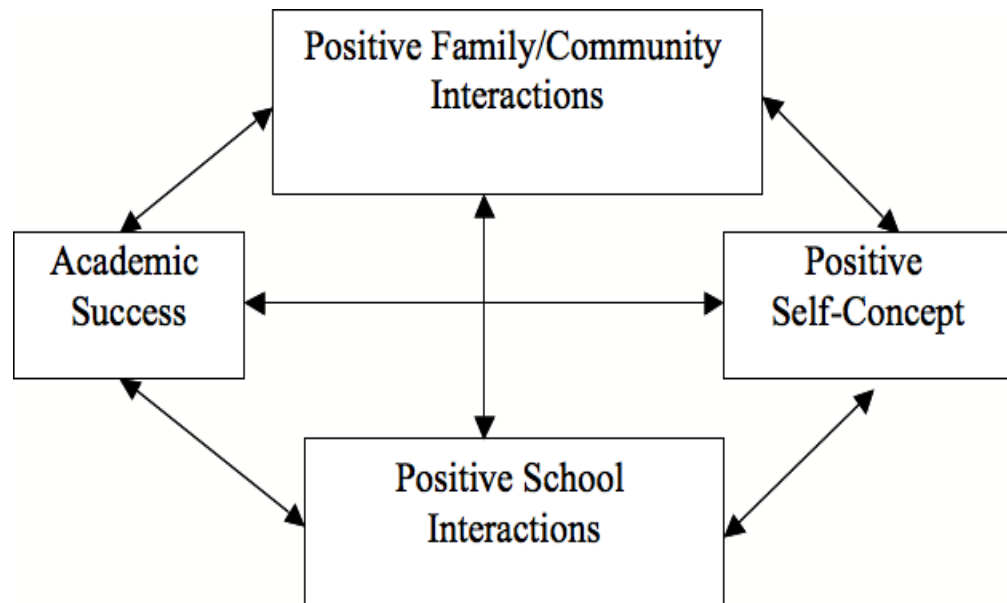


Figure 2 *The Function of Protective Mechanisms that Facilitate Resilience*



Studies on resilience find that successful outcomes occur when the focus of the intervention is on strengths rather than weakness (Brown, et al., 2001; DeCivita, 2006). Once the resilience process initiates success, it is possible to sustain this success by initiating other protective mechanisms (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). These mechanisms are dynamic and occur over time. Consequently, resilience scholars draw much of their data from longitudinal studies (Masten et al., 1990; Pianta & Walsh, 1998; Rutter, 1987). Longitudinal studies have discovered that children thrive academically despite adversities such as economic hardship, mental health issues and pre and post partum stress (Werner & Smith, 2001). Resilience scholars contend that a positive school environment facilitates protective mechanisms and can engage students, who have been exposed to environmental and biological risk factors, to experience success in school (Brown et al., 2001; Rutter, 1987).

The body of research on resilience reveals common factors that facilitate the development of protective mechanisms that contribute to academic and life success. These factors are also identified in the literature on homeless education. In a number of studies on homeless education, researchers and evaluators have offered suggestions for providing support for homeless students; however, there are few studies that actually explored how programs offer support and how homeless families perceive the effectiveness of these programs. In all 41 articles reviewed, only four actually evaluate the effectiveness of a specific program (Baggerly, 2004; James & Lopez, 2003; Nabors et al., 2004; Quint, 1994). Three evaluations indicated that support in terms of social services, specifically mental health support, facilitates a positive school experience and fosters resilience (Baggerly, 2004; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Quint, 1994).

The suggestions and strategies offered in homeless education research corroborate findings in the evaluative studies and are closely connected with components discovered in resilience research.

There are five key components found in both resilience and homeless education research: forming meaningful relationships that promote self-efficacy and self-control, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, creating community involvement in schools, and developing positive school-family relationships (Bernard, 1998; Brown, et al., 2001; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McMillan & Reed, 1993; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Morrison, et al., 2006; Rutter, 1987; Wang, et al., 1996; Wang, et al., 1998; Werner, 1993). Much of the research on resilience education also explores how these components are implemented in programs to facilitate resilience in their students. Table 2 illustrates the comparison of key components of resilience education and homeless education programs. This review outlines protective strategies in homeless education using the factors identified in resilience research as a lens for understanding their function.

Table 2

*Comparing Key Protective Components for Academic Success between Homeless Education Programs and Resilience Research*

McKinney-Vento	Resilience Education
Counseling	Forming meaningful relationships
Providing basic needs Providing transportation Expedient enrollment Equal Access	Creating a caring environment
Policies facilitate increased access to school and students/families feeling more welcome in school	Creating a sense of belonging
Collaboration	Creating community involvement in schools
Parent involvement, identifying families and educating families, staff and communities about student rights/needs and providing information and referrals to resources in the community	Developing positive family relationships

*Developing Meaningful Relationships*

The protective factor that is most important to students who were at risk is a close relationship with a family member (McMillan & Reed, 1994). The type of support in a close caring relationship that contributes to academic success includes one that has no conditions, is positive and provides high expectations for success (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Students who have a meaningful relationship with a family member or teacher where the adult has high expectations for the child's academic performance and behavior tend to have a higher self-esteem and higher academic achievement (Bernard, 1998; Brown, et al., 2001; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McMillan & Reed, 1993; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Morrison, et al., 2006; Wang, et al., 1996; Wang, et al., 1998). In addition, school counseling that is focused on providing

socio emotional support to cope with exposed risks also helps to establish meaningful relationships in school (McMillan and Reed, 1993). School social workers may help foster strengths and adaptive skills with homeless children by providing counseling (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

A strengths-based approach is an important approach to the development of meaningful relationships with homeless students (DeCivita, 2006; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Quint, 1994). A school counselor, teacher or social worker can have a significant positive impact on the life of a homeless student by adopting a strengths-based approach towards their learning (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). Focusing on student strengths means believing that the child has the capacity to succeed because of their exposure to risk (DeCivita, 2006).

Meaningful relationships also may lead to increased internal locus of control as well as increased self-efficacy (Bernard, 1998; Rutter, 1987). A student with high internal locus of control and self-efficacy is self-motivated and feels competent and capable (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Rutter, 1987). Students with a high internal locus of control are often motivated to succeed and have clear goals and tend to be academically successful (McMillan & Reed, 1994). Programs that give choices, construct opportunities to succeed, and foster responsibility for self and others provide opportunities for internal locus of control (Morrison et al., 2006). It is also suggested that relationships that foster self-efficacy through successful experiences as well as opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities facilitate an internal locus of control (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Strategies to support highly mobile students to be academically successful encourage the development of meaningful relationships in school (Rumberger, 2003). Strategies specific to developing meaningful relationships include: forming new student support groups and taking one-on-one time to meet and encourage the student and welcome them to the school (Rumberger, 2003). Other strategies mentioned in homeless education literature that could facilitate the development of meaningful relationships in school include supplemental tutoring and counseling (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004; Stronge, 1993a). These relationships encourage mentoring and focusing on helping to solve problems (Robertson, 1998; Swick, 1996).

There is little data evaluating whether intervention strategies, such as group counseling, contribute to academic success (Nabors, et al., 2004). This may be due to the high mobility of homeless students who have inconsistent attendance, which makes it difficult to access and compile a complete data set (Robertson, 1998). It is possible to obtain meaningful data from such a highly mobile group by offering incentives such as free participation in a program or a fiscal stipend to increase the likelihood of participation despite the high mobility (Masten, et al., 1993).

One example of the power of establishing meaningful relationships through counseling and support in the classroom is a case study that evaluated the effectiveness of the American School Counselors Association (ACSA) National Model for homeless students (Baggerly, 2004). This case study explored the effects of the ACSA model as an intervention on a seven-year old African American homeless girl. The study included teacher and parent pre and post interviews as well as norm-referenced mental and behavioral assessments including the CBCL- Parent Report (Achenbach, 1991),

Conner Parent Questionnaire (1973), and the Child Anxiety Scale (CAS), (Gillis, 1980). The student's pre test scores were in the clinically significant range in terms of anxiety and at-risk in terms of a negative self-concept. Unfortunately, the student only remained at the school for 12 weeks, but did show improvement in terms of self-concept after ten weekly sessions of child-centered group play therapy and teacher support (Baggerly, 2004). After ten weeks implementing the ACSA model as a support for a homeless student, an improved mental health state was noted as measured by parent, teacher and norm-referenced assessments. It could be presumed that the close relationship established through teacher support and counseling was connected to an improved self-concept in the child. A limitation to this study is the fact that only followed one student's data was tracked, thus making it difficult to generalize the results.

#### *Creating a Caring Environment*

Buddy programs and support groups create a caring environment and may lead to reduced mobility (Rumberger, 2003). Research on high mobility provides specific examples of how schools implement strategies that will facilitate a caring environment that could be connected to academic success due to increased attendance (Rumberger, 2003). A Los Angeles elementary school that created a "culture of caring" included a buddy program for new students (Rumberger, 2003). Another southern California high school developed a plan to reduce mobility by creating a support group that met weekly with a counselor (Rumberger, 2003). Providing a place to do homework and making community resources readily available to teachers so they can provide them to families also may help to create a culture of caring at school (Robertson, 1998; Swick, 1996).

Providing school supplies and resources that address basic needs, such as food and shelter, help to create a caring environment.

Increased access to services at school can also help in creating a caring environment for children. A program called *The Empowerment Zone* designed to address the mental health needs of students who are living in shelters and low-income housing was evaluated for effectiveness in terms of increasing teacher and student awareness of available resources (Nabors, et al., 2004). The hope was that school-based prevention/intervention services will increase the chance that homeless youth will have access to these much-needed services (Nabors et al., 2004). After participation in the program, data was analyzed to determine whether students became more aware of health and mental health resources. Teacher satisfaction and the potential for repeating intervention strategies in the classroom was also evaluated by researchers (Nabors et al., 2004). Overall satisfaction of the program was high for students and above average to excellent for teachers who reported that they would be able to repeat activities in the future. This study suggests that increasing access and awareness to resources creates an environment that is inclusive and caring to homeless children.

#### *Creating a Sense of Belonging*

One intervention that contributed to an increased sense of belonging at school is a positive school climate. A positive school climate is identified as one that is welcoming and encourages one-to-one connections with teachers and administration. This healthy climate extends to the whole school and “enhances a sense of belonging” (McMillan & Reed, 1993, p. 15). Policies and practices that focus on creating a welcoming environment at school are “alterable factors” that promote education

resilience (Morrison et al., 2006). In addition, resilience attributes in effective schools include peer programs as a method for engaging students and helping them to feel a part of the school community (Bernard, 1993; Wang et al., 1998). Peer programs reflect the culture that children are viewed as a “resource to contribute to schools”, not as “a problem to be fixed” (Wang et al., 1998, p.7). Peer groups also protect against adversity and stress by providing a source of concern and “a sense of being cared for” (Wang et al., 1998, p. 11,).

Homeless Education legislation has encouraged schools to create a sense of belonging for homeless children through mandating policy changes. The McKinney-Vento Act requires every LEA (Local Education Agency) to have a homeless liaison who is responsible for ensuring that homeless students’ rights and needs are addressed (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). Some of these rights include: prompt school enrollment, support for transportation to and from school and equal opportunities to participate in activities at school (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). . Other suggestions include the development and use of affidavits designed to facilitate expedient enrollment (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). School districts attempt to create a more welcoming environment for homeless students by implementing board policy that expedites a homeless student’s enrollment and participation in school (Duffield, et al., 2007).

Two school districts in Texas facilitated resilience in homeless students by complying with provisions stated in the McKinney-Vento Act that mandate schools provide transportation for homeless students to their school of origin (James & Lopez, 2003). The two school districts ensure that homeless students have access to their



school of origin despite the barrier of no transportation to their school (James & Lopez, 2003). Both districts varied in size and demographics and aimed to increase student stability in school. Houston Independent School District (HISD) had 211,000 students with approximately 1,500 students identified as homeless. HISD also provided transportation for parents and students for other purposes, such as meetings at school, extracurricular activities and doctor appointments (James & Lopez, 2003). Victoria ISD (VISD) had a student population of almost 14,500 students. The actual number of homeless students in this district is not given; however, 49.8% of the students are eligible for free-reduced lunch and student mobility is a constant challenge in this school district. VISD implemented a policy *One Child-One School-One Year* in 1995 and observed drastic improvement in terms of student mobility and attendance (James & Lopez, 2003, p. 135). After two years of *One Child-One School-One Year*, student attendance improved by 63,340 days (James & Lopez, 2003p. 135). Consequently, state funding increased by 1.8 million dollars (Bowman, Bundy & Peoples, 2000 as cited by James & Lopez, 2003). Although James and Lopez do not include academic data, the impact of providing support through transportation to increase school stability is evident in terms of data gathered on attendance rates in VISD (2003). By providing transportation, students are able to remain at their school of origin and maintain a sense of belonging as well as caring relationships that have been established at their school. A sense of belonging and caring relationships are key factors identified in the resilience literature which facilitate success in school.

It is suggested that a sense of belonging can also be created by providing shelters with school spirit t-shirts so students can feel more a part of the school, sharing

school communication, such as newsletters, with shelters, and providing shelters with materials needed to do homework (Robertson, 1998).

The social reconstruction of B.F. Day School environment impacted the homeless students in a positive way based upon the many interviews conducted throughout her study (Quint, 1994). Many of the families who were homeless consisted of single mothers with children. All but one of the mothers interviewed for this book reported to have had a positive experience with the school and felt a sense of belonging. The mothers interviewed noted that the school cared and provided resources, such as clothing, school supplies, and transportation, so the children could get to school. In terms of the program's impact on academic achievement, B. F. Day School was transformed from the lowest ranked school in improvement (out of 65 elementary schools in Seattle) to the seventh highest in two years.

#### *Community Involvement in Schools*

Dimensions of effective programs have education resilience attributes (Wang, 1998). The Climate and Organization dimension includes attributes that provide coordinated school-linked services and community involvement that involves shared decision-making (Wang, 1998). This can be compared to the in-depth collaboration, which occurs to provide integrated services provided by the school and community to facilitate success in school for homeless children. The KOOL-IS program offered at B.F. Day Elementary School involved tremendous community and school collaboration in order to address the complex and intense socio-emotional and academic needs of homeless students (Quint, 1994). The school caseworker collaborated with other agencies to find stable housing for families as well as provided resources to meet the

health and mental health needs of the students (Quint, 1994). Effectiveness of collaboration is also noted in terms of effectively integrating services: “the pooling of resources (time and money) reduces loss from duplicated and fragmented interventions and provides a cost-effective way to address problems” (Bernard, 1993, p. 3).

Interagency collaboration to facilitate easy access to services that provide support for socio-emotional, physical, employment needs (Stronge, 1993a). Fortunately, due to the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, many schools in collaboration with community agencies have developed programs to facilitate school access and promote academic success for homeless children.

#### *Developing Positive Family Relationships*

Family involvement with school is also a protective factor connected with education resilience (Wang et al., 1996). Effective strategies that are associated with resilience include providing resources that improve parent-child relationships (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Schools that were effective and promoted resilience were also more engaged with families and community (Wang, et al., 1998). Homeless education research suggests parent involvement as an effective strategy for increasing success with homeless children (Nabors et al., 1994; Robertson, 1998). “Developing close relationships with parents” is suggested as an effective strategy for supporting homeless students (Robertson, 1998, p. 167). B.F. Day School facilitated positive parent-teacher as well as parent-child relationships with its effective parent volunteer program (Quint, 1994). A single parent with four children interviewed in this study talks about how her involvement with the school makes her feel good about herself and the school and she states: “That make a big difference in my kid’s attitude about learnin’ and gettin’ along

with the teachers and the other students” (Quint, 1994, p. 98). Clearly, a positive family relationship between the school and family beginning at an early age has a positive impact on a child’s success in school (McMillan & Reed, 1993; Wang et al., 1998). Programs that promote self-efficacy and link families to resources in the community encourage the students and parents to utilize these resources to be successful in school and life.

### *Methodological Considerations*

The few articles that research program effectiveness vary in program type and methodology. Baggerly (2004) introduced how the ACSA model can be used with a homeless child; however, the results are difficult to generalize because the model was tested on only one student. Nabors et al. (2003) included the largest group of students (55 students from homeless shelters and 86 from low-income families) in their study, however the geographical location could make the results less generalizable to all homeless students across the nation because the variability of the demographic background of homeless children across the nation. Over 95% of the children in the study were African American (Nabors, et al., 2003). Although African Americans are disproportionately represented overall among homeless families, certain regions show a much lower representation of African Americans in their homeless population (Nunez, 2005). Masten et al. (1997) also had a large sample size (73 students) that consisted of 83% African American. The nationwide average of African American homeless families is 61% with Western states consisting of only 13% African American families (Nunez, 2005). In addition, these three studies may not be generalized very easily to the homeless population because they only studied students residing in shelters. The

findings from the James and Lopez study (2003) are generalizable because of the numbers of students in the two school districts. However, a possible limitation of researcher bias is possible because the methodology of how the information was obtained from the districts was not clear.

The description of teacher training also varied from study to study. All four studies address teacher training as an important component to the implementation of their programs, however Baggerly (2004) and James and Lopez (2003) provide very little description of the teacher training. Nabors et al. (2004) and Quint (1994) provide detailed descriptions of the training including follow-up surveys, excerpts from videos used and quotes of feedback and comments from teachers who received the training. A follow-up study researching the capacity of teacher in-service supporting homeless students would be informative to this field of research.

All research discussed in this section utilized different methodologies to analyze the effectiveness of intervention and support systems for homeless children; however, they all find that positive and creative solutions that focus on student strengths is an effective strategy for improving academic success for homeless students. The majority of studies reviewed in this section focus on supporting student mental health to impact school success (Baggerly, 2004; Nabors et al., 2004; Quint, 1994; Masten et al., 1997). Some research found that whole school and district reform focused on addressing the specific needs, such as transportation, is connected to improving achievement (Quint, 1994; James & Lopez, 2003). All studies in this section indicate there are positive solutions for supporting homeless children in school. My study will strive to identify

key factors in McKinney-Vento programs that are designed to bring out strengths in homeless students to facilitate academic success.

### Summary

Homeless children face unprecedented challenges when attempting to go to school and the number of homeless children continually increases from year to year. Homeless students also encounter many inequities when attempting to go to school. The research uncovers barriers students encounter when accessing school, such as delayed enrollment due to missing paperwork, not having a place to do homework, lack of transportation and frequent moves and segregation. In addition, many other risk factors may impact a homeless child's ability to go to school. Risk factors stem from the student's biological and environmental exposures, such as: drug abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. A student's ethnicity and gender may also impact his or her ability to negotiate risk (Rutter, 1987). Nationwide, the dominant ethnic group that is homeless is African American; however, this statistic varies from state to state. The specific geographical area where the research was conducted influenced the ethnic breakdown of children involved in studies. For example, in one study a higher percentage of Puerto Rican (45%) than African American students (21%) were represented (Buckner et al., 1999); whereas in another study a higher percentage (81%) of African American students were included in its sample (Masten et al., 1993). The children in another case study included 56.1% Hispanic students in one district and 50% Hispanic students in the other school district (James & Lopez, 2003). Yet, another homeless sample included 52.2% African American students and 34.8% Puerto Rican

students (Rafferty et al., 2004). The ethnic breakdown seems to vary by the geographical location of the study. Overall, African Americans and Latinos seem to encounter the most exposure to homelessness in the United States. The majority of research has been focused on identifying the barriers students encounter and how the barriers impede academic achievement. These studies have been important and have been crucial in laying the groundwork for policy changes and improvements to support homeless students.

Many studies identify challenges and barriers homeless students encounter in school; however, few studies focus on exploring the program components and how they may build resilience in homeless children that affect their school functioning. The studies that have evaluated these programs have identified creative positive approaches and a focus on student strengths as key factors to promoting academic success such as improved attendance, mental health and academic achievement. This supports research that identifies caring learning environments that are culturally proficient and facilitate meaningful learning as key components of effective strategies for working with students in poverty (McKinney, Frazier & Abrams, 2006). Identifying and implementing these protective factors to promote academic success supports the theoretical framework of resilience education.

Resilience theory identifies many attributes that have been associated with students who are successful in school. These attributes seem to develop over time and are connected with certain protective mechanisms that seem to ameliorate risks that are often common among children living in poverty (Freitas & Downey, 1998; Doll & Lyon, 1998; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten et al., 1990; Pianta & Walsh, 1998; Rutter, 1987;

Want et al., 1994). Key components of factors that facilitate protective mechanisms are: forming meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, creating community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships. These components can be compared to suggestions offered and programs studied in homeless education research geared towards facilitating academic success with homeless students. These common factors are: forming meaningful relationships through counseling and peer programs to increase self-efficacy and internal locus of control; creating a caring environment by providing resources to meet basic needs and facilitating access to school by offering expedient enrollment and transportation; creating a sense of belonging by implementing policies focused on increasing access to school for homeless families; creating community involvement in schools by collaborating with outside agencies in order to integrate needed services for homeless students and families; developing positive family relationships by educating families, staff and community about homeless students' rights and needs, providing necessary supplies to help students be successful in school and implementing parent involvement programs in school that engage parents and encourage positive family/school relationships and promote academic success.

#### *Future Research*

Future research needs to address successful strategies and policies for homeless children in education. It is important to study and understand the factors, processes and mechanisms that contribute to homeless students who are successful in school despite their exposure to the debilitating effects of homelessness. Research identifying components in successful programs that facilitate resilience in homeless students,



teachers and communities will be beneficial to the practitioners who serve these children. Evaluating whether there is a connection between school stability and academic success with homeless children is another beneficial area for future research.

Future research must also consider the federal definition of homelessness, especially when evaluating academic achievement and the impact of intervention programs on academic achievement. With the many discrepancies of the term *homeless*, results are ambiguous and may be misconstrued. For example, students living in shelters may be performing more successfully in school than students with more unstable housing, or those students with no housing at all (living in the car or on the streets). It is also important to have a more cohesive definition in terms of establishing this group as more than just students living in a shelter. If the definition is clear, schools and community agencies will have a common language that will streamline support for homeless children. In addition, more effort needs to focus on evaluating programs that serve a broader group of students who suffer similar effects of homelessness, such as high mobility. Continued research on the topic of homeless education is crucial not only to improving equality in education and well being of homeless students but also to breaking the cycle of homelessness in our society.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Methods

This study identifies key components of McKinney-Vento programs that contribute to academic success of homeless students. This study also explores the range of services offered by McKinney-Vento programs in California and identifies similarities and differences in programs that have higher rates of success on the Standardized Testing And Reporting (STAR) test with their homeless student population compared to those that do not. For purposes of this study, I focus on districts serving between 1,000 and 3,500 homeless students. I use STAR academic data reported in the 2007-2008 Annual Survey Report of McKinney-Vento Programs as well as STAR data from 2007-2008 reported by Dataquest. For the purposes of this study, I used overall proficiency for the language arts (LA) portion of the STAR test. I used LA data because the math data becomes differentiated in the middle and high school grades and it is not possible to compare data between the homeless and general population.

All school districts in the state of California are required to have a homeless liaison who is responsible for meeting the needs of homeless students. In addition, all districts receiving Title I funds have access to Title I Part A Reservation Funds to use to support homeless students in school. If a district wishes to receive more supplemental funding, it may apply to receive McKinney-Vento funds in order to implement a more comprehensive program to support homeless children. In 2007-2008, the state of California funded 63 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and 28 County Offices of Education (COEs). To receive these funds these LEAs and COEs participated in a

competitive grant process. Award amounts vary by homeless population of the district or county. All districts (or LEAs) and counties (or COES) receiving funds are required to have a plan for ensuring homeless students rights and needs are addressed. The plan must include providing support for homeless students as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act. The law requires some services such as transportation. Other services are optional and up to the discretion of the district to offer. Some of these services may include: staff development, increased access to resources, before/after school programs, counseling, parent involvement classes, school supplies, clothing and books.

The body of research discussed in Chapter Two shows that there are many studies on homeless students identifying barriers and offering implications and suggestions for policies and programs to remove barriers for homeless students, however there are few studies that identify key factors of successful programs. The literature review also identifies a theoretical framework highlighting the construct of resilience as a lens for understanding strategies and programs designed to support homeless students in school to be academically successful.

#### *Research Design and Research Questions*

I use a multiple case study approach to identify key components of successful McKinney-Vento programs and characteristics of those programs that do not seem to have the same student success rate. A case is defined as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 194, p. 25). In this case, the phenomenon being explored are the components of McKinney-Vento programs in the bounded context of school districts serving more than 1,000 identified homeless children. This case study is particularistic because it seeks to inform the education leaders about successful strategies that support highly mobile students living in poverty

(Merriam, 1998). This study is descriptive because it shows the depth and complexity of successful McKinney-Vento programs and the challenges less successful programs may face through data collected from coordinator, principal and counselor interviews (Merriam, 1998). Finally, this study is heuristic because it explains how resilience components are evident in McKinney-Vento programs through interview and document data (Merriam, 1998).

In my research the phenomena of study are the characteristics of McKinney-Vento programs that serve homeless children in California. Of particular interest are the ways in which successful programs reflect the components identified in resilience. Concepts drawn from resilience research serve as the primary theoretical lens for analyzing the data I obtain from interviews with coordinators of McKinney-Vento programs and review of documents such as state reports and local plans.

Since I explore characteristics and conditions of multiple programs, I use a multiple case design leading to cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2003). The case study method is useful when (a) the phenomenon of interest is contemporary and occurring in a real life context and (b) the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clear (Yin, 2003). In this case the McKinney-Vento programs do not stand alone, but are embedded within larger district, community and state contexts. Although the primary unit of analysis in this study is the McKinney-Vento program, the blurring of boundary between program and district may need to be taken into account as the data are analyzed.

Through a multiple case study approach, I am able to investigate a complex social phenomenon with multiple variables (Patton, 1990). The advantage of a multiple

case design is that I am able to offer a deeper understanding of the process of providing care and assistance to homeless children and the conditions that may support quality programs. Multiple case studies are often perceived to be more robust (Yin, 2003). For purposes of this study, I use a theoretical replication design because I predict contrasting results among the cases but for predictable theoretical reasons (Yin, 2003). For example, my prediction is that a district that appears to have a negative school environment will also have lower levels of academic success than a district with a positive school environment. Resilience theory discusses how components of a positive school environment (a caring environment that promotes a sense of belonging and meaningful relationships and collaborates with the community and strives for positive family relationships) may be connected to fostering academic success with students facing adversities such as homelessness.

One strength of case study research is that it uses a variety of sources of evidence, which allows for the inclusion and exploration of a broader array of issues (Yin, 2003). Multiple data sources will be used to strengthen this study of McKinney-Vento programs. Every type of data collected has inherent weaknesses and is unlikely to allow the researcher to fully capture a complete perspective of the phenomenon of interest. For example, interviews are a strong source of evidence because the data gathered will be directly related to the topic of study. A limitation of an interview is the issue of “reflexivity”; the interview may proceed differently because it is being recorded and observed (Yin, 2003, p. 86). Interviews also reflect the perspective of those being interviewed and do not convey the whole story. Documents are considered a reliable source because they are “stable...unobtrusive...exact” and cover a “long span of time,

many events and many settings.” (Yin, 2003, p. 86). A limitation of using documents as a data source is that it may reflect a bias of the author of the document. They also vary in quality and focus (Patton, 1990). Surveys can provide a broader perspective than interview data, but often cannot answer how and why questions. Fortunately, for the proposed case study a variety of data are available and will be used to inform the research.

The array of data collected allows me to triangulate the findings which is an important way to strengthen the study (Miles & Huberman, 1998). Specifically validity and reliability are increased through the triangulation of multiple data sources (Miles & Huberman, 1998; Yin, 2003). For triangulation to occur “converging lines of inquiry” are required (Yin, 2003, p. 98-99). I achieve triangulation through multiple data sources: interviews of those who offer the program such as state and local coordinators; those who see the program in operation in their school such as principals and counselors; and review of local plan documents such as Request for Applications and surveys submitted for funding and compliance purposes. In addition, through the interviews and surveys, I use multiple data sources to corroborate findings. Figure 3 illustrates the data to be collected and its convergence on the phenomenon. In addition, Table 3 summarizes how the data sources are connected to my research questions.

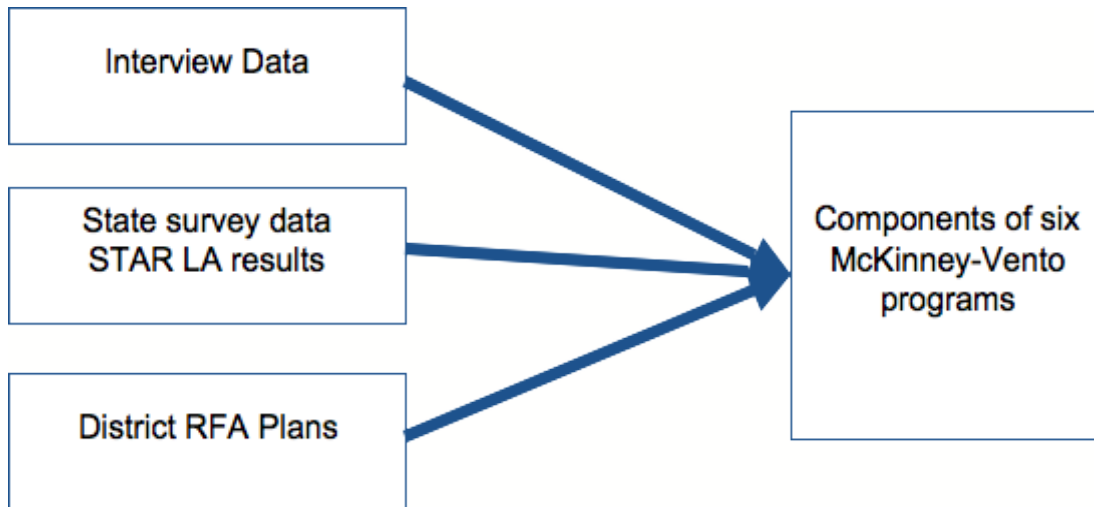


Figure 3 *Convergence of Evidence for Data Triangulation*

Table 3

*Summary of Research Questions, Data Sources and Data Collection Timeline*

Research Questions	Data Sources
What are the components of McKinney-Vento programs in districts serving over 1,000 homeless students?	State survey RFA Coordinator, principal and counselor interviews
What are the risk factors that confront McKinney-Vento children and families that may inhibit academic success?	RFA, Coordinator, principal, and counselor interviews STAR data
What are the protective components in district McKinney-Vento programs and how are they connected to resilience literature?	State survey, RFA, Coordinator, principal, and counselor interviews
What protective components exist in McKinney-Vento programs that have higher rates of academic success as measured by the language arts portion of the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test?	State survey RFA Coordinator, principal, and counselor interviews STAR data

*Research Context*

The setting for this study is public school districts, also referred to as LEAs, in the state of California. The focus of this study is the LEAs receiving McKinney-Vento funds to enhance their homeless education programs. In 2007, there were 91 McKinney-Vento grant recipients in California. These recipients are comprised of 63 LEAs and 28 county offices of education (COEs). The number of districts receiving McKinney-Vento grants is small in comparison to the total number of district in California. There are 1,042 districts in California, so 6% of school districts are receiving extra funding to support their homeless population. In 2007-2008, all 91 grant recipients reported data to the state regarding the status of their homeless students. The state also collected data from the CON-AP (Consolidated Application) on the remaining districts not receiving funding. The total number of homeless students identified in the state of California in 2007-2008 was 224,967. This reflects 3.5% of the total number students enrolled in California, but does not represent students that are preschool age or students who are not enrolled due to homelessness. The total number of identified homeless students in California has increased 35% from the 2005-2006 school year. The number of identified homeless students seems to be increasing as districts become more aware of the definition of homeless as identified by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Of the 63 districts receiving McKinney-Vento funds, 18 of the school districts serve over 1,000 homeless students in their school district. Of the 18 school districts, 15 are districts serving students in grades K-12. The student population ranges from 18,000 to 88,186. Ethnicity in the district is broken down by the highest percentage of identified ethnic groups. In all identified districts, the largest ethnic groups were:



Hispanic, African-American, Caucasian and Asian. Of these four ethnic groups, African-American and Hispanic were highly represented as compared to Caucasian and Asian (California Department of Education website, Dataquest). The terms for ethnicity were taken from the terms used by the California Department of Education. Socioeconomic levels in these districts vary, but the majority of districts from this sample are living below the poverty level as measured by number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Communities in this sample range from agricultural to industrial with most having high unemployment rates and some with a subpopulation of undocumented workers (McKinney-Vento RFA, 2006).

#### *Role of Researcher and Limitations to the Study*

I have served as the homeless liaison and the McKinney-Vento coordinator for an LEA in Southern California. Potential bias for participant-observers exists because of the possibility of the observer manipulating events (Yin, 2003). This circumstance will be mitigated because I am currently not in the position of homeless liaison and my role in this study will be that of a researcher and an interviewer. As a former insider, one advantage I enjoy is access to the state coordinator and to the database consisting of survey data collected from LEA coordinators in 2007-2008 on the McKinney-Vento program. Although the program records are all publicly available, my position as a former McKinney-Vento program coordinator helped to speed access to key data because I knew of its existence. My position also facilitated expedient communication between the state coordinator and several of the district coordinators.

It is important to mention that there are limitations of the observer and interviewer. Limitations include: “bias due to poorly constructed questions, response bias, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity-interviewee gives what interviewer

wants to hear.” (Yin, 2003, p. 86). I mitigate potential bias by using a structure for my interview provided in an article on education resilience authored by Morrison et al. (2006). I also piloted my interview questions and adapted the interview based on feedback from the pilot study. To avoid inaccuracies due to poor recall, I audio-recorded and transcribe each interview. All participants were faxed a description of the study and a consent form and were asked to sign and fax the consent form to me prior to conducting the interview. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using Hyper Research software as a tool to draw out themes identified in resilience and homeless literature.

Another limitation to the study is the limited number of participants that were willing to participate in the second and third phase of the study. However, three districts provided representation from each level of interviews, thus providing an opportunity to provide a detailed profile of three districts serving over 1,000 homeless students and their unique characteristics. In addition, evidence from documents as well as each district’s LEA coordinator provides sufficient data for analysis and findings for all six districts.

#### *Selection of Research Sites*

Of the 15 districts receiving McKinney-Vento funds and serving more than 1,000 homeless students, 13 districts had academic data and documents available for analysis. The 13 districts were organized by average percentage of homeless population scoring proficient on the LA portion of the STAR test. Language arts data was used because math data is differentiated in the upper grades and it is not possible to compare scores between groups. I selected four districts with the lowest average proficiency and four districts with the highest average proficiency. Of the eight selected districts

chosen, six were willing to participate in my study. Table 4 lists a profile of the six school districts, gives a snapshot of the total population, homeless population and ethnicity of the total population of the six school districts serving more than 1,000 students in California.

Table 4

*Profile of School Districts in California Serving More than 1,000 Homeless Students*

School District	Homeless Population	Total Population	Hispanic	Caucasian	African – American	Asian
10	1,051	88,186	51.2%	16.4%	17.5%	8.3%
20	1,590	24,000	52.5%	9.7%	14.9%	7.8%
21	1,696	18,889	77.9%	18.8%	.6%	1%
27	2,452	79,383	58.7%	14.7%	10.8%	14%
24	2,190	18,000	61.3%	4%	2.5%	20%
29	2,824	30,192	74.5%	.2%	23.8%	0%

*Note.* Ethnic percentages are based on total district population. Data obtained from 2007-2008 McKinney-Vento RFA and California Department of Education Dataquest.

The goal of the district selection was to identify a representative sample of districts receiving McKinney-Vento funds and serving more than 1,000 homeless students. The six districts willing to participate in the study represented three districts with the lowest scores on the language arts portion of the STAR test and the three districts with the highest scores on the language arts portion for the STAR test. The phenomena of interest for this study are each district's McKinney-Vento program. Other measures of success and challenges were identified in the interview and document data.

### *Participants*

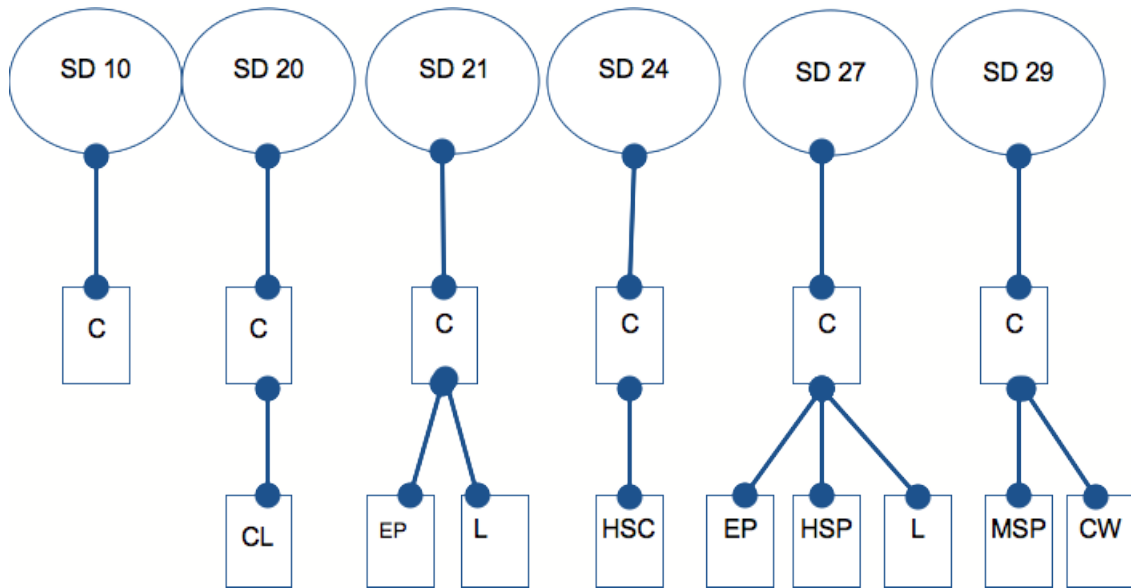
The purpose of this study is to gain insight from key participants who are familiar with their district's McKinney-Vento program. Participants interviewed for this study represented three levels, involved three phases of interviews and included a total of 15 participants. Thirteen of the participants were female and two participants were male. The first phase included six LEA McKinney-Vento coordinators. The second phase included four principals. The third phase included five participants who had a counseling or social work support role in their district.

LEA McKinney-Vento coordinators of the selected districts were interviewed in the first phase of participants in the study. LEA coordinator data is essential because coordinators of McKinney-Vento programs are the most familiar with program components and can corroborate data obtained from the documents related to the McKinney-Vento program. All six LEA coordinators agreed to participate in the study. Five of the coordinators were female and one of the coordinators was male.

To inform the second and third phases of the interview process, recommendations were solicited from the LEA coordinators. It was important to obtain recommendations from the coordinators because they are knowledgeable of key personnel who are familiar with the McKinney-Vento program in their school district. The second group of participants involved interviews with principals from the selected school districts. This data is crucial to the study because this will be the first time that principals have the opportunity to share their perceptions regarding components of McKinney-Vento programs that facilitate academic success. A total of four principals participated in the study. Three of the principals were female and one was male. The four principals represented three school districts: District 21, District 27 and District

29. One female elementary principal represented District 21, one high school and one elementary principal represented District 27, and one middle school principal represented District 29.

The third phase of the interviewing was conducted with district or school counselors, liaisons or social workers. The participants in the counseling roles were more familiar with the details of the McKinney-Vento program because some were funded by McKinney-Vento and all were focused on providing support for students who may be encountering risks (such as homelessness) that inhibit success in school. The role of the counselor, social worker and community liaison is also similar in terms of referring students and or family members to resources in the community. Insight from all three of these roles adds robustness to my study because all three of these positions are familiar with the goals of their district's McKinney-Vento program. A total of five participants from this phase represented five districts. Four of the participants were female and one of the participants was a male. One female community liaison represented District 20, one liaison represented District 21, one high school counselor represented District 24, one family liaison represented District 27 and one caseworker represented District 29. Figure 4 displays an overview of the three phases of participants in this study.



SD = School District

C= Coordinator

CL= Community Liaison

EP= Elementary Principal

L = Liaison

HSC = High School Counselor

HSP = High School Principal

MSP = Middle School Principal

CW = Case Worker

Figure 4 *Three Phases of Participant Interviewing Process*

### Data Sources and Collection

Data sources for this study include interview and document data. Interview data is provided by participants in all six districts and includes coordinators, principals, counselors, social workers and liaisons. Document data collected includes McKinney-Vento survey data as well as each district's Request for Application (RFA) that provides an overview of the district's McKinney-Vento plan.

### *Interviews*

I conduct four sets of interviews to explore differences and similarities of successful and challenged McKinney-Vento programs and to determine whether all programs incorporate resilience components in their programs. The first set involves an interview with the state coordinator who agreed to participate in the study because she saw the study's potential value to McKinney-Vento programs. The state coordinator assisted in providing state survey data as well as each district's RFA. In addition, the state coordinator provided useful background information regarding the importance of McKinney-Vento programs in the state of California.

The second set involves interviews with six district coordinators, selected from 15 districts that reflected the top and bottom academically performing homeless population as measured by STAR language arts test. LEA coordinators were also asked to describe components of their program that they felt were linked to academic success as well as challenges and barriers encountered when trying to implement the program. When interviewing LEA coordinators, I asked for a recommendation of principal and or counselor, social worker or liaison in their district who would be able to answer questions about the homeless program in their district. The coordinator interviews took approximately one hour. (See Appendix B).

The third set involved interviews with principals at each selected LEA. Principals were selected because of their capacity as leaders in their school and because they are seen by the coordinator as a key informant of evidence of the impact of the McKinney-Vento program at school sites. As the school leader, a principal has opportunities on a daily basis to observe the impact supplemental programs have on the students in the school. A principal at a school is a strong witness that corroborates

evidence of successes or challenges of the McKinney-Vento program. Interviewing principals also fills a gap in the literature on homeless education in terms of documenting the perspective of school leaders on the impact of homeless education support programs and their role in providing leadership. Based on literature regarding the key role of principals in student achievement, it is hypothesized that the principal's knowledge and support for the McKinney-Vento program may be a factor in the provision of a program that shows the presence of resilience components. The interview will also serve to triangulate the data collected from the LEA coordinator.

The fourth set of interviews involves school staff who provide counseling support and referrals to resources for students and families in the school community. This person is a key player who provides services to homeless students is the school counselor. Several studies on homeless education have included counselors in their studies (Baggerly & Boorkowski, 2004; Buckner, 1999; Nabors, 2004, 2001; Quint, 1994). Similar to the principal, the school counselor is also a strong witness because of his or her ability to establish close relationships with students as well as their direct influence with implementing support programs. A counselor is aware of support resources such as McKinney-Vento for students needing socio-emotional as well as academic support. They are also in a better position to describe key components of the program that support both school and student resilience because they are more directly involved with the district McKinney-Vento program than the principal, who tends to have more of a supervisory role in regards to the implementation of the McKinney-Vento program.



*Interview protocol*

In conducting these interviews I primarily use an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) interview strategy (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). AI is based on tenets of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). Instead of focusing on the problems of an organization, AI focuses on the positive aspects of an organization and explores what is working to make an organization successful. Phase I of the model involves: “appreciating the best” of the organization which often involves telling stories of peak experiences. It is important to note that AI does not turn a blind eye to problems existing in an organization; it simply shifts the focus on the strengths and asks participants what needs to be strengthened to increase desired results. Using the AI approach to guide the interviews also supports the resilience theory, which focuses on protective and risk mechanisms of their environment. The interview guide follows a semi-structured format (Merriam, 1998) using AI as a guideline for formatting the questions (Appendices A, B and C). The transcripts of interviews are coded for themes related to research questions and include: district characteristics, services and components of programs, protective mechanisms connected to success and risk mechanisms that inhibit success. Specific themes of resilience will include: forming meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, promoting a sense of belonging, creating community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships. Figure 5 provides an overview of the themes used for coding the interviews as well as the documents.

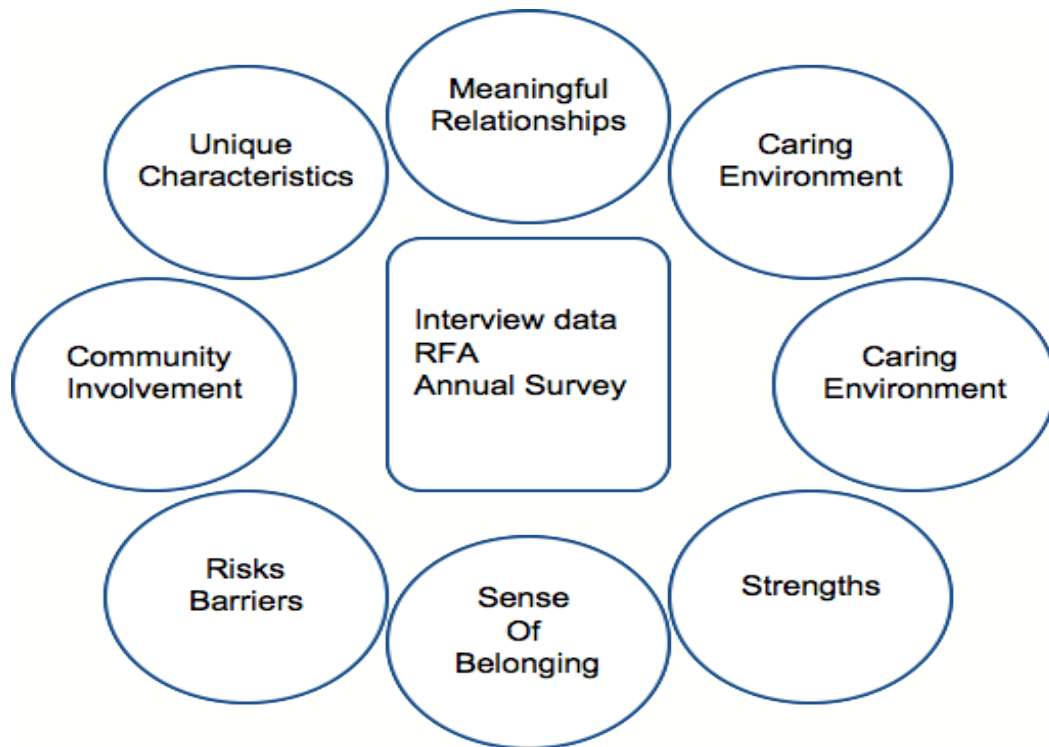


Figure 5 *Themes for Coding Data*

*Survey Report Data*

If an LEA is receiving McKinney-Vento funds, it is required to complete an annual survey accounting for the number of homeless students identified and served as well as academic data based on STAR test results. In addition, the state report requires the LEA liaison to report: the number of homeless children enrolled in school, the number of homeless children identified by type of homelessness, the number of homeless children served by the LEA's McKinney-Vento program, the number of unaccompanied, migrant, limited English proficient (LEP) and students with disabilities. Each LEA also reports whether or not they provided identified services for homeless children and families. Table 5 provides a description of key survey information and its connection to the study. Each homeless program coordinator also includes a narrative identifying the success and barriers encountered with their program.

The data from this survey is required by the federal government and is reported to the U.S. Department of Education every year, and it is important to know that the data is public and required to be reported on an annual basis. This study looks at the data reported for the 2007-2008 school year. I used this data to identify the 18 districts serving between 1,000-3,500 homeless students and to identify those who are reporting a higher percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the STAR as well as those districts with a lower percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the STAR test. Student achievement data will support the idea that McKinney-Vento programs with protective components identified in resilience literature facilitate academic success with homeless students.

Table 5

*Description of Key Survey Information and its Connection to the Study*

Connection to the study	Who is being served by the district's McKinney-Vento program	Risk factors homeless students encounter in this school district	Potential protective mechanisms students encounter in the district	Homeless students experiencing academic success
Relevant Survey Item	<p>Number of homeless students in the district</p> <p>Type of homelessness (e.g., shelter, hotel)</p> <p>Number of homeless who are a part of other sub populations (e.g., ELL, migrant)</p>	List of barriers homeless students encountered	<p>List of services offered in the district</p> <p>List of program successes</p>	Number of homeless children scoring proficient or above on STAR test

I also examine the overview of services offered to students at the identified districts and explore any differences between these districts. In addition, I code the narratives documenting the successes and barriers of the programs and explore similarities and differences between these programs.

#### *RFA Document*

In addition to the annual key survey, each district is also required to submit a plan in their RFA (Request for Application), in order to be considered to receive funds. Each LEA receiving McKinney-Vento funds has an RFA, which includes a plan on how their proposed program will be implemented. In addition, each grant recipient must complete an annual key survey reporting narrative data on the successes of their program. The document analysis includes narrative data from the key survey from the 2007-2008 school year as well as the RFAs from 2006 for three-year McKinney-Vento funding. The RFA and key survey are reviewed to identify commonalities and differences across LEAs in the following areas: forming meaningful relationships (i.e., connecting students/family to counseling resources); creating a caring environment (i.e., providing basic needs); creating a sense of belonging (i.e., implementing policies that increased access to school and students/families feeling more welcome in school); developing community involvement in schools (i.e., collaboration with outside agencies); and developing positive family relationships (i.e., identifying families and educating families, staff and communities about student rights/needs and providing information and referrals to resources in the community).

For each RFA document one summary form is generated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The documents are coded with specific attention to a document analysis. Themes for coding schema include: creating meaningful relationships, creating a caring

environment, promoting a sense of belonging, creating community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships as well as risk mechanisms: biological, environmental and cumulative.

### Data Analysis

To ensure that a disciplined inquiry process is being conducted on the analysis of the data, a protocol for evaluating the data is utilized. Appendix D provides a protocol for analyzing the data from the interviews and documents. Document and interview data are organized in files and on the computer. The RFA documents are organized in files. The interview and survey data are also kept in files and on the computer.

#### *Data Reduction*

Data is categorized by key components of the theoretical framework of my study illustrated in Figure 5 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By categorizing using resilience theory as a guide, I am reflecting the purpose of my research (Merriam, 1998). The process of data collection also includes the utilization of *constant comparative analysis* in order to sort data into categories, develop themes that are connected, ground the data, “eliminate redundancy and develop evidence for categories.” (Creswell, 2005, p. 406) Data analysis can be divided into three parts: “data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Data reduction is used when making decisions about which information to code. Coding is used to categorize the data into chunks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Resilience theory is the guideline for drawing out key phrases, words and sentences in the data. For example, statements that are highlighted include protective and risk mechanisms that exist or do

not exist in the program. This helps me gain a clearer perspective of how much or little resilience promoting components exist with in each district's program.

Data display included organizing the data in a way that allows conclusions to be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The use of graphs, matrices and networks as key tools facilitated the processing of large amounts of data. I utilized Hyper Research software as a tool to code and identify themes in the interviews and document analysis.

Conclusion drawing and verification is incorporated into the data analysis. It is important to test the validity of conclusions drawn by looking at themes emerging from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The processes of data reduction, display and conclusion are iterative and are used to refine and identify themes discovered in the data collected through interviews and documents in this study. Cross-case analysis is used to increase the generalizability of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Interviews and documents from McKinney-Vento programs are coded, chunked and analyzed with each other in order to determine if there are common themes and differences between programs.

I analyze interview data by taking notes and audiotaping during the interview as well as transcribing the interview. I highlight and identify key terms related to resilience theory, such as caring environment and sense of belonging, in the interview transcriptions. I compare families and sub-families of terms discovered in the interview in order to compare across cases and increase the generalizability of the study. I also track the occurrence of terms, phrases and sentences to determine significance of findings across cases.

I analyze the documents using a similar strategy highlighting terminology related to resilience research. I summarize the occurrence of themes for each document and compare across cases looking for similarities and differences between programs. I also compare data gathered from the documents and data gathered from the interviews within each case and identify patterns of themes discovered between the data. I also identify any new themes that come up in this process. STAR language arts test scores are compared with data from interviews and RFAs to analyze whether resilience components are more apparent in schools with a higher percentage of students scoring proficient on the STAR test.

A strong qualitative study includes “rich” description as well as triangulation of data (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). The data collected in this multiple case study paints a detailed picture of quality McKinney-Vento programs in California districts serving more than 1,000 identified homeless students. This study also provides rich detail about who is being served and the types of services they are receiving, thus revealing more about how and what protective mechanisms in these programs are connected to student success. This information is useful because it informs school leaders on what particular strategies are most important in terms of facilitating student success as well as how these mechanisms have a positive impact on students in poverty.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

In chapters one through three I provide the overview, theory and methodology that guides my study. Chapter one highlights that the purpose of my study is to fill the gap in literature on homeless education by exploring components of McKinney-Vento programs that facilitate students' academic success. I also explore the characteristics of McKinney-Vento programs serving more than 1,000 homeless students. Chapter four will provide results from the three school districts that provided the most data in terms of interviews. The results will also reflect the data from the documents from these three districts. This chapter is organized by the three school district's profile. Within each profile, I answer the first three research questions. Each district is referred to as "district" or "SD" (School District). This chapter will provide a profile for SD 21, SD 27 and SD 29. SD 29 is the district that has the highest percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the language arts portion of the STAR test, so research question number four will only be answered in the profile of SD 29.

#### Profile of School District 21

##### *Data Sources*

Data sources from SD 21 were gathered from interviews with the LEA coordinator, an elementary school principal and a family liaison. Documents analyzed include the annual survey from 2005-2006 and 2005 Request For Application (RFA) requesting funds to continue SD 21's McKinney-Vento programs. The LEA coordinator is one of two family advocates in the school district. The focus of her role is on families in transition that includes homeless youth and foster youth. The LEA



coordinator meets with families on a regular basis and provides services for these families to be successful in school. The principal is the site representative for the district's McKinney-Vento program and keeps track of students referred to the McKinney-Vento program. The family liaison works at one school site and links displaced families at that school to resources including driving families back and forth to receive services such as medical care as well as transporting children to school.

#### Research Question One: Components of McKinney-Vento Programs

##### *Characteristics*

SD 21 serves 18,889 students in 33 schools. Forty-six percent of these students are identified as second language learners and 78% of these students are Hispanic (SD 21 RFA, 2006). The poverty rate is high at SD 21 with 64% of the students receiving free or reduced lunches. SD 21 community consists of a "labor intensive" work force concentrated on mainly seasonal agricultural jobs that "adds instability to the employment base." (SD 21 RFA, 2006). In 2005, SD 21 identified 2,715 students as homeless, which was a 59% increase from 2001. The LEA coordinator identifies students that are doubled-up as the highest percentage of students identified as homeless. Some families live in very crowded conditions "at least doubled-up and sometimes 20 people to a home." (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). A large proportion of families who are doubled-up are migrant families. However, the LEA coordinator has noticed an increase of Mexican families who are not migrant workers as well as an increase in people living in their vehicles and in shelters and attributes this increase to a "downturn in the economy" (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Table 6 describes an overview of students who are homeless and at risk for homelessness in SD 21 (SD 21 RFA, 2006).

Table 6

*Overview of Homeless Students in SD 21*

Homeless Student Survey	2003-2004	2004-2005
Transient motel/hotel	7	393
Overcrowded condition	1137	3416
Not a normal human habitat	666	1119
Spending nights in shelters	10	233
Living without parents	8	70
Living in transitional housing	0	240
Awaiting foster care placement	44	103
Foster students in permanent placement	23	217
Migrant children not living in migrant housing	2052	505
Withdrawn from school due to lack of affordable housing	233	393

A needs assessment conducted with district personnel found that services needed in order of priority include: “tutoring, health services, pupil counseling...school supplies, parent support/training” (SD 21 RFA, 2006).

*Range of Services Offered*

SD 21 offers a range of services to support identified homeless students in their school district. The support can be organized into four categories: health, mental health, social services/case management and academic- although it is important to note that support in one or all of these areas can contribute to students’ success in school. The majority of services provided to students fall into the social services/case management category and academic category. There is also significant support under the health and mental health category that is unique to this school district. Because SD

21 is a Healthy Start Recipient, they are able to provide dental/health clinics at three of the campuses in their district. Health services offered at these locations include: immunizations, well-child visits, dental services and walk-in appointments for sick children. Services mentioned in all interviews included health services offered through the clinic, transportation and housing referrals, backpack and school supplies, clothing, emergency food, linking families to resources in the community. Two of three of the interviews also mentioned individualizing support to the needs of the student and family, providing training for staff to increase awareness of the needs of homeless students and provide strategies to help them be successful in school, and helping families complete applications for resources in the community (LEA coordinator & family liaison interview, 2009). Table 7 lists the categories of services offered for homeless students at SD 21.

Table 7

*Categories of Services for Homeless Students in SD 21*

Health	Mental Health	Social/Case Management	Academic
Partnership with Healthy Start	Partnership with Teen Resource Center	Scheduling appointments	Back pack School supplies
Enrollment in free lunch		Housing referrals	Clothing
Two medical clinics and one dental clinic	Prevention Student Assistance- provide counseling and programs to address risk behaviors	Arranging for transportation	Academic support
On campus health center: health exams, dental services, immunizations, well-child visits,	Counselors at every school	Arranging for school supplies	Assessing eligibility to receive academic support
Emergency food	Domestic Violence Support group for girls	Advocacy for insurance enrollment	Ensuring equal access to the curriculum
		Linking families to other support	Working with schools providing information about McKinney-Vento/training /identification (two of three interviews)
		Connecting homeless students to peer support groups	
		Assess family student needs and develop strategies that address needs	
		Help completing applications (two of three)	
		Intensive one-on-one follow up with students	
		Guiding families through Section 8 process	
		Individualize support to family needs	

## Research Question Two: Risk Factors Impacting Success

Although SD 21 offers many integrated services for homeless families in their district, only a low percentage of identified homeless students actually score proficient on the annual standardized test. In 2005-2006, only 20% of the identified homeless population scored proficient on the LA portion of the STAR test compared to the 28% of the total population scoring proficient on the LA portion of the 2005 STAR test. Although there are many reasons that a lower percentage of McKinney-Vento students scored proficient on the LA portion of the STAR test, it is important to explore the risk factors that may have attributed to the students being less successful with standardized testing than other districts.

Risk factors identified in interview and document data point to environment. High mobility and substandard living conditions were the most frequently mentioned types of environmental risk factors (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009; SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21 principal interview, 2009; SD 21 RFA, 2006). There is also evidence of a negative school and community environment, specifically related to gaps in services, low expectations and limited parent education opportunities as well as denial of enrollment. Other environmental risk factors include poverty, domestic violence, and instability. Biological risk factors included, health, mental health and gender (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Table 8 provides an overview of environmental and biological risk factors for homeless students in SD 21.

Table 8

*Overview of Risk Factors in SD 21*

Risk Factor	Type	Examples
High mobility	Environmental	Moving from school to school due to frequent moves
Substandard Living conditions	Environmental	Portable heaters; cooking on gas stove, crowded living conditions
Poverty	Environmental	Foreclosure, no shoes, no appropriate clothes
Negative school and community environment	Environmental	Gap in service delivery; low expectations; limited parent education; denying enrollment due to missing paperwork; not allowing student to remain at school of origin; gang involvement
Domestic violence	Environmental	Inability to concentrate- scanning for danger in the classroom.
Instability	Environmental	Fire in home; living in car
Physical health	Biological	Being in pain due to dental or health issues and unable to concentrate in school
Mental Health	Biological	Depression; feeling of helplessness
Gender	Biological	Older boys not allowed to stay in shelter with mothers
Cumulative	Biological/Environmental	Combination of mental health and poverty

*High Mobility*

All three participants in district 21 list high mobility as a risk factor for homeless children in SD 21 (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator and principal interview, 2009). High mobility impacts academic achievement, “every time they move, they can lose four to six months of academic progress” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Often, parents will decide to change schools even though the school would like the child to remain at their school of origin (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). “We have a very high transiency rate between schools in our district and some kids will bop back and forth between schools over and over and over again and that’s very

frustrating” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). School staff finds it difficult to keep track of students moving from place to place (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009; SD 21 principal interview, 2009).

### *Substandard Living Conditions*

All three participants in SD 21 list substandard living conditions as a risk factor for homeless children and families (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator and principal interview, 2009). Some students become separated from family members because they are living in a car (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Other families have been victims of fires, especially during cold years. “...we had a lot of fires due to portable heaters” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Another example of a substandard living condition is when families use portable gas tanks to cook their meals. “It’s also very dangerous. And so they find it very challenging to cook.” (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009). These unstable living conditions can have a negative impact on academic performance. “I can track down a list of kids and I’ll get to one and go, ‘Uh oh!’ and I’ll look left to find their name and it’s almost always...some kind of major housing issue” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Some of these housing issues are challenges children encounter when trying to complete their homework in substandard living conditions. Other substandard living conditions include sleeping on floors, living in garages and motor homes.

### *Negative School Environment*

Evidence of a negative school environment included a gap in services for students as well as low expectations, limited parent education and denial of enrollment in school. The RFA mentions a gap in services for middle and high school students, but

attempts to address the gap through an increase in coordinated services. There is also evidence of a disconnect between social service agencies and schools who serve students in poverty.

...needs to be more information provided to different people and agencies- the clinics, the low income clinics and the low income programs. I think they should be able to notify parents who are in that situation because homeless families usually end up receiving cash aid even if they have only one child that is legal and for some reason, they fail to notice that little issue of being a family in transition. (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009.)

Social workers from outside agencies do not always refer families to schools because “a lot of families do not know about the support available for their children” (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009). There is also a desire for more regular communication from the McKinney-Vento program about services offered for families and better collaboration between agencies (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009). The principal cited an example of unknowingly calling a parent only to find out the child had been removed from the home and the school had not been notified. “It’s embarrassing” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009).

Expectations for homeless students are low in school (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In terms of academic success, “the broad picture is kids staying in school-even though I don’t know if these students are getting B’s or D’s, I see them staying in school, where before, they would have dropped out” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition, the program does not explore what particular services might be linked to academic success “I know what my students’ test scores are, but we don’t keep a correlation of how, you know, like how many services or what services you provided relates to the test score” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview,



2009). The school staff's low expectations for student performance creates a negative environment for students and can have a negative impact on student success in school.

Although the RFA does mention parent training offered through the county, there is no evidence of parent training in the interviews. In regards to parent training, McKinney-Vento staff hopes for classes that teach life skills and also hopes parents will participate more willingly in counseling (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). A negative school environment is created when a homeless child is unable to enroll in school due to paperwork is missing and awareness of the students' right to remain at the school of origin despite multiple moves in the school district (SD 21 RFA, 2006).

#### *Other Environmental Risk Factors*

Poverty, negative community and school environment, domestic violence, and instability are all mentioned as environmental risk factors that exist in SD 21. Two of three participants list several examples of poverty as a risk factor for children attending SD 21 (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009; SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Poverty has led to housing foreclosures and the inability to purchase clothing for school (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009; SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Negative community risk factors include gang involvement. Gang involvement is often associated with crime and violence. Domestic violence can also inhibit success in school.

They're constantly scanning for danger. Even in the classroom, they're looking for the other shoe to drop. They're looking for someone to yell at them and they're not processing the information that the teacher is giving them (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Students who are victims of domestic violence are often distracted and unable to concentrate in school. A student's feelings of instability can also be a risk factor for success in school. "...she was embarrassed that she was only coming once a week.

How do you explain that to your friends? (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Students often feel ashamed about their unstable situation and withdraw from support for fear of being judged because they are homeless.

### *Biological Risk Factors*

Health and gender were the two biological risk factors mentioned by participants. One participant discussed how health impacts a student's ability to be successful in school. "And we always say also if a student is sitting in pain in a classroom with a tooth that hurts, they're not going to be able to concentrate or take in information" (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Lack of health care impacts student attendance. The coordinator corroborates that many families are "more used to seeking health care when there's an emergency..." (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). One of the participants mentions depression as a risk factor for homeless students. "The mom is very depressed, which is holding back the family in many ways" (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Two of the three participants from SD 21 mention a student's gender as a risk factor for homeless students (SD 21 LEA coordinator & principal interview, 2009). Often shelters are full and sometimes older boys cannot stay with their mothers (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). "She was telling me all the trouble she was having at the shelter and her son was a little on the edge of too old to be on her side of the shelter (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Clearly, male students encounter risk factors in terms of finding housing in shelters.

### *Cumulative Impact*

Exposure to multiple risk factors can continue the cycle of risk when a parent becomes helpless toward their situation.

...nothing really happens and they're stuck in this cycle of passivity, and powerlessness, and poverty. They all go together. And if they won't act on something, it's not going to change the situation. Like, I can't change it for them (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

In this case, the additive affect of mental health and poverty continue the risk cycle.

School staffs trying to help families who are caught up in this risk cycle find it very frustrating because they feel these families do not “follow-through” with resources that are provided to them.

### Research Question Three: Protective Components

Fortunately, SD 21 identifies many protective factors in their McKinney-Vento program to help ameliorate the impact of risk exposure associated with homelessness.

This section presents the results of data from the three participants' interviews as well as the RFA document. The themes will be explored under the umbrella of the following resilience components: developing meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, developing community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships at school. Table 9 provides an overview of protective components identified in SD 21.

Table 9

*Overview of Protective Components for SD 21*

Protective Component	Themes	Examples
Meaningful relationships	Caring and positive adult relationships; support groups	Relationship with counselor; relationship with liaison; talk about feelings and goals; having a positive connection; offering to help; knowing they are not alone provides support.
Caring environment	Increased access to health care; stability; transportation; materials; language	Healthy Start Collaborative- health care on school campus; resources for clothing, free lunch and academic support; placing a student on independent study while housing was stabilized; school is stable; increases likelihood of good attendance; Materials needed for science project; bilingual staff makes families feel more comfortable; school sweatshirts; policy.
Sense of Belonging	Transportation; free lunch; school supplies; clothing; policy	Stability; enrolled for free lunch; materials to finish science project; clothing vouchers for school; policy for immediate enrollment
Community involvement	Healthy Start; collaboration at district and county level	Collaboration facilitates supplies for students and families; staff training; LEA coordinator is the link.
Positive parent relationships	Workshops; relationships with staff	No specific examples provided.

*Meaningful Relationships*

All three participants identified meaningful relationships as an important component to facilitating academic success with homeless children (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator & principal interview, 2009). The themes of meaningful relationships included those relationships that were positive and caring and relationships that were created in support groups.

All three participants as well as the RFA document reveal the importance of caring relationships in the lives of homeless students (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator & principal interview, 2009). The relationship created with counselors can have a positive impact on academic success for homeless students. Counseling involves a positive adult-child relationship at school. “I think relationships are behind academic success and the more positive adult relationships at school the kids have...that is helping them” (SD 21 LEA coordinator Interview, 2009). Counseling students who have been victims of domestic violence is crucial. “...if you can get to the root of those issues, help them understand and work through what they’re going through, I think it opens them up to the academics and not worry so much about the perceived danger that they’re always looking for” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The relationship with the counselor can be the key component that supports academic success. “This one person caring about this student. Perhaps giving them a reason to come to school and encouraging them every week to continue with school and do better” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). The relationship between the family liaison and the students is also caring and positive.

I like to take the opportunity to talk to them how they are feeling, what their goals in life are, stuff like that, because...I get to know how they are feeling...and it gives me a clue if there is anything I can support them with. (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009.)

Having these relationships helps the student to feel a positive connection with the school. “I notice that when I am in the school, the playground, or any area of the school and I encounter them, it’s like there is a connection...I think they even are happy to know that we care for them” (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009). Developing a caring relationship begins by offering help to families. The principal discovered that a

student was in need of clean clothes because she took the time to care and ask the parent if there was anything she could do to help her. “We have a chance to say to our families, ‘Is there something else we can do for you?’ Often that has to do with their living situation.” By creating a caring relationship, the principal discovers challenges, such as homelessness, that may be impacting academic success. Finally, “The district nurtures the psychosocial development of homeless students by providing opportunities otherwise missing from their lives to experience stability, security, predictability and belonging: to make friends and play, and to enjoy the undivided attention of a caring adult” (SD 21 RFA, 2006)

Meaningful relationships are also facilitated in support groups available for students encountering crisis in their lives. The students in the crisis support group find comfort from their peers.

They’re in a group and they see that they’re not alone...they get in this group where other people are going through the same experiences...they have compassion and empathy and they support each other...I think that definitely increases the emotional and social success feeling- feeling that you belong, that you’re not an outsider, that you have other people who relate to you or your peers. (SD 21LEA coordinator interview, 2009.)

Peer relationships developed in support groups can be meaningful because they are supportive and understanding.

### *Caring Environment*

All three participants provide evidence of how a caring environment can potentially facilitate academic success for homeless children (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator & principal interview, 2009). Themes of a caring environment include: providing increased access to health care, resources to meet basic needs, and academic support. A student’s health can have a great impact on school success. The

Healthy Start collaborative has allowed the creation on community clinics on campus so families have increased access to health care (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21 RFA, 2006). Dental and health clinics on campus facilitate a caring environment at the schools. “To be able to get them to a clinic on a school campus is much friendlier than to go into another clinic, or to try to make an appointment and work out payments” (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009). The principal corroborates evidence of ensuring good physical health and meeting basic needs as a key factor facilitating academic success. Many times, students are doing academically well and the principal is unaware of the students’ housing situation because they are linked to support programs in the community through McKinney-Vento that allow them to eat and dress and be at school like everyone else.

A school that creates a caring environment also provides resources so students can have access to clothing for school. Obtaining a washer and dryer for the school is a goal of the principal in this study and also indicative of a caring environment. She would like a washer and dryer so students will not feel stigmatized because they come to school with dirty clothes. Teachers also worked together to provide resources for students that were in transition (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Providing these resources enables a student to concentrate in school because they do not have to worry about where these resources are coming from. Providing these resources creates a stability for students whose home lives are not stable. “I think it helped them to realize that they have a stable situation, because even if they cannot verbalize it or don’t tell their parents that it’s affecting them, it affects them” (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009).

Other resources that create a caring environment include providing free lunch and academic support. When students are identified as homeless, they automatically qualify for free lunch (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009). After school academic tutoring and providing school supplies was also mentioned as a key factor for increased school success (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21 principal interview, 2009).

### *Sense of Belonging*

All three interviewees attribute a students' sense of belonging to stability in school and at home (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator & principal interview, 2009). This stability is evidenced by the provision of transportation, free lunch, school supplies and clothing as well as policy that mandates expedient enrollment for homeless students. In addition, one participant and the RFA document also revealed the importance of staff speaking Spanish, the language of the dominant ethnic group in the community (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview; SD 21 RFA document, 2006).

Stability in school is an important theme that facilitates a sense of belonging. "I actually do think the most important thing is that they can stay in the school... whenever we find out that housing is the issue for that, we try to make sure they get referred and I know our school district works very hard to try and get them here so that's always a plus" (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). One example of how stability created a sense of belonging is when a student was displaced away from the mother because the mom was living in the car. During this time, the LEA coordinator linked the student to independent study while assisting the mother with finding stable housing. When stable housing was established, the student was re-enrolled at her school of origin and proceeded to do well in school.



Transportation is an important protective factor because it can facilitate stability, continuity of education and academic success. “By the school providing transportation where they moved, they were able to keep their kids here...I think that was very meaningful for them because at least that part of their life was stable.” (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009) Providing transportation also increases the homeless student’s likelihood in attending school.

I know that education is very standard, however the flavor of how teachers provide the knowledge to the student is going to have a little difference...I think that somebody could just fall between the cracks if they don’t have the stability with the transportation for them...and that would affect their grades and their self-esteem, because I’m sure that they won’t feel good to know they have a bad grade (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009).

The school principal also corroborates transportation as a key factor facilitating academic success and a key contributor to school stability.

Materials provided by school and having bilingual staff also facilitate a sense of belonging in the schools. The McKinney-Vento program also provides materials for students to be successful in school, which also creates a sense of belonging. In one case, a student was provided materials to complete a science project. “She felt like she belonged and could participate like any other student” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition a Spanish speaking staff also increases a sense of belonging with the Spanish speaking families and families return to the clinic and are treated well by the staff (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Providing school clothing also facilitates a sense of belonging at school. By providing a sweatshirt for a student who felt embarrassed to come to school, the principal enabled this student to feel more a part of the school. “I think it’s the same thing about the kid’s sweatshirt issue...his mom was saying if he can’t come to school

because he feels so badly about being different” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). In another situation, there was a house fire that impacted many students at the school and the families reached to the school for support through this time. The office staff created a sense of belonging, by becoming active in providing resources for the families at the school. Consequently, the families felt comfortable coming into the office to talk about what had happened. “They didn’t need help, they just wanted to be heard...I think that may not have happened had we not been so active in trying to get them resources” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Providing clean clothes also impacts a student’s ability to interact with their peers in a positive way, “...kids are kids and they will not feel comfortable to be close to them if they are not so really clean and we try to help out to avoid that, because it’s not just about the hygiene issue, it’s that it affects them socially with others” (SD 21 principal interview, 2009).

Enrollment policy can also facilitate a sense of belonging at school “enrollment policies and procedures accommodate the needs of homeless children” and “children identified as homeless will have access to the same education programs and services that other students receive” (RFA, 2006). By developing policy that promotes the well-being of homeless children and facilitating equal access to the curriculum, the district promotes a sense of belonging to homeless children.

### *Community Involvement*

All three participants as well as the RFA document provide evidence of community collaboration to serve the needs of homeless students (SD 21 family liaison, LEA coordinator & principal interview, 2009; RFA, 2006). Community involvement in schools is evidenced through the Healthy Star Collaborative as well as collaboration between employees at the district and county and school sites (SD 21 LEA coordinator

interview, 2009). The MV program and Healthy Start collaborate to provide community clinics on the school campuses. In addition, the LEA coordinator collaborates with local churches so homeless families can park in their parking lots without worrying about having to move the RV in 72 hours or getting a \$60 ticket (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The LEA coordinator and county office of education personnel “constantly meet and work together”. A lot of the backpacks, school supplies bus passes and vouchers for clothing are provided by the county. The county also provides staff training about McKinney-Vento for employees of SD 21.

There are organizations that work together to provide resources for families. The principal became especially aware of the support and collaboration available when several families in her school were suddenly displaced by a fire (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). The organizations provided clothing, hotel vouchers, food and transportation to and from school. The RFA also corroborates the integration of services at the school site available with the collaboration of Healthy Start and McKinney-Vento. In addition, LEA coordinator “will collaborate with teachers, principals, nurses and counselors as well as community agencies to work together to serve students and families wherever they are, in the way they need educational help” (SD 21 RFA, 2006). The LEA coordinator is “serving as a link between homeless middle and high school student and families, the schools and service providers” (SD 21 RFA, 2006). There is also mention of collaboration with the county to provide parent workshops as well as a “Steering Committee to develop uniform procedures for enrollment, inter district transfers, data collection and evaluation service strategies.” The annual survey report from 2006-2007 mentions collaboration as one of the key successes of the program for

the year. Specifically, “collaboration with Healthy Start Steering Committee...the county office and migrant education.” (SD 21 Annual Report, 2006-2007).

The LEA coordinator also has a close relationship with the school nurse where information is shared about how to better serve students. “We had one last week that a child was receiving Zyrtec through Medi-cal, but it went over the counter and he can’t afford it.” The nurse and coordinator work together to develop a plan to make sure students’ basic needs are being met.

### *Positive Parent Relationships*

Overall, there is little mention of positive parent relationships in the SD 21 McKinney-Vento program. Two of three participants and the RFA document provide evidence of parent relationships through case management services that connect families to resources in the community (SD 21 family liaison & LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Other positive parent connections are evidenced in relationships between parents and the LEA coordinator, family liaison and principal (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009; LEA coordinator interview, 2009; principal interview, 2009). For example, the principal shared a story about how she helped a parent obtain clothing for her child in order to increase the child’s attendance. Healthy Start Clinics facilitate a positive relationship between the school and the family by making health services available at some of the school sites and providing staff who speak the family’s native language (SD 21 family liaison interview, 2009; SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition, parent workshops that are offered focus on “school enrollment, how to communicate with the teacher and what to expect from parent/teacher conferences” (SD 21 RFA, 2006).

### *Strengths*

The only evidence of the McKinney-Vento program focusing on student strengths was the program's ability to focus on individual differences (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21 RFA, 2006). When serving homeless students and families, it is important to take into account the individual differences of each student and family to accommodate their needs and do not "make assumptions about a child's potential based on living situations" (SD 21RFA, 2006).

### *Conclusion*

SD 21 offers a wealth of services for homeless families and provides evidence of facilitating protective components in homeless students. The most evidenced areas were found in building meaningful relationships between school staff and students and families and creating a sense of belonging. The area with the least evidence was found in developing positive family relationships.

### *Profile of School District 27*

#### *Data Sources*

Data sources from this school district were obtained from interviews conducted with the LEA coordinator, an elementary school principal, a high school principal and a school community liaison. Documents analyzed included the annual survey from 2005-2006 and the 2005 RFA requesting funds to continuing running SD 27's McKinney-Vento program. The role of the LEA coordinator is to coordinate seven staff members who are co-funded by other categorical funding as well as coordinate efforts to ensure homeless students are enrolled, attending and succeeding in school. The coordinator is also responsible for monitoring academic and attendance data and communicating about homeless students' academic data to the school sites on a quarterly basis. From the time

of the interview, this coordinator has served as the district's liaison for 12 years. She works in the district office's prevention and intervention department, formerly known as student services. Her role involves the monitoring and dissemination of data on homeless student data as well as the supervision of seven staff members (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The role of the elementary school principal in SD 27 is to be aware of who the identified homeless students are in her school and communicate with teachers about the students' special needs. This elementary principal's involvement is more indirect and explains that higher level administration is not as directly involved with specific services (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). The role of the high school principal is similar in terms of indirect involvement with the McKinney-Vento program. The high school principal oversees all programs and McKinney-Vento is one of the many programs serving students in the high school. Although the high school principal is not aware of specific day-to-day services offered by McKinney-Vento, he is aware that the program is to identify and support homeless students in his school (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009).

The role of the school community liaison is to serve students in the school where he is housed as well as schools in the surrounding area. The community liaison serves homeless students and families by connecting them to services, helping parents complete affidavits for expedient enrollment, providing families with needed resources, such as bus tokens for transportation and backpacks for school. The community liaison will also connect with the district representative to discuss student needs and obtain resources for homeless families (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The participants in this study have served in their roles as educators for many years. The

LEA coordinator has served in her role for 12 years. The elementary principal has been an educator for 24 years and has worked closely with the McKinney-Vento program in the past. The high school principal has served in his role at his school for 13 years and the community liaison has served in his role for 7 years, but has worked in the district for twenty-seven years. This section will analyze the interviews from these participants and documents obtained from SD 27 to explore the district's characteristics, range of services, as well as risk factors and protective factors encountered by homeless families. This section will also explore how these protective factors may contribute to academic success.

#### Research Question One: Components of McKinney-Vento Programs

##### *Characteristics*

SD 27 is the largest district in this study with 98 schools and 79,383 students. SD 27 is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest school district in the state of California and the 7<sup>th</sup> largest city in the state of California (SD 27 RFA, 2006). SD 27 educates 2,684 students identified as homeless. Of these students, 1,538 are doubled-up, 511 are unaccompanied and 480 are living in shelters (SD 27 RFA, 2006). A unique characteristic of this district is the large number of unaccompanied youth in the district. The number of unaccompanied youth has increased to over 1,000 students. Students are identified as unaccompanied when they have sometimes run away from home and are living with someone who is not their legal guardian. Some of these students are foster youth and living in group homes (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The high school principal corroborates the data of unaccompanied youth representing the highest group of students identified as homeless (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). The area of the high school is

located near several group homes. Assimilating students from group homes into the large high school (total population of 2,700 students) can be a challenge. Two of the group homes serve children who have extreme special needs; one houses students identified as emotionally disturbed and the other houses students who are sex offenders. The elementary school principal finds the majority of homeless students in her school boundaries are those living in hotels (SD 27 elementary school principal interview, 2009). The community liaison finds that the majority of families in his area to be those who are doubled-up. Homeless students living in the boundaries of the area where the community liaison works can be classified into two groups: those that are homeless for a long time and those that have only been homeless for a short time and don't always inform the school about their status (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). In addition, the transiency rate is high (50-60%) among students attending the school where the community liaison works (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

The ethnic breakdown is similar to the other districts in this study in terms of the majority of students in the district are identified as Hispanic (58.7%). The next largest groups are Caucasian (14.7%) and Asian (14%). African Americans make up 10.8% of the total student population (Dataquest, 2006). In 2005, the unemployment rate in SD27 was 10% (RFA, 2005). A high percentage of students (82%) are also living below the poverty level, as measured by the number of students qualifying for the free lunch program (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Ninety-two of the district's 98 schools receive Title I funding. Recently, there has been an increase in families becoming homeless due to the increase of foreclosures (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Although the district is experiencing declining enrollment, the



number of identified homeless students has increased from 125 in 1997 to 2,684 in 2005 (SD 27 RFA, 2006).

### *Range of Services*

SD 27 offers many services to identified homeless families and students. The types of services can be categorized into three different groups: basic needs, socio-emotional and academic. The majority of these services are accessed through ongoing case management provided by staff working for the school as well as staff hired by health and human services agency, but housed at the school district (SD 27 RFA, 2006; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Basic needs services include referrals for housing, food, clothing and health resources. Socio-emotional services include referrals for counseling and support offered through ongoing case management as well as support offered by teachers and counseling staff at the school sites (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009; SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Academic support includes transportation to and from school, books, backpacks and school supplies, monitoring of grades and attendance, homework assistance and credit recover to stay on track for graduation (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009; SD 27 elementary principal, 2009; SD 27 high school principal, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). Other support provided includes monetary support so students can participate in activities and not feel stigmatized due to their homelessness. These include: clothes for physical education, yearbooks, fees to pay for tests for college, and a cap and gown for graduation (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Many of these services are possible due to collaboration with outside agencies including the local

housing authority, health and human services and other business organizations (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). When a family is identified as homeless, they have the option of whether or not to be case management. If families choose this option, a case manager or social worker will monitored them. At the time of the interview, McKinney-Vento staff had directly worked with over 1,300 identified homeless students (LEA coordinator interview). Table 10 provides an overview of the services offered.

Table 10

*Overview of Services in SD 27*

Basic Needs	Socio-emotional	Academic
Housing	Counseling	Transportation
Food	On going case management	Books
Clothing		Backpacks
Health Resources		School supplies
		Monitoring of grades and attendance
		Homework assistance
		Credit recovery

### Research Question Two: Risk Factors Impacting Success

Risk factors identified in the interviews and RFA document include those found in the environment. The overarching environmental risk factor that can be connected with other environmental risk factors is poverty (RFA, 2006). Other environmental risk factors include: family instability, negative school environment, and high mobility. The only biological risk factor was mentioned in two of the interviews was mental health issues (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Table 11 provides an overview of risk factors identified in SD 27.

Table 11

*Overview of Risk Factors in SD 27*

Risk Factor	Type	Examples
Family instability	Environmental	Living hour to hour, worried about food and shelter
Negative school environment	Environmental	SARB; Being bumped off agendas
High mobility	Environmental	Moving eight times in a school year
Mental health	Biological	Emotionally disturbed; sex offenders
Cumulative	Biological/Environmental	Caught in a “vicious cycle”

*Family Instability*

Three of the four interviews mention family instability as a risk factor for academic success among homeless families (SD 27 community liaison, elementary principal and LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Most educators are unaware of the extent of instability these children encounter on a day-to day-basis: “Most families are living to hour to hour...most educators do not understand the living situation of some of these families (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). Certainly this instability can impact a student’s ability to succeed in school: “When they are going to school and worried about where they are going to live or what they are going to eat, it is much harder to learn” (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009)

Another factor that contributes to instability is lack of skills in parenting their children: “a lot of parents don’t have parenting skills” (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). Instability can also occur when a family is adjusting from changes in their living situation (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

*Negative School Environment*

Three of the participants identified factors of a negative school environment that can inhibit a homeless student's ability to be successful in school (SD 27 community liaison, elementary principal and LEA coordinator interview, 2009). One factor is the limitations of access to conduct trainings designed to increase awareness on the rights and needs of homeless students due to "being bumped off agendas" (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). A second factor is the dysfunctional structure of the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) in terms of providing support for students who are not attending school. When a student is not enrolled or attending school, law enforcement becomes involved and a warrant will be generated for the student's arrest (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). This consequence puts the student into hiding and inhibits the student from returning to school. This type of system perpetuates a lack of trust between the school and the family. A third factor is limited access to extra curricular activities because of student's socio economic status. Although the school makes every effort to ameliorate this risk, students are sometimes not aware of the support and avoid participating in activities due to exorbitant cost of participation. For example, participation on the cheerleading squad requires the purchase of a uniform that costs between \$800-900 and although fundraising is possible, it is typically only done in the summertime (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009).

### *High Mobility*

Three of the four participants cite high mobility as a risk factor for student success (SD 27 community liaison, elementary principal and LEA coordinator interview, 2009). One student in SD 27 moved eight times during a school year (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Although transportation is offered for students

encountering barriers with accessing school, the only method of transportation is the bus and sometimes this is not feasible for families (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Part of this may be due to the large size of SD 27. Participants see a direct connection between a student's attendance and ability to succeed in school.

"Kids are low academically because they have missed so much school" (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). Transiency is high in some of the schools and may be connected to the dropout rate (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

#### *Mental Health Issues*

Two of the four participants mention mental health issues as the biological risk factor that impacts student success (SD 27 high school principal & LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Specifically, those students living in group homes with special needs. Those that are emotionally disturbed and sex offenders encounter barriers to assimilating into the large high school environment (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). Mental health issues are also prevalent among many homeless children in SD 27 (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

#### *Cumulative*

One of the participants provides an example of how risk factors can perpetuate more risk (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). She shares an example of a student she taught who was homeless who came to her school with his children where she was principal and while they were there, the family became homeless (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). This is an example of how homelessness can become a "vicious cycle" (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009).

### Research Question Three: Protective Components

District 27 identifies many protective factors in their McKinney-Vento program to help mitigate the risk exposure associated with homelessness. This section will present the results of data from the four participants interviews as well as the RFA document. The themes will be explored under the umbrella of the following resilience components: developing meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, developing community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships at school. District 27 also presented evidence of student attributes as a component that contributed to academic success. Table 12 provides an overview of protective components identified in SD 27.

Table 12

*Overview of Protective Components for District 27*

Protective Component	Themes	Examples
Meaningful relationships	Case manager; liaison; counselor; social worker; teacher; peer	Support and advocacy; advocacy; getting kids graduated; being discreet, nurturing and caring; established in extracurricular groups and support like a family
Caring environment	Basic needs; sensitive; caring; academic support	Providing food at school; not using the term “homeless”; smaller learning communities; providing materials for school
Sense of Belonging	Transportation; board policy; resources	Bus passes; policy for immediate enrollment; training, CAHSEE materials
Community involvement	School; agency; business	Support and information exchange regarding academic support and rights and needs; expanding network of resources; funding for resources
Positive parent relationships	Case manager; language	Outreach; speaking family’s native language
Personal attributes	Inner drive; giving back to the community; winning awards	Unaccompanied youth involved in high school activities

*Meaningful Relationships*

All participants as well as documents show evidence of meaningful relationships serving as a protective factor for homeless students (SD 27 community liaison, elementary principal, high school principal and LEA coordinator interview, 2009; RFA, 2006). Those most closely involved with the McKinney-Vento program (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009) were able to discuss what role the McKinney-Vento program played in facilitating meaningful relationships for homeless children and families. The principals provided important

examples of meaningful relationships on their campus and speculated on how the McKinney-Vento program played a role in facilitating meaningful relationships. A person who is effective in developing meaningful relationships with families is one who can make connections with them and one who has an understanding of how lower SES families function (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). The key personnel who develop meaningful relationships with homeless students and families are: case managers, liaisons, counselors, and teachers. There was also mention of meaningful peer relationships as well as meaningful relationships developed in community support groups and social workers. This section will describe components of those roles that make the relationships meaningful to homeless students and families.

A case manager's role is to establish a meaningful relationship with homeless students and families. They are trained on successful practices to support homeless students and advocacy (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Case management is "proven to be the most effective approach in positively affecting school attendance and achievement and school stability" (SD 27 RFA, 2006). When surveyed, parents and students attribute improved academic achievement and school stability to the case management they received from the McKinney-Vento program (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Data collected on student mobility from 2004 showed that the average home moves per homeless students were 2.05, whereas the average moves between schools were 1.56 (SD 27 RFA, 2006).

Another crucial role that has established meaningful relationships with homeless families is the liaison. There were three different types of liaisons mentioned in interviews: homeless liaison, community liaison and home school liaison. Advocacy came up as a common term describing the role of the liaison (SD 27 RFA, 2006; SD 27



LEA coordinator, interview, 2009; SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). An example of advocacy is when a student is “deficient” academically, the case manager will contact the school to find out what types of services are available to meet the student’s needs (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Another example of advocacy is participation by the liaison in a Student Study Team (SST) meeting focused on developing a plan for academic support for students who are struggling academically or behaviorally in school (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The advocacy role of the liaison seems to have a positive impact on student achievement, “as staff helps students improved rate of attendance, grades, test scores is evident. As a result, graduation rates begin to improve” (SD 27 RFA, 2006). The liaison also encourages families to be successful and provides extra contacts for support for the students and parents (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The liaison establishes a meaningful relationship by maintaining a constant connection with the family (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The presence of a community liaison creates accountability of children to adults for being successful in school (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The liaison communicates to the child that there is an expectation for the child to succeed in school. Home school liaisons establish positive interactions with kids and try to give them encouragement to do well in school (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). This relationship has had a positive impact on success of homeless students in school (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009).

Counselors, social workers and teachers can also have a positive on homeless students in school. A counselor is “the first person responsible for getting these kids graduated ...they have a lot of influence on these kids” (SD 27 high school principal

interview, 2009). Social workers are also staff that constantly connects with the family (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). Teachers who work in after school programs can develop meaningful relationships with homeless students. A teacher who develops meaningful relationships with homeless students will work discreetly with children to prevent stigmatization (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). A nurturing, caring teacher establishes meaningful relationships with students and makes a difference in terms of academic success (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). When kids connect to teachers who affirm kids and give positive encouragement will have more success in school than teachers whose focus is more on the curriculum and less on the connection with the student (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009)

Peer relationships and relationships in the community can also be meaningful and be connected with academic success for homeless students. Support groups at school are places where students can establish meaningful relationships.

Extracurricular activities can also be an avenue for developing meaningful relationships at school. For example, an unaccompanied youth who is very successful in school and going to college is also very involved with the theater and choir group in his high school (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). The theater and the choir are like a family and had been a “tremendous benefit” to this student (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). Another source of support for this student came from a church who had been mentoring the student (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009).

Supportive relationships can come as much from the community as the school site (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009).

### *Creating a Caring Environment*

School District 27 creates a caring environment for homeless students by incorporating four components into the culture of the schools. These four components are: providing for the student's basic needs, creating an environment that is sensitive to the need of homeless children, involving caring adults in the lives of these children, and providing academic support in the means of tutoring and supplies.

*Basic needs.* The McKinney-Vento program addresses a homeless students' basic needs by providing referrals to different agencies that provide these needs (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006) "When you are able to meet basic needs, then emotionally they are better prepared to learn" (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Two of the participants cited food as one of the most important basic needs for homeless children (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009; SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). "Eating is the biggest factor because they don't eat outside of school (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). The liaison connects families with resources for food and helps families with housing (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). In addition, the school makes sure that students are provided with an extra "satellite lunch" when they know a student is not getting access to enough food at home (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). Other basic needs include clothing, housing and medical and dental care (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

*Sensitive environment.* An important component to the success of the McKinney-Vento program includes being sensitive to the negative connotation of the term homeless. The program addresses this by educating staff to refer to students as "in transition" and homeless students attend tutorials with all other students and are not

separated into their own group (SD 27 RFA, 2006). It is also important to understand when students in homeless situation to be sensitive when enrolling them in school (community liaison interview, 2009).

*Caring adults.* Caring adults can help facilitate academic success for homeless children. SD 27's McKinney-Vento program attempts to "provide caring adults at school sites as a connection for students to develop resiliency" (SD 27 RFA, 2006, p. 7). Three of the participants provide examples of qualities of a caring environment. "Smaller learning communities" on the campus is a way in which caring environments can be created at school (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). An example of a smaller learning community that yields positive results in children is the ROTC program "they function much like a family...they learn responsibility and how to work as a team" (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). Other ways caring adults have a positive impact on homeless families are simply by "helping mom and dad feel better about themselves" (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Caring adults also support homeless children by "keeping them involved and their minds off the reality of home" (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

*Academic support.* Finally SD 27 creates a caring environment for homeless children by providing academic support for them by purchasing necessary materials and making available supplemental academic tutoring for students both at school and other areas in the community. Materials provided for students to help them become successful in school include backpacks, school supplies, p.e. clothes and materials to complete a program designed to help students pass the CAHSEE (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009; SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator

interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). Tutoring is provided at the school site and the local shelter. One of the tutoring programs is dedicating towards helping students pass the CAHSEE (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition, McKinney-Vento staff ensures students are participating in extended day programs by monitoring grades and communicating with the school sites (SD 27 RFA, 2006).

In addition to providing materials and tutoring, a training video was created on strategies for working with high mobility children (SD 27 RFA, 2006). The district does research on students to look at progress and notify school staff on changes by looking at grades and discipline (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). Then, McKinney-Vento staff follows up with school and families to look at why student is failing and find out what they can do to help the student (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009)

### *Sense of Belonging*

SD 27's McKinney-Vento program has done a lot to create a sense of belonging at the schools. All participants mention the resource of transportation as a key factor to creating a sense of belonging for homeless students. In addition, board policy has also been enacted to ensure homeless students are able to immediately enroll in school and remain at their school of origin. Finally, a sense of belonging is also created by providing students resources to participate in extracurricular activities. Participation in these activities make them feel like they are a part of the school.

Transportation was the most widely mentioned resource that facilitates a sense of belonging in school. All four participants mention transportation as an integral component to achieving success in school because it provides stability and can maintain good attendance. Bus tickets are provided so that a student is able to remain at the

school they are attending even if they have temporarily moved outside of the schools boundaries (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). Consistency in the same school also seems to have a positive impact on academic achievement. An example of transportation being integral to student success and has decreased student mobility in school is when 4<sup>th</sup> grade boy with “horrid” attendance moved 8 times during the school year, but when he was provided with transportation his attendance improved to 100%. “Staying at the same school helped him to feel better about himself” (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Students who remain at one school year round have better success rate in school (SD 27 RFA, 2006). The district initiated “stay put rule” is implemented so student can be at his home school (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). This has a positive impact socially because students maintain important friendships and academically because there is consistency with instruction (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009).

In addition, board policy has been written to enforce a homeless student’s right to remain at the school of origin as well as mandate immediate enrollment for homeless students and assistance for homeless families with obtaining documents to enroll in school, and providing immediate access to special services. This policy shared with staff four times in a year (SD 27 RFA, 2006)

Other strategies that schools use to connect students and their families to school include providing training and resources that will help them feel more a part of their school. For example, McKinney-Vento connects outreaches to 8<sup>th</sup> grade families so they can understand expectations for high school and understand CAHSEE (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition, yearbooks, class rings and graduation

announcements are provided to students so that they can feel more a part of their school (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). To increase a sense of belonging, home school liaisons speak the native language of the students (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006).

By providing these resources and implementing board policy to ensure homeless students and families have access to school, families “feel secure...they have people to go to when they need something (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). This type of an environment increases “stability and trust” at school (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

#### *Developing Community Involvement in Schools*

SD 27’s McKinney-Vento program collaborates with many organizations to serve homeless students and families. Three of the four participants and the RFA document discuss what agencies the district collaborates with to serve homeless students. The collaborative efforts can be found in three different areas of the community: between the state, county, different departments in the district and the schools; between agencies that directly serve homeless families and the schools; and between businesses that provide extra funding for resources for homeless families and the district.

Regarding collaboration with the state, the LEA coordinator communicates with the state coordinator on a regular basis. The state coordinator is a source of support and “always available” to answer questions regarding the McKinney-Vento law (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Regarding collaboration with the county, SD 27 serves as a resource to the county in terms of providing training to county and other

district staff on the rights and needs of homeless students. There is also tremendous collaboration between departments in the district in the form of co-funding and co-planning services for homeless students, namely academic support co-funded through Title I Part A and Title Neglected and Delinquent funds (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). The district's McKinney-Vento program also collaborates with the local university. SD 27's McKinney-Vento program "participate[s] in research studies through doctorate programs on resiliency and strategies that work." (SD 27 RFA, 2006)

One of the most significant collaborative efforts involves the participation in the city's continuum of care. By collaborating with members of continuum of care, the LEA coordinator is able to connect with housing agencies and the rights of homeless students shared at meetings (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). Participation in the Continuum of Care puts "the district at the table with housing agencies, non-profits and government agencies all working to end homelessness" (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). This is important because decisions are made on how HUD funding gets to area, which directly impacts housing resources for students that attend SD 27 (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Participation in the Continuum of Care has also helped facilitate a good relationship with shelter providers (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Another important collaborative effort involves the department of children and family services (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Many homeless families use this county resource and communication with this agency is important. SD 27 collaborates with Health and Human Service social workers by co-funding social worker positions and housing this



staff at the school district (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Social workers have worked to increase attendance by conducting monthly visits with homeless families (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Other collaborative efforts are with the local churches and food bank to provide food and other basic needs for homeless families (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006).

The Sanctuary is another organization that is important to collaborate with because it provides housing for runaway youth in the community (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Other organizations that serve homeless families in District 27 that were mentioned include: catholic social services, salvation army, and the Majorie Mason center, a resource for victims of domestic violence (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009).

Finally, collaborative efforts with businesses in the community have provided funding to purchase resource materials for homeless families. Last year, one of the large businesses donated \$50,000 to the McKinney-Vento program (SD 27 RFA, 2006). In addition, gift cards were provided to help families to pay electric bills, rent deposits and gas for transportation (SD 27 RFA, 2006).

There are many strategies the LEA coordinator employs to ensure successful involvement with community agencies. Schools foster good relationships by offering trainings and communicating information from the agencies to school staff to increase awareness of the resources that are available to the families (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The LEA coordinator makes sites aware of services that McKinney-Vento provides, deals with 100 school sites and a lot of agencies, and gets information

out to school sites through home school liaisons and counseling staff by making aware of services (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). The role of LEA coordinator is to offer trainings to liaisons, coordinators, social workers and site administration (numbering about 140-150 people) about upcoming events, donations, and new partnerships offering services to homeless students in the community (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The LEA coordinator also provides an annual training with agencies to increase awareness of the rights and needs of homeless students. Consequently, the coordinator has found that students are graduating because they have increased access to student services (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

#### *Positive Family Relationships*

All four participants as well as the RFA document provide evidence of positive family involvement in schools (SD 27 community liaison, elementary principal, high school principal and LEA coordinator interview, 2009; RFA, 2006). The community liaison and the LEA coordinator were able to speak about how McKinney-Vento is directly involved with parent involvement in the district, however the principals were not aware of how the McKinney-Vento program was directly involved with connecting parents in the schools but did provide examples of positive parent involvement that might involve the McKinney-Vento program. The type of involvement discussed involved who was making the connection with the parent as well as how the connection was being made. For example, case managers were making positive connections by speaking the family's native language and offering strategies for finding a home. This section will provide examples given about which positions in the district most often connect with families and what they do to connect with them.

The most commonly mentioned position that connects with families was the case manager (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; RFA, 2006). Other positions also involved with connecting families to the school are liaisons and social workers (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Case management helps parents to make better decisions (SD 27 RFA, 2006). For example, case managers take parents shopping to teach budgeting and nutrition and assisting families with completing affidavits (SD 27 RFA, 2006). The community liaison also facilitates a positive connection with the school. “We visit homes and try to ensure them. Whatever the situation, we can assist them” (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). School liaisons help families by educating parents prior to meetings so they feel more comfortable participating in these meetings “a lot of times they feel intimidated and we try to circumvent that” (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). Liaisons also reach out to parents by going “door to door and let families know about services” (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The community liaison also informs families of events to connect families in a positive way to the school. For example, during the holidays, school and community agencies provide toy giveaways for students and families (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

Social workers and clerical staff can be connected with family members by speaking the native language of the family (SD 27 RFA, 2006). In addition, social workers provide support by working with parents on discipline strategies (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The McKinney-Vento program also attempts to connect with families in a positive way by producing media (posters, brochures) informing families of right to immediate enrollment. These materials in are made more accessible

to families because they are produced English, Spanish and Hmong (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Families also have access to neighborhood resource centers where they can receive support for basic needs as well as health and dental services (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). There are also support groups for families, such as community coffee groups, where families can learn about resources in the community (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

Parent trainings are also offered to homeless families. The parent workshops are offered in three languages (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Parent trainings are made more accessible by offering them at other locations besides the school, such as the local shelter (SD 27 RFA, 2006). The goal of some other programs is to educate parents, which is the “key to breaking vicious cycle” (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). One example of a program that makes a difference is the 0 to 5 readiness program (SD 27 elementary principal interview, 2009). The First 5 program focuses on toddlers, preschool age children and their parents (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The McKinney-Vento program does collaborate with First 5 as well as Head Start, another intervention program focused on early intervention (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). The high school principal didn’t know of McKinney-Vento program offering parent training, but school site offered an eight week training course for parents training parents on what schools offer, what it takes to go to college and how to get access to counselor and ask for a four year plan- “then they become a help to a child going to school” (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). The home school liaisons made the phone calls to invite the parents and had a successful turnout (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). Other parent

trainings sponsored by McKinney-Vento are available in the district (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009).

### *Personal Attributes of the Child*

In addition to the protective factors discussed above, three of the participants also mentioned personal attributes of the child as a protective factor that can facilitate academic success (SD 27 community liaison, high school principal and LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Although these personal attributes are not program components, they are also mentioned in resilience literature. In addition, program components may have an impact on student attributes, which has not been very well explored in the literature. Having an “inner drive to succeed” was mentioned as an attribute that could facilitate academic success for a homeless student (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). Another attribute is the ability to engage people in a positive way. “You have a tremendous advantage and people gravitate to him. He’s the kind of person you want to help” (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). An interest in helping others was also mentioned as an attribute in students who were successful despite being homeless (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009; SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). This student “volunteers to help others [and] received an award for attendance” (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). The high school student who was an unaccompanied youth had a desire to become a youth minister and help other children who were having trouble in life (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009). Another homeless student who was recognized for her achievements had 3 jobs that involved helping other students (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). It is important to mention that both of these students had meaningful

relationships and support, so it is difficult to say whether the support facilitated these attributes or the attributes facilitated the positive support.

#### Other Results: Examples of Success

Protective components as well as student attributes may be linked to student success. Clearly the support provided by the McKinney-Vento program seems to have a positive impact on student success, however a link between the success and a specific program component was not established in the evidence. Participants in SD 27 were able to provide examples of homeless students experiencing success in school. Two of the students were receiving services from McKinney-Vento. It was undetermined whether the other students mentioned were receiving support. The first student receiving support from McKinney-Vento was an unaccompanied youth who McKinney-Vento helped to graduate high school and is going onto college. She was nominated both by her school and the McKinney-Vento program for the Mayor's Award in recognition of her achievements (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Other evidence of student success was provided with homeless students' grade point average (GPA): "a sophomore with a 3.67, and a senior with a 3.78 "remarkable despite challenges in lives and can wind up with a GPA that high" (SD 27 high school principal interview, 2009).

In addition, SD 27 did a study on homeless students receiving McKinney-Vento services in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and above and found academic improvement, behavior and attendance improved 40-50% compared to other students (SD 27 community liaison interview, 2009). Student stability is also a measure of success. SD 27 keeps data on students who were "formerly homeless" to track whether they remain stable. In 2004-

05, 81% of formerly homeless remained housed, with attendance rate 92% and satisfaction rate 95.5% of McKinney-Vento services (SD 27 RFA, 2006). Although improvement with the annual academic achievement test scores for homeless students has improved every year, it still does not meet the average student population in terms of percentage of students achieving proficiency in the district.

### Profile of School District 29

#### *Data Sources*

Data sources from this school district were obtained from interviews conducted with the LEA coordinator, a middle school principal and a school social worker. Documents analyzed included the annual survey from 2007-2008 and the 2006 RFA requesting funds to continuing running SD 29's McKinney-Vento program. The role of the LEA coordinator is to function as the district's homeless liaison, ensuring that homeless students' rights and needs are being addressed. From the time of the interview, this coordinator has served as the district's liaison for four years. She works in the central office's student orientation center in the pupil services department. Her role involves the identification of new students who are homeless and advocating for these students to ensure that they are not stigmatized (LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The role of the middle school principal in SD 29 is to service students as she would any other student in her district. This principal's philosophy is to treat all students equitably and ensure that they have a place to be academically and socially successful. The role of the caseworker is to advocate for homeless children and protect them. The caseworker also is involved with locating shelter for families as well as providing other resources for basic needs and linking families to these resources. The

social caseworker is a master at connecting families to resources in the community. She understands the network of resources in the community and how to access these resources. This section will analyze interviews and documents obtained from SD 29 to explore the district's characteristics, range of services, as well as risk factors and protective factors encountered by homeless families. This section will also explore how these protective factors may contribute to academic success.

### Research Question One: Components of McKinney-Vento Programs

#### *Characteristics*

School District 29 is in an area where poverty is the norm. Forty-two point one percent of the community lives below the poverty level (SD 29RFA, 2006). Ninety-three thousand five hundred people live in the city of SD 29. Five thousand people are identified as homeless with over 50% of this number being children (SD 29 RFA, 2006). Over 90% of students in SD 29 qualify for no cost lunches.

Crime and tragedy also impact the children of SD 29. Many of the parents of homeless families also are dealing with incarceration and separation from their children. Unfortunately, the school environment is not immune to tragedy. "A student died on campus last year" (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). Incarceration and tragedy can lead to instability in students' lives. Unstable living is common in SD 29 with 43% of children living in an out of home placement (SD 29 RFA, 2006). A high number of students are identified as foster youth. Of the 2,905 identified as homeless in 2005, 1,530 are identified as doubled-up and 665 are identified as living in an unsheltered situation (SD 29 RFA, 2006). Nearly all of the 30,192 students are identified as under represented ethnic groups. The two biggest ethnic groups in this community are Latino



and African American (Dataquest, 2009). Latinos have recently surpassed African Americans as the largest group in this community (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). There has also been a recent increase of migrant children from Mexico who are not able to access some resources because they or their parents are not U.S. citizens (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Despite the extreme poverty and need that exists in this community, there is a lack of resources available to families in transition. There are not many shelters available to provide housing to those in need. Consequently, the school district is very involved with collaborating with agencies to facilitate access to the resources available in the community.

The school involved in this study is a middle school with 987 students. The principal corroborates the extreme poverty that exists in the community and explains that many students who are not identified as homeless encounter similar risks and barriers that homeless students encounter. “A lot of children do not eat...homeless students do not stand out” (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). The whole districts needs are similar to the needs of the homeless population.

Also, there has been a recent increase of employed families working for large companies becoming homeless due to loss of employment. Many families have also become homeless due to foreclosure of their homes. Some families identified as homeless are also employees of SD 29.

#### *Range of Services*

The type of services offered in SD 29 can be broken into four groups: basic needs, socio-emotional, academic and training. Of the six districts explored in this study, SD 29 provided the most comprehensive description of how academic support is

provided to homeless students to bridge achievement gaps and facilitates academic success. Enrollment in SD 29 is centralized at the district office, so key personnel at the district identify families as they enroll, assess their needs and link them to the appropriate resources at the school and the community. The central location facilitates ease of access to service and alleviates the risk of feeling stigmatized at the school site (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Collaboration with outside agencies is key to the success of having resources available for families. Some of the outside agencies are housed at the district, which facilitates ease of access to services. Awareness building is also a crucial component to the success of the program. Every year, trainings are offered to educate parents about their rights as well as provide a platform for parents to share their successes with the program. In addition, an annual symposium is provided for the school and community to create awareness and offer education to both the homeless population and staff that serve them. The symposium is a collaborative effort between SD 29 and the local college in the community. Table 13 provides an overview of services offered in District 29.

Table 13

*Overview of Services in SD 29*

Basic Needs	Socio-emotional	Academic	Training
Food	Supplemental counseling	Tutoring	Awareness
Clothing		Summer school	Collaborate with local college
Housing		Differentiation of instruction	Symposium
Medical/Dental		Training	
		Academic support off campus	

*Basic needs.* The McKinney-Vento program at SD 29 offers resources for all of a student's basic needs. At the district level, the resource center provides resources for food, clothing, housing as well as medical and dental services. The centralized resource center collaborates with agencies in the community to provide these resources. Collaboration with these agencies has helped to ensure that basic needs are met. In one situation, a family was about to lose their housing at a shelter because the mother did not have enough food stamps to provide the meals for the week at the shelter (one of the requirements for living in the shelter). The caseworker had an established relationship of collaboration with this agency and was able to work with the shelter provider to help the mother and children stay at the shelter. In addition, the district social caseworker had other connections to community members who provided supplemental gift cards so the mother was able to go shopping for the food she needed to provide the meals at the shelter (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

Many of the families coming in do not have access to medical or dental care because they do not have medical insurance and do not qualify for Medi-cal. McKinney-Vento has helped to open a clinic on one of the school campuses so students can access needed medical and dental care. In addition to increased access to medical care, SD 29 also increases access to housing by providing resources for shelters because of their direct connection with the shelter providers in the community. Clothing vouchers are also provided to students so they can purchase uniforms to go to school.

*Socio-emotional support.* A large component of the McKinney-Vento program is increased access to mental health support. Supplemental counseling is available at the school sites and the McKinney-Vento program refers students who are impacted by

their exposure to the environmental risks associated with homelessness. The mental health support is thought to have the biggest impact on facilitating academic success for students (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

*Academic support.* Academic support for homeless students is a top priority for the McKinney-Vento program. When homeless students are behind academically, they are referred to after school tutoring that services all students who are in need of academic support. The focus of the program is to bridge the gap in achievement. The focus of the tutoring is on language arts and math. In addition to after school programs, summer enrichment programs are also available for homeless students as well as funding for students to attend educational field trips. Training is offered to teachers to implement differentiation in instruction strategies to engage all learners. Monitoring of student progress was a consistent theme in the data (SD 29 RFA, 2006; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Pre and post testing is used to measure student progress. Staff training is focused on increasing the knowledge of the specific educational needs of homeless children. For example, a homeless child may not have a private quiet place to do homework, or may not have the funds to purchase school supplies (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Homeless children are provided with school supplies so that they can be successful in school. The McKinney-Vento staff collaborates with the local shelters to offer tutoring and training to shelter staff to offer tutoring at the shelter. Students are assessed and referred to services to address academic deficits and are referred to appropriate programs such as ELL and GATE (SD 29 RFA, 2006). The middle school looks at the entire student and also connects students to after school programs that help with academics. Students are

also provided transportation to and from school if this is a barrier that is keeping them from consistently attending school. They are given with bus tokens so they may remain at their original school if they experience moves that place them outside of the school's boundaries (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

*Training.* Awareness training is a significant service offered through the McKinney-Vento program. The focus is to collaborate with the local college to increase awareness in the community and school about the rights and needs of homeless students in terms of eliminating barriers to be successful in school. Parent education workshops are also offered throughout the year. Both the symposium and parent education classes provide opportunities for families to share their success and talk about how they were able to improve their situation and help their child be successful in school. This is effective because, “no one tells their story better than the person who experienced it...” (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

#### Research Question Two: Risk Factors Impacting Success

There are many risk factors that impact a homeless student's ability to be successful in SD 29. Biological risk factors are namely physical and mental health issues that homeless students encounter. Environmental risk factors include issues related to high mobility and a negative home and school environment. This section will highlight interview and document data that revealed risk factors students at SD 29 encountered while homeless. Table 14 provides an overview of risk factors identified in SD 29.

Table 14

*Overview of Risk Factors for SD 29*

Risk Factor	Type	Examples
Mental	Biological	Suicidal; depression
Physical	Biological	Poor health; fatigue; hunger; poor dental care
Gender	Biological	Not all shelters accept boys
Negative school	Environmental	Students disciplined harshly for not having materials; Undocumented fearful of getting into trouble
Negative community	Environmental	Lack of trust in the system; gangs
Negative family	Environmental	Unaware of resources
Cumulative	Biological/environmental	Dysfunctional; repeat the cycle

*Biological Risk Factors*

Biological risk factors were mentioned in two out of the three interviews as well as the RFA (SD 29 caseworker & LEA coordinator interview; RFA, 2006). Mental and physical health issues were mentioned as the primary source of risk for homeless students. The biological barriers most often mentioned in interviews were mental health issues related to depression were discussed as primary risk factors homeless children encounter at school: “kids have scars” and are suicidal, angry and depressed (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Feelings of hopelessness “permeate through their lives” (SD 29 RFA, 2006). In addition, physical illness and dental health appear to be a barrier for many homeless children. Poor health, fatigue, hunger, and poor dental care leading to infections and cavities. When a student is in pain and does not feel well, it is difficult for the student to concentrate on his studies. Gender is also mentioned as a barrier: “not all shelters accept boys” (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

*Environmental Risk Factors*

All three interviews as well as the RFA identify several environmental risk factors encountered by homeless students (SD 29 caseworker, LEA coordinator, principal interview, 2009; RFA, 2006). These environmental risk factors stem from experiences in the school, community and family. Negative school environment risks include adversarial clerks denying enrollment, other districts not supportive of McKinney-Vento and teacher's negative attitude towards homeless students. "If a student does not have school supplies, the teacher may start in on the student...students may be disciplined harshly when they don't know the student's situation" (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Undocumented families are afraid they are going to get into trouble if they ask for help (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009) There exists a lack of trust or fear of agencies that are available to help students (SD 29 RFA, 2006). Community risk factors mentioned include gang affiliation (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). Family risk factors include: domestic violence, drug abuse, and incarceration (SD 29 principal interview, 2009; SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). In addition, many families are unaware of the resources that are available to them in the community and the school. In addition, lack of adequate clothing is also a barrier for students being successful in school.

Other barriers mentioned in every interview and document includes poverty and high mobility. The overarching environmental barrier in this community is poverty. All interviewees mentioned that the whole student population in SD 29 encounters similar barriers to homeless students. High mobility is also listed as a barrier and leads to lack of continuity in education as well as fragmented service delivery.

### *Cumulative Risk Factors*

As discussed in resilience research, both environmental and biological risk factors can compound and repeat and continue the risk cycle. This is also cited as a risk in SD 29: “sometimes they just play the game to play it...It’s a function within dysfunctionality” (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Fortunately, only a small number of people in SD 29 seem to “repeat the cycle” of homelessness (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Other risk factors include a lack of knowledge about services available to homeless families (SD 29 RFA, 2006). Finally, inadequate clothing for school and lack of transportation are identified as risk factors for homeless students (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 principal interview, 2009; SD 29 RFA, 2006).

### Research Question Four: Components and Characteristics of Districts with Higher Rates of Academic Success

This section will explore the protective components identified in SD 29. District 29 is unique from the other two districts because it has the highest percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the LA portion of the STAR test. Forty-three percent of District 29’s homeless population scored proficient on the LA portion of the STAR test. In addition, a higher percentage of homeless students scored proficient on the LA test (43%) than the general population (38%). This is significant because students in District 29’s McKinney-Vento program may be more successful in school because of support they have received from the McKinney-Vento program. Examples were given in the RFA and interviews under each of the identified protective tenets identified in chapter 4: developing meaningful relationships, creating a caring



environment, creating a sense of belonging, developing community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships. The characteristic that is unique to SD 29 is the emphasis on academic support for homeless children. There is a specific plan that is being implemented in SD 29 to address the achievement gap in homeless children. An important component to the plan is monitoring student progress (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 RFA, 2006). The plan is specifically laid out in the RFA and is mentioned in the LEA coordinator interview and the social caseworker interview. Interestingly, both the LEA coordinator and the caseworker also provided specific examples of how SD 29's McKinney-Vento program focused on student strengths to facilitate academic success. Table 15 provides an overview of protective components discovered in SD 29.

Table 15

*Overview of Protective Components for SD 29*

Protective Component	Themes	Examples
Meaningful relationships	Counselor; tutor; teacher; caseworker	Socio-emotional support; one on one academic support; caring, love, advocate; advocate, get to know them
Caring environment	Food; sensitivity	Free lunch; send to the doctor
Sense of Belonging	Transportation; clothing; materials; sensitivity	Bus tokens; vouchers; books; training
Community involvement	Seamless access; symposium; school	Day to day communication, participation in meetings; testimonials and training for parents, staff and community; COE, state, district and schools support
Positive parent relationships	Testimonials	Success stories, focus on strengths

### *Developing Meaningful Relationships*

Most of the meaningful relationships identified in the interviews as well as the document are relationships with a caring adult in the school or community. SD 29 attempts to develop meaningful relationships with homeless children by linking homeless children to counselors at school and in the community. When a homeless student is identified in SD 29, they are often referred to counseling for socio-emotional support (SD 29 RFA, 2006; SD 29 principal interview; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Group therapy is also offered at the school sites. In addition to counseling during the school year, there is also a counselor that provides support in the summer school program.

One on one tutoring is also another avenue to develop meaningful relationships with an adult (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). In addition, making sure students are connected with caring teachers is also an example of how meaningful relationships are established with homeless children (SD 29 principal interview, 2009).

In addition, the caseworker discusses the important components of developing relationships with her homeless clients. The caseworker is responsible for managing their cases and talks about how the relationship with the families is an ongoing process and talks about the benefit of developing a relationship with the families. “If you get to know a family more personal, sometimes they reveal more things” (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). One example of the protective quality of meaningful relationships is when the caseworker communicated with a shelter provider and encouraged a positive relationship with the parent and worked to help solve some problems that were

occurring at the shelter due to lack of resources. The caseworker feels it is important to see beyond a person's abilities and have high expectations. The result of this interaction was that the caseworker facilitated a positive relationship with another care provider and the mother went on to return to school and eventually found housing (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Another example of the protective quality of a meaningful relationship between school staff and homeless student is given when it was discovered that a homeless student's picture was revealed in an LA Times article on skid row. The McKinney-Vento staff made sure the information did not get circulated. "We made her feel good about herself...we tried to protect her" (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

Finally, the term "love" and "advocate" were used to describe the type of relationship that is meaningful to homeless children. The school is a place that can provide an education, food and love (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). Love is equated as a relationship where the student can have somewhere to go and talk about their feelings; then they can begin to heal (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). "If a child is not mentally stable, they cannot do well academically" (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

### *Creating a Caring Environment*

The essential purpose of SD 29's McKinney-Vento program is to provide a supportive and enriched environment that ensures the success of every student (SD 29 RFA, 2006). Ways in which schools show support is by providing them with food and being sensitive. For example, it is important to be aware that homeless children often don't have an address or phone number, so it is important not to embarrass or

discriminate them because they do not have this information (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). Other ways that SD 29 attempts to create a caring environment is by providing clothing, shoes, and school supplies as well as access to health and dental care (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). “If we are sensitive and understanding, the more we can help” (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). One powerful example of how SD 29’s caring environment made the difference in a student’s life is when staff brought a student who was very ill to the clinic doctor who discovered the student had a severe infection. The doctor immediately sent the student to the hospital where he was treated (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). Clinics are very important to undocumented families who have no access to medical care (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). A student’s health is very important because if the student is not healthy, the student will not be able to attend school. Most of the services are offered through pupil services at the central office and “parents know that pupil services is a place that can help them” (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

### *Creating a Sense of Belonging*

There are many components to SD 29’s McKinney-Vento program that facilitate a sense of belonging for homeless students. Ensuring that a student stays at their school of origin despite frequent moves, ensuring expedient enrollment and providing materials that help a student feel a part of the school are ways in which this McKinney-Vento program ensures that students feel at home in their school (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 principal interview, 2009; SD 29 RFA, 2006). The McKinney-Vento program provides bus tokens for students who move outside of the boundaries of their school so they can remain at their

school of origin. In one case a student moved to a shelter far away from her school, but the LEA coordinator made a plan with the family so the student could stay at her home school. The student is reported to have become happier because of her ability to stay at her home school and keep in her regular routine (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). “We want them to have ties and be connected” (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Other ways students feel connected are by looking and feeling like any other student. For example, the McKinney-Vento program has provided prom dresses, memory books and graduation invitations to help a student feel more a part of their school (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Being sensitive to special needs also helps a student feel a part of the school. For example, holding books for a student to minimize the student’s disruption helps them feel a part of the school (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). In addition, providing school supplies helps students feel like they belong (SD 29 principal interview, 2009). The goal at a middle school in SD 29 is to make them look and feel like any other student. “We don’t offer a lot of free dress days or fundraisers where kids need special clothes or money” (SD 29 principal interview, 2009).

Sensitivity training is also an important component to creating a sense of belonging in SD 29 schools. Training emphasizes the importance of integrating homeless students in all school activities (SD 29 RFA, 2006). The principal corroborated this component emphasizing the importance of ensuring that support looks seamless and ensuring students that the support is confidential.

*Developing Community Involvement in Schools*

Collaborating with community agencies to increase awareness and service to homeless families is an important component to SD 29's McKinney-Vento program. The goal is for the district to have a system that offers expedient access to referrals that is not fragmented (SD 29 RFA, 2006). Examples of community involvement include day to day communication with community agencies to ensure homeless student needs are being met, participating in established meetings with agencies to keep informed on changes and collaborating with agencies and the local college to provide training to community agencies, school staff in order to increase awareness on the rights and needs of homeless children (caseworker interview, 2009; LEA coordinator interview; RFA, 2006).

The Annual Homeless Symposium is a primary example of how SD 29 involves the community in the schools to support homeless children. SD 29 partners with the local college and offers workshops provided by McKinney-Vento staff, community agencies and parents offering information about services available for families, special needs that homeless students have in the classroom as well as success stories of homeless families who have benefited from these resources (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 29 also meets with the County Office of Education to get support on how to deal with districts not supporting homeless students. The state coordinator provides support with legal issues and is "always supportive" (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). This supportive environment seems to facilitate a culture of caring between agencies, organizations and families.

Overall, the principal was not aware of the details of the linkages between SD 29 and community agencies, but she was aware of some of the community agencies that served her school and felt very comfortable with calling the McKinney-Vento department if a student was identified and had any particular needs (SD 29 principal interview, 2009).

#### *Developing Positive Family Relationships*

The RFA, LEA coordinator and social caseworker all corroborated evidence of the McKinney-Vento program developing positive family relationships. However, the principal of the middle school was not aware of any parent education programs offered in the district. Ways in which the McKinney-Vento program develop positive family relationships is by providing resources to parents and a support center to obtain these resources, educating families about their rights while they are homeless and offering parent workshops to learn strategies to successful (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009; SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 RFA, 2006). Evidence of positive family relationships can be found in the testimonials parents give in parent workshops sharing success stories about how their children do well in school despite their homeless situation:

By letting others know that the school tries to help you, they hear it from their peers. When you hear from the person who has actually lived through it, it has a different impact on the person who is seeking help and is being reassured about asking for help because they think they are the only ones in this situation (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

Not only are these testimonial opportunities a positive experience for the parent providing the testimonial but other parents have a positive experience hearing about the

success of their peers. The parents have an opportunity to hear first hand how to cope with risk factors they and their children are encountering due to their homelessness.

### *Focus on Strengths*

Both the social caseworker and LEA coordinator provided examples of how the district McKinney-Vento program focuses on strengths. Although there is nothing specific written in the RFA, the program does attempt to support individuality and recognize student talents (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The McKinney-Vento staff looks at the student's academic areas of strength and encourages them to stay strong (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). The McKinney-Vento program also focuses on parent strengths to provide support. For example, a reluctant parent was told that she had a great child and discussed the parent's strengths (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). "Once you do that, they buy into your help. You see a successful turnaround" (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009). In this case, the mom went on to school and the student graduated and went on to college.

### Summary

In summary, SD 21, 27 and 29 are three school districts in the state of California with unique characteristics in terms of location and student population. These three districts have many similarities as well as some unique differences in their McKinney-Vento programs. Although all three districts exhibit components identified in resilience literature that potentially facilitate academic success, not all three districts have demonstrated academic success as measured by the annual STAR testing with their homeless population. Table 16 provides an overview of the percentage of homeless



population and total population scoring proficient or above on the LA portion of the STAR test.

Table 16

*Overview of District Homeless and General Population Scoring Proficient on Language Arts Portion of STAR*

District	Percentage of Homeless Scoring Proficient on LA portion of STAR	Percentage of General Population Scoring Proficient on LA Portion of STAR
SD 21	20%	28%
SD 27	19%	24%
SD 29	43%	38%

Academically, SD 21 has shown only 20% of homeless students scoring proficient on the language arts section of the STAR testing. Many stories were shared about how components of the McKinney-Vento program facilitated academic success. In most cases, success was measured by increased attendance and stability in school. SD 21 does not monitor academic progress with homeless students, so participants could not comment on whether or not components of the program were having an impact on academic achievement. However, it is important to mention that other variables may impact the low academic scores. For example, almost 50% of the student population is identified as English Language Learner (ELL). If students are not fluent in English, they are not going to score well on a test that is given in English. Another possible explanation for low academic test scores could be the limited evidence of positive family connections at the school. None of the participants provided examples of ongoing parent training or workshops designed to engage parents in their child's learning or increase awareness of their rights while they are homeless. However, SD

21 did show positive connections with families in terms of meeting basic health needs, which seemed to have a positive impact on student attendance.

Similarly, 19% of SD 27's homeless population scored proficient on the language arts section of the STAR test. However, SD 27 showed evidence of monitoring academic data and reported academic growth every year with their homeless population. Another unique discovery is that SD 27 also monitors the progress of "formerly homeless" youth and has found high attendance rates as well as higher graduation rates with this group. Similar to SD 21, SD 27 does not show much evidence of positive family connections with the school.

Of all districts studied in this chapter, SD 29 had the highest percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the LA portion of the STAR. What is particularly unique about SD 29 is that a higher percentage of homeless students (43%) scored proficient or higher than the total district student population (38%). Similar to SD 27, SD 29 also monitors academic progress and showed evidence of communicating with staff when a student is struggling. SD 29's most unique component to their McKinney-Vento program was its annual awareness training that involved parents who were successful with the McKinney-Vento program. At the annual training, parents experiencing success in their lives had the opportunity to share these successes with other struggling families. In addition, school staff and community agencies participate and attend workshops at this training that increase awareness about the rights and needs of homeless youth. SD 29 also offers enrichment classes through summer school and provides socio-emotional support through counseling offered at summer school.

Overall, the three districts studied in this chapter show evidence of providing stability for homeless students in school. It seems as though SD 29 is providing the type of support that is having a positive impact on academic achievement. SD 27's McKinney-Vento program also appears to be having an impact on academic achievement because they have shown growth over time. The most significant difference between SD 29 and the other two districts is the evidence of positive family relationships in school and focus on student and family strengths.

Chapter 5 display data across all six cases and expands the exploration to the other three districts in this study. Chapter 5 also answers the research questions by exploring predominant themes across districts and significant findings that seem to have a positive impact on student success.

## CHAPTER 5

### Cross Case Analysis and Discussion

Chapter Four explores similarities and differences found in three key districts, SD 21, 27 and 29. In this chapter I present data from all six districts that participated in the study (SD 10, 20, 21, 27 and 29) and lay out common and unique themes across districts. I provide a brief summary of the characteristics and risk factors identified in the six districts and discuss the themes identified in the exploration of protective mechanisms in the McKinney-Vento program. In particular I explore how the length of time of program operation of the specific components of McKinney-Vento programs seems to impact academic achievement with homeless students. The specific components that seem to facilitate a positive impact on student success are positive family relationships and enrichment activities built into student and family programs. Finally, this section also looks at the principal's role as it relates to the implementation of the McKinney-Vento program.

#### Research Question One: Components of McKinney-Vento Programs

##### *Characteristics*

This section incorporates data gathered from six K-12 school districts serving more than 1,000 identified homeless students in their district. There are many similarities and some differences in terms of each district's characteristics that are explored including: student population, homeless population, poverty level, dominant ethnic group, and unique characteristics. Table 17 provides an overview of the characteristics of each district.

Table 17

*Overview of District Characteristics*

District	SD 10	SD 20	SD 21	SD 24	SD 27	SD 29
Total population	88,186	24,000	18,889	18,000	79,383	30,192
Homeless population	1,051	1,590	1,696	2,190	2,452	2,824
Percentage identified as homeless	1%	7%	9%	12%	3%	9%
Poverty level	68.5%	55%	64.2%	76%	76%	Over 90%
Dominant ethnic group	Hispanic 51.2%	Hispanic 52.5%	Hispanic 77.9%	Hispanic 61.3%	Hispanic 58.7%	Hispanic 74.5%
Unique characteristic	5 <sup>th</sup> largest city in CA	Many families do not realize they are homeless	Sparsely populated	District does not represent a particular city	7 <sup>th</sup> largest city in CA	Central enrollment

All school districts are serving more than 1,000 homeless students. SD 10 has the least number of identified homeless students with 1,051 and SD 29 has the highest number of identified students with over 2,800. It is important to note that there is not a correlation with size of the district and number of identified homeless students. The reasons for this discrepancy are not entirely clear, but some possible explanations are related to the sophistication of databases tracking this information as well as each school's awareness of who is homeless and how to identify homeless students. All but one school district mentioned the continued rise of identified homelessness over the years. All coordinators attribute the growth in population to the downturn in the economy with many families losing housing due to the increased rate of foreclosures in their community. In fact, all districts but SD 20 are confident that they have over 2,000 homeless students in their district, but because of barriers with identification, not all

students who are homeless are currently identified in the district's database. These barriers include a lack of cohesiveness in reporting from school to school (SD 10 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Another barrier is the reported fear that exists with immigrant families who do not have legal status in the United States (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Overall, the largest population of identified homeless students is those living in a doubled-up situation. However, SD 29 and SD 27 both have a large population of unaccompanied youth including foster youth, runaways and those who are living with an unofficial guardian (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 RFA, 2006). District 10 and District 27 have the highest overall student population. District 10 has 88,186 and District 27 has 79,383 (SD 10 RFA, 2006; SD 27 RFA, 2006). However, SD 27 has a higher rate of poverty with 76% of the population qualifying for free lunch and SD 10 only has sections of the district with high rates of poverty (SD 10 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 27 RFA, 2006). SD 24 and SD 21 have a similar total student population (between 18-19,000), however SD 21 has a high number of migrant students and is in an agricultural area (Dataquest, 2006). SD 24 is unique because the district does not represent a particular city, it is a part of five different cities and does not report a high percentage of agricultural workers (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 24 RFA, 2006). SD 20 and SD 29 have a total student population between 24,000-30,000 (Dataquest, 2006). SD 29 has a higher reported number of homeless students residing in the school district than SD 20 and SD 29's McKinney-Vento program has been in place for a longer period of time than SD 20's program (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 RFA, 2006). Both districts report to have families struggling

economically in their district (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

In terms of ethnicity, all districts have a low representation of Caucasians in the district with less than 20% representation in all districts (Dataquest, 2006). All districts also list Hispanic as the majority of their population (Dataquest, 2006). SD 29 has experienced a recent shift over the years from African American being the majority of their student population to Hispanic being the majority (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 10 and SD 20 show a similar representation of African Americans in their district (between 14-17%), while SD 24 and SD 27 having a similar representation of Asians in their district (between 12-20%) (SD 24 RFA, 2006; SD 27 RFA, 2006).

#### Research Question Two: Risk Factors Impacting Success

All six districts identified risk factors that inhibited the success of homeless students in school. Four of the six districts mentioned biological risk factors namely mental health issues and physical health issues. The remaining risks mentioned were environmental including risks identified in the school environment. Risk factors identified outside the school environment included: domestic violence, drug abuse, family instability and high mobility (SD 10, 20, 21, 27, 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 10, 20, 21, 27, 29 RFA, 2006). SD 20 had a much longer list of negative school environment factors than the remaining five districts (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 20 outreach worker interview, 2009). This may be because SD 20 has the newest McKinney-Vento program (SD 20 RFA, 2006). Other risk factors mentioned were family's fear and lack of trust in the school and community (SD 20

LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition, the cumulative affect of these risk factors can cause some families to “learn to fail” and exhibit repeat homelessness in subsequent generations (SD 27 high school counselor interview, 2009; SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Table 18 provides an overview of risk factors identified by the school districts.

Table 18

*Overview of Risk Factors*

	District	10	20	21	24	27	29
Risk	Type						
Negative School Environment	Environmental	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of trust/fear of organization	Environmental				X		X
Domestic violence	Environmental				X	X	
Drug abuse	Environmental	X				X	
High mobility	Environmental		X	X		X	
Family instability	Environmental	X	X			X	
Physical Health	Biological	X			X		X
Mental health	Biological	X			X	X	
Gender	Biological			X			X

SD 10, 24 and 27 listed mental health issues with children and parents. SD 10 shared that a high rate of homeless children are also being identified as having other learning disabilities that may be related to mental health issues in the parents (SD 10 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 27 and SD 24 also identified mental health issues of the primary caregiver as a risk for homeless children (SD 24 high school



counselor interview, 2009; SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 27 also finds mental health issues in homeless children (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview).

Physical health issues were mentioned in SD 10, 24, 29. Specific issues were: head lice, dental issues, and hunger. “Kids can’t learn if they are not healthy” (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Three districts (10, 20 and 27) list family instability as a risk to student success. Examples of family instability include: broken family ties, dysfunctional relationship with mother, parents struggling to make ends meet, and being worried about where they are going to live, what they are going to eat (SD 10, 20, 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Three districts (20, 21 and 27) provide examples of high mobility. Families that are transient families often have poor communication with the school (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In SD 27, one student moved 8 times during a school year (LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 21 points out that “every time they move they can lose 4-6 months of academic progress” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Other risks mentioned are domestic violence and drug abuse. SD 24 and 27 mention domestic violence has negative affects on learning and SD 10 and 27 talk about drug abuse impacting students negatively in school.

Negative school environment was mentioned as a risk factor in all six districts. The types of negative school environment can be divided into eight different categories: low morale, high mobility of staff, pressure from program improvement, lack of awareness, low expectations, lack of resources, and conflicting policies. The category with the highest representation of districts was the area of pressures related to school

improvement; four out of six districts cited this as a risk for homeless students achieving success. Every other category included two or three districts mentioning that type of risk factor.

Low morale and high mobility of staff were listed as a risk factor by two districts. Morale is low in SD 24 and 20 due to budget cuts and staff layoffs (SD 10 & 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). In addition, SD 20 describes building his program is “like building sandcastles with the tide coming in” mentioning the nature of the school with staff constantly changing positions (LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 10 talks about the high turnover rate with staff at school sites and hopes new administration will see the benefits of the program.

Pressure from Program Improvement is the most widely mentioned risk factor by the districts. SD 20 says with Program Improvement in place “the sweetest principal in the world will say, ‘I can’t take this kid now! We are testing in two weeks!’” (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009.) In addition, teachers are under a lot of pressure to show increased test scores in a short period of time and homeless children do not fit into that mold. Program Improvement is a priority and has caused communicating information about homeless programs to SD 27 staff to be bumped off of agendas, and thus limiting professional development for the staff in McKinney-Vento requirements and opportunities for homeless children.

Two districts provide many examples of how lack of awareness can be a risk factor for success. SD 20 discusses how families “slip through the cracks” because enrollment staff “does not know what to ask for” (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 20 also says that schools currently believe that “kids learn in nine week

increments. That does not fit in with the mold for a homeless students” (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 24 exemplifies lack of awareness by sharing that teachers are not understanding why kids can’t complete reports because they don’t have a computer or desk at home in the garage where they live.

SD 20 also gives an example of how office staff may rebuff parents seeking help because the parents lack of social skills and display attributes of families living in poverty. Rudeness will turn away office staff because of their lack of awareness about how to interact with some families living in poverty. “We have the ‘Fuck you families’ They need to know you can’t say “fuck” in the office. People get weirded out by that” (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Homeless families have unrealistic expectations and many homeless families do not take responsibility for their actions (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Two districts identified low expectations as a risk factor for homeless students (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The McKinney-Vento coordinator has low expectation in terms of a teacher’s ability to bond with a student “teachers can love a kid, but ya know- I love you now get to work” (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Low expectations are also expressed for a parent’s ability to follow-through. “I see a lack of follow-up; [it] is so frustrating for me with my clients...nothing really happens and they get stuck in this cycle of passivity, and powerlessness, and poverty...I can’t change it for them” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Low expectations are also expressed in terms of a student’s ability to succeed in school (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Lack of resources in terms of offering services for families is another risk factor. The inability to develop relationships with students due to small staff is listed as a concern with SD 10. Inefficient student information access inhibits SD 20's ability to monitor academic progress. SD 20 and SD 27 also list limited transportation as a risk to student success

Conflicting policies related to sharing information and enrollment is another environmental risk in schools. SD 20 has barriers to enrolling students in program due to criteria/policy for enrollment. For example, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program is supposed to serve the most needy kids, yet the criteria of program become barriers. One criteria of this program is that it needs to be full at the beginning of the year, but homeless students don't always enroll at the beginning of the year. McKinney-Vento tries to save slots so they can get in. In addition, policies implementing from the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) make sharing information between agencies challenging and can lead to fragmented service delivery for SD 20.

Finally, interviewees from SD 24 and SD 29 described that many families do not trust schools or community agencies because they are fearful of authorities as a result of their illegal status in the United States or as a result of negative experiences with the authorities. SD 29 provides an example of a parent who kept her kids at home (except school) because of the "little white truck" that came around every day to deport them. This mother thought the mail trucks were there every day to look for undocumented people (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). This example is interesting because the parent seems to trust the school because she sends her children to school. This may

be due to meaningful relationships that have been established between school staff and the family. On the other hand District 21 provides an example of negative school experiences creating fear and mistrust by explaining how the SARB process keeps children from attending school because when a child has missed many days of school and missed meetings to address the issue, a warrant can be issued for the arrest of the parent or the child (SD 21 liaison interview, 2009).

### Research Question Three: Protective Components

An important finding from this study that emerged in the cross-case analysis is that the number of years the McKinney-Vento program has been in place seems to parallel the number of protective mechanisms put into place as well as the academic success of homeless children. All district McKinney-Vento programs provide some evidence of building meaningful relationships with homeless children and families. Five out of six districts provide evidence of creating a caring environment at schools. Four out of six districts give evidence of creating a sense of belonging in their schools. Five out of six districts have developed strong community ties to serve the needs of homeless students and families. Only two of six districts, however, show evidence of building strong positive parent connections with homeless families. None of the school districts gave strong evidence of focusing on student strengths to facilitate academic achievement. Finally, the principals' role in three of the school districts will be explored in terms of their direct or indirect involvement in the McKinney-Vento program. Table 19 provides an overview of the different components in the six school districts with student population and academic data.

Table 19

*Overview of School Districts*

District	SD 10	SD 20	SD 21	SD 24	SD 27	SD 29
Years MV program in place	3	>3	6	15	12	15
Percentage of Homeless population scoring proficient on STAR- LA	34%	20%	20%	34%	20%	43%
Evidence of meaningful relationships	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Evidence of a caring environment	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sense of belonging	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community involvement	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Positive parent connection	Limited	Limited	Limited	Yes	Limited	Yes
Focus on strengths	No	No	No	Limited	No	Limited
Principal's role	Unknown	Unknown	Direct	Unknown	Indirect	Indirect

*Meaningful Relationships*

All districts provided some evidence of the importance of building meaningful relationships with homeless students and families. SD 20 had the least evidence of building relationships in their district, whereas SD 24 and SD 10 provided the most evidence of meaningful relationships. Interviews revealed nine themes identifying the types of relationships that are meaningful for homeless students and families. The themes discovered are: advocacy, high expectations, commitment, specific goals related to academic achievement, peer relationships/mentors, cultural sensitivity,

community involvement, caring, and enrichment. The theme that was mentioned by most participants was the theme of advocacy. Five of the six districts mentioned advocacy as an important component to building meaningful relationships with homeless students and families.

*Advocating for the student/family.* Advocacy is the primary role of the LEA coordinator or support staff, such as case managers, outreach workers or liaisons in five of the six districts. Coordinators in SD 10 and SD 27 actually use the term “advocate” to describe their role in terms of their relationship with students and families. SD 27 provides direct case management for the family that involves advocating for families to receive services to meet basic and academic needs. “Parents know who to call for support” (SD 27 high school elementary school principal interview, 2009). SD 29 describes advocating for students and families by “eliminating barriers” (SD 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The outreach workers in SD 20 find out what the student needs and are the “eyes and ears of the school and communicate with the teachers and try to keep alive those lines of communication” and “hooks them up with resources at the school site” (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The outreach worker in SD 20 can access resources in the district that parents otherwise would not be able to get just by registering them in school. The liaisons in SD 24 work with teachers and let them know about students who need extra support. In addition SD 24 has one teacher at each school site responsible for making sure McKinney-Vento kids get to resource center and get support. These teachers present to school staff about how the school needs to “have compassion for students” (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Advocating is an important component for McKinney-Vento staff that requires

compassion, sensitivity and an awareness of resources available at the school site and community.

The remaining eight themes were mentioned by two of the six LEA coordinator interviews but provide a richer description of the coordinator's perception of important actions for developing meaningful relationships with students and families. SD 10 and 27 felt that having high expectations for students and families was an important component in relationships with homeless children and families. High expectations are important in a relationship because it sends the message that parents and students play a crucial role with experiencing success in school. Both SD 10 and SD 27 believe that part of having high expectation involves encouraging the family to do better. "If a family is in trouble, we encourage them to re-connect with the multi-service center for case management" (SD 10 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 10 also feels it is important to stay committed to a student despite high mobility "we will follow them wherever they go" (SD 10 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). At the transitional center, the kids grow very attached to the people, "kids know they can come back and talk to us" (SD 10 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 10 and SD 29 feel it is important to set specific goals for academic achievement. In SD 10, teachers are focused on specific academic goals based on the grade level. For example, phonemic awareness for grades 1-2, then in grades 2-8 reading comprehension. SD 29 also has very specific academic targets for teachers tutoring students to bridge the achievement gap. As noted above, SD 29 also has the highest percentage of homeless students achieving proficiency. Meaningful relationships focused on academic achievement are developed through one on one tutoring and after school tutorial. The teachers and tutors in SD 10 and SD 29



also monitor the students' academic achievement. SD 10 and SD 24 involve college students to help with academic support, which facilitates more of a peer mentoring relationship. In SD 24, college students are trained to run after school programs and SD 10 college students look at home life as well as academic issues and the intervention is "intensive" (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). All three of these districts have a higher percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the STAR test than the other districts.

Another important component to developing a meaningful relationship is having cultural sensitivity towards students and families. The ability of staff to communicate in the family's native language is one way staff can be culturally sensitive. Staff is "sensitive, bilingual experienced at determining needs of family, and puts resources in place" (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 24 RFA, 2006). Encouraging community involvement is also an important component to developing meaningful relationships.

Teacher liaisons trained on *Community of Caring* a national program started by Kennedy foundation- the emphasis is family, trust, caring, responsibility and respect. Lessons are infused into the curriculum. Kids do community service projects. Every school adopts a community service project (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

Caring is also common theme in the development of meaningful relationships in SD 21 and SD 24. For example children in SD 24, who are experiencing family instability, receive extra care from their teachers and have "progressed academically". Another example of caring from SD 21 is given with counseling girls who are victims of domestic violence. As shown in chapter four children who suffer abuse are always on edge and have difficulty processing information (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

The coordinator finds that when relationships are caring in a women's crisis support group in SD 21, women feel supported and this contributes to socio emotional success (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Counseling in SD 21 also provides a positive caring relationship. "I think relationships are behind academic success and the more positive adult relationships at school the kids have...that is helping them" (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). Positive caring adult relationships at school may also motivate students to come to school on a regular basis. "This one person caring about this student, perhaps giving them a reason to come to school and encouraging them every week to continue with school and to do better"(SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Finally, the coordinator from SD 24 has observed that a relationship that involves enrichment seems to facilitate the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy in children. "Students get a close relationship with teachers at summer school which is focused on fun learning with no stress" (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 24 also refers many homeless students to the district's Primary Intervention Program and the coordinator has noticed a positive outcome with the homeless students who participate in this program. "The room has toys and games and the child has the power to decide what to do... by the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> session, children show a change relating well to adults and are happier in the classroom and the playground" (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Participation in SD 24's summer school and PIP provide opportunities for the child to bond with a positive caring adult "they are at home at school" (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Participation in these programs and increases self-esteem and self-efficacy- they feel better about themselves. "We can help them to experience success" (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009).

### *Creating a Caring Environment*

All six districts provided examples of how their district creates a caring environment for homeless students. Two critical categories of creating a caring environment are: addressing basic needs and addressing academic needs. All districts identify that meeting a student's basic needs is crucial to academic achievement. Four of the six districts discuss the importance of addressing academic needs for homeless students.

Addressing basic needs is an important component of creating a caring environment for all McKinney-Vento coordinators interviewed in this study. SD 29 indicated food as a high need in their district. SD 24, 27, 29 and 21 reported medical and dental needs as an important priority. SD 24 and 29 also reported clothing as an important basic need. SD 10 and 27 simply pointed out that addressing a student's basic needs is important for school success. "When you are able to meet basic needs, then emotionally they are better prepared to learn" (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). "If a student is sitting in pain in a classroom with a tooth that hurts, they're not going to be able to concentrate or take in information. So, we think that definitely helps academically and with the attendance also" (SD 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). "They're not missing school due to a dental problem or medical problem that has gone untreated for a long time" (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). More days in school and the ability to focus because a student is not sick or in pain can be equated to increased success. (SD 21, LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Availability of clinics on campus has facilitated access to meeting basic needs for SD 21, 27 and 29. "To be able to get them to go to a clinic on a school campus is much friendlier than to go into

another clinic, or try to make appointment and work out payments” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 24 has dentists and physicians who will do work at no cost for students who do not have insurance. SD 24 and 27 assist families with completing paperwork to qualify for Medi-cal. By helping meet students basic needs, parents in SD 27 feel better about themselves. In one case, McKinney-Vento staff found housing for a mom who was living in a car and her child was able to return from independent study and attend school on a regular basis (SD 21 coordinator interview, 2009).

In addition to addressing basic needs, four districts gave evidence of the importance of addressing student’s academic needs to create a caring environment. It is important to provide school supplies because being prepared can have a positive impact on the student’s self-esteem. Providing school supplies is important because the “goal is for the students to feel good about themselves” (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 24 provided several examples of how they provide an enriched academic environment for homeless students. The summer school program is extended enrichment time for at-risk and McKinney-Vento kids with over 100 identified McKinney-Vento kids at nine schools. The program is focused on literacy, music, art, sports, fun projects, field trips so kids have exposure to enrichment activities such as: “going to the beach, discovery science, and swimming” (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). The McKinney-Vento program bought kids swimsuits so they could go to the pool. Eighty percent of the kids surveyed about the program reported that they “loved the program and learned a lot and had become a better student”. SD 29 also has summer school programs to address achievement gap. Five of the six districts offer

after school academic support and tutoring. SD 21 allows kids to stay until 6:00 pm so they can receive “enrichment and after school support” (SD 21 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). SD 27 and SD 29 monitor academics and use this information to connect with sites and make sure they are in the right classes and connected to intervention to help them graduate. SD 27 has observed an increase in STAR test scores with their homeless population and SD 29’s homeless population outperforms the general population on STAR testing.

### *Sense of Belonging*

All six McKinney-Vento Programs incorporate strategies to create a sense of belonging for homeless students and families in their school district. The common strategy that all six districts have incorporated into their programs is transportation. The other strategy that four out of six districts implement is sensitivity to the student and family’s culture. Transportation helps a student remain stable at school despite the fact that their home life is highly mobile. Transportation also facilitates more support from the McKinney-Vento office. A family receiving transportation get the best service because their attendance is monitored as well as attendance and grades and they check in with the counselor on a regular basis (SD 20 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Cultural sensitivity is shown to families by having staff available that speak the family’s primary language (SD 21, 24, 27, 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 21, 24, 27, 29 RFA, 2006). SD 24 has Cantonese, Mandarin and Spanish speaking liaisons that work with families to help link them to resources and feel more a part of their school.

### *Community Involvement*

Community involvement and collaboration is a crucial component to the success of McKinney-Vento programs. All six districts demonstrated some level of community involvement in their McKinney-Vento programs. The most common themes in community involvement involved collaboration with health care agencies to serve the needs of homeless families, developing meaningful relationships with outside agencies as well as working with key staff in the district to serve the needs of homeless students. Two of the six districts had developed a strong collaboration with health service agencies because of the implementation of the Healthy Start grant. SD 10 and 29 also address student health care needs with community clinics on campus and collaboration with a network that provides free health and dental care to children with no insurance (SD 10 & 29 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 10 & 29 RFA 2006).

#### Research Question Four: Components and Characteristics of Districts with Higher Rates of Academic Success

Although all six districts give examples of protective factors that can facilitate resilience, two districts stand out in terms of their ability to engage homeless students and families in a way that promotes academic success. SD 24 and 29 have positive family programs that incorporate enrichment for students and families. This finding is salient because interview data in the four districts with minimal evidence for parent involvement expressed wishes for effective parent education for homeless families. The main avenue that four out of six districts use to facilitate a connection is through case management and connecting families to resources in the community (SD 20, 21, 27 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 20, 21, 27 RFA, 2006). In addition, SD 24 and

29 gave evidence of enrichment in their summer school programs. SD 21 and 27 also had summer school programs, however the focus on these programs were primarily focused on remediation whereas SD 24 had a significant focus on enrichment and SD 29 incorporated a socio-emotional component.

This evidence is also important because both SD 24 and SD 29 showed evidence of a higher percentage of students scoring proficient on the Language Arts portion of the STAR testing. District 29 not only scored higher than the other districts, but their homeless population scored higher than their general population. One variable that may account for this is the fact that the majority of the student population in this district lives in poverty. However, it also makes a positive case for the effectiveness of the components of the district's McKinney-Vento program in terms of facilitating academic success. It is also important to note that SD 10 was also one of the districts scoring higher on the STAR testing, however, the district's LEA coordinator admits that they have only begun to break the surface of thorough identification of McKinney-Vento students. In the interview, the coordinator mentioned she had discovered over 100 students that were homeless but not yet identified in the district's database. So, the overall proficiency rating may be different once the district has a stronger grasp on their total homeless population. The final section of this chapter will focus on highlighting these significant findings as well as discussing the importance of the principal's role in relation to the district's McKinney-Vento program.

#### *Positive Family Programs*

Both SD 24 and SD 29 have parent centers and offer a more in-depth approach to engaging parents that incorporates parent participation into their programs and

focuses on parent self-esteem and self-efficacy. The results seem to be a positive impact on their children at school. This supports resilience research findings that providing resources that improve parent-child relationships facilitate academic success (Bryan, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Wang et al., 1996). One way SD 24 engages parents in a positive way is by offering “Family Fun Nights”, morning break clubs, annual resource fairs and “Parents as Teachers” training offered through First Five (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). At these events, meals are provided, children are involved and the focus on parent training is on childhood development. Parents and families walk away from these trainings feeling empowered and wanting to give back to their community. “And those parents have just really developed a lot of self-confidence and you know, talk about empowerment. Not just for themselves and for their children, but also they’re excited about doing things in the community” (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). This supports resilience research that has found events such as these facilitate empowerment (Bryan, 2005).

SD 29 also provides resources that facilitate a positive connection to the school. The caseworker organizes parent workshops with parent input. Enrichment is also offered in the way of toy drives and positive parent testimonials at workshops and trainings. At the annual awareness event, parents, school staff and community agencies all gather to receive training and listen to testimonials of success. The parent testimonials have been powerful for the other agencies in the community, staff who attend the training, as well as the parent who gives the testimonial. The parents who give the testimonial become “motivated” and staff reacts in a positive way as well. This facilitates their awareness of the needs of homeless children.



The staff, they get motivated to help the students more. Oh, I now understand why this student acts this way, I now understand why this mom is so hostile when she comes in, or this dad is disgruntled, now I know what it is that I need to do better to help a student or a family like this. So it's just a wonderful time that we educate everybody about what is happening. And the agencies say, we know what we need to battle now, we know we need more of this; we need more of that. (SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009.)

Not only is this experience building self-efficacy, but it builds social capital as well.

Resilience research explains that parent events that build social capital increase trust between the school, community environment and the parent is able to link with resources that can help their child succeed (Bryan, 2005).

### *Strengths*

In addition to having the most thorough parent involvement programs at their districts, SD 24 and 29 were the only two school districts that evidenced program components highlighting a student or family's strengths. District 29's testimonials are a clear method that highlights parent strength to the school and community. These testimonials support resilience research on the importance of noting strengths to promote success and facilitate the development of more protective factors (DeCivita, 2006; Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Another example of the utilization of parent strengths to promote resilience is the parent leadership components built into District 24's early childhood program that collaborates with McKinney-Vento. "...she has parents of some of the children that are involved in the program actually as a decision-making group on how the program is going to run. And those parents have just really developed a lot of self-confidence..." (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). Not only do the parents help themselves and their children, but they also tend to become more involved in the schools and the community. This supports how a strengths-based focus can build

resilience and the development of protective factors (Brown, et al., 2001; DeCivita, 2006).

### *Enrichment and Support*

In addition to a supportive early childhood program that engages families in a positive way, SD 24 also involves students through enrichment in their summer school program. The “After Summer School” offers “intensive fun” activities focused on literacy. This enrichment program focuses on music sports and art. They also have field trips to places like the science museum, aquarium, beach and swimming pool. Swimming suits were purchased for students who did not have them. The results of this program had a positive impact on the student’s self-esteem and self-efficacy. “...like 80 percent of them just loved the program, that felt they had learned a lot in the program and felt they had become a better student as a result” (SD 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009). This measurement was obtained by surveying the students asking them how they felt about their program and how they felt about their learning. This program supports how protective mechanisms lower the impact of the risk, maintain a high self-esteem and create opportunities for success (Rutter, 1987).

District 29 also provides socio-emotional support in their summer school program by providing a counselor to work with the students in addition to providing academic support. This type of support facilitates opportunities for the child to have positive relationship with a caring adult, which is a predictor for facilitating resilience (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

### *Length of time impacting program quality*

Although all six districts incorporate protective methods to support homeless students and families, it seems that the districts with programs that have been in place

for a longer period of time seem to have a more established web of protection in place for their students. This was evidenced by the information provided in the LEA coordinator interviews. District 20, who has had their McKinney-Vento program in place for less than three years, listed many more risks for homeless children and had less protection strategies in place. District 10 was unique because it had a very comprehensive program for children living in shelters at a separate school, however the coordinator acknowledged that the rest of the district was not providing services to the level that the comprehensive program was providing because of the lack of awareness school staffs had about the presence of homeless students in their district. Table 20 provides an overview of the number of risk factors and protective components given by each LEA coordinator. This table supports that the amelioration of risk and development of protective mechanisms is a dynamic process that occurs over time (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Freitas & Downey, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1998).

Table 20

*Overview of Risk and Protective Factors given by LEA Coordinators*

District	10	20	21	24	27	29
Years MV program in place	3	>3	6	15	12	15
Physical Risk	2	0	1	1	3	1
Environmental Risk	6	17	9	8	5	2
Meaningful Relationships	10	1	5	10	8	5
Caring Environment	4	3	4	5	4	3
Sense of Belonging	11	2	4	5	4	3
Community Involvement	10	2	3	9	9	4
Positive Family Connections	2	1	1	8	2	3

Although District 10 has many protective mechanisms put in place, it is important to note that these mechanisms have not been implemented district wide and primarily are impacting those students living on the campus that serves families living in the shelter that is connected to that school.

### A Principal's Role

This is the first time the principal's role has been explored in relation to its link to the MV program. The analysis of interview data reveals that principal involvement, awareness, and leadership seem to facilitate the successful implementation of McKinney-Vento program components. Table 21 provides an overview of the principals involved with their districts McKinney-Vento program.

Table 21

#### *Overview of Principal's Role with the McKinney-Vento Program*

Principal	SD 21 Elementary Principal	SD 27 Elementary Principal	SD 27 High School Principal	SD 29 Middle School Principal
Experience	3 years as principal	24 as an educator	13 years as principal	Not reported
Number of homeless at school	Approximately 43	10	100	10
Student population	602	606	2,700	987
Biggest risk to academic success	High mobility	Lack of awareness	Not having an "inner drive"	Poverty
Biggest contributor to academic success	Meaningful relationships, caring environment	Educating parents	Personal attributes of the student	Caring environment
Unique characteristic	Many fires	Majority of homeless live in hotels	Majority homeless are unaccompanied youth	Extreme poverty

As shown previously in Table 18 most principals had indirect involvement in the program. Those that had direct were much more aware of the needs of homeless students. The principals with direct involvement were elementary principals in charge of a smaller student population. Although the high school principal was not as directly involved, he had an awareness of the components of the program and knew who to go to for the resources at his school. In all schools that had a counselor, the principal was not as directly involved. Overall, principals in school districts with McKinney-Vento programs were aware of the rights of homeless students and utilized the support of the LEA coordinator as a resource to assist these students. If the principal was not involved, they had a “go to” person when a need came up for a homeless student. They all valued the support of the program and felt it was making a positive difference in the lives of homeless children who otherwise might not be going to school.

Coordinators in four out of six districts mentioned the importance of training administrators about the McKinney-Vento law. These coordinators also felt it was crucial for teachers and counselors to be intimately aware of the challenges homeless students encounter when trying to participate in school. Both the counselors and the principals that were more directly involved felt that teachers were not aware of the depth of the need of the homeless students in their school (SD 10, 21, 24 LEA coordinator interview, 2009; SD 29 caseworker interview, 2009).

Principal leadership seems to have an influence on the successful implementation of McKinney-Vento programs in schools. The principal sets the tone on how students are treated in the school. For example when many families were

displaced by a fire, the principal and staff of the elementary school in SD 21 mobilized to provide basic needs for the families (SD 21 principal interview, 2009). The teachers at this school organized a clothing drive for students in need. Clearly, staff felt comfortable rallying together to support their students. Another example of principal leadership is given with the principal's awareness of resources in the community relative to the needs of the student population. Although the high school principal in SD 27 was not directly involved with the district's McKinney-Vento program, he was very aware of the resources available in the community and school to support students with special needs (SD 27 principal interview, 2009). Finally, the principal in SD 29 used her leadership to ensure no student was stigmatized due to his or her homelessness. She emphasized the importance of confidentiality and scrutiny when providing support for homeless children as well as treating all children equally (SD 29 principal interview, 2009).

The principal at the high school with 2,700 students felt personal attributes were the main contributing factor towards a student being resilient. This principal gave an example of a student with many personal attributes that was successful in school. He was an unaccompanied youth who was very personable and approachable and had high goals of going to college and being a youth minister. He was also involved in the high school drama club and choir. Resilience researchers have identified resilient students to have engaging personalities and are approachable (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993) This resilient student also had a lot of support at school and community his involvement in drama club and community support from his church. The principal referred to this school support as "family" support "you have these

smaller learning communities, what we call them, that end up being support for kids” (SD 27 high school principal interview). What we don’t know about this outgoing student is which came first: the support he received or the engaging personal attributes. A student who positively engages adult care providers can facilitate a positive relationship and an adult care provider who is positive can elicit positive behaviors in the child. This interactive relationship facilitates the development of protective mechanisms and can lead the student onto a positive pathway of development (Doll & Lyon, 1998).

### Conclusion

In Chapter Five, I provided an overview of all six school districts in terms of characteristics and risk factors and common protective factors. I also presented significant findings in terms of those programs that seem to facilitate academic success for homeless students in their school district as well as how the length of time of the McKinney-Vento program facilitates the depth of the program in terms of the development of protective mechanisms and the mitigation of risk factors for homeless children. I also presented evidence in regards to the principal’s role as it relates to serving homeless students in the school district. Significant findings of McKinney-Vento programs include positive family involvement in the school by highlighting parent strengths as well as effective and engaging parent workshops and resource centers for parents.

McKinney-Vento programs that have a positive impact on homeless students also engage them in enrichment activities during summer school and provide socio-emotional support in conjunction with academic support. These findings support

research in resilience education about the impact of positive family relationships, engaging children in extracurricular activities, and facilitating pro social relationships with caring adults (Bernard, 1998; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 1987). In addition, the McKinney-Vento programs that have been in place for a longer period of time seem to have more depth in terms of protective mechanisms put in place and the coordinators of these programs have given less evidence in terms of environmental risks, especially in the school and the community.

Examination of the principal's role supported the perspective that the construct of resilience is a transactional process between positive programs and student attributes (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Freitas & Downey, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Principals involved in McKinney-Vento programs are also aware of the law and know who to go to in their district or school to help meet the needs of homeless students in their school. Overall, elementary principals were more involved than the secondary principal as would be expected, but none of the principals were fully aware of the details of McKinney-Vento programs. All principals felt that the McKinney-Vento program was making a positive difference in the lives of homeless children. Clearly, all programs exhibited protective factors, however the depth of the program as well as positive parent and student engagement seemed to play a significant role in academic success for homeless students.



## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions and Implications for Practice and Research

The number of homeless children and youth is an increasing population in the United States. This story about a homeless child illustrates some of the challenges that homeless students in California encounter when trying to be successful in school:

Jose calls the one bedroom that his family of five shares “home.” It is a small room, where all five family members sleep together on a full-sized mattress on the floor and where mother cooks simple meals in a borrowed Crockpot. The family must all get up early in the morning to quietly use the only bathroom in the three-bedroom home before their landlord and his family get up...

Jose and his brothers hurry off in the morning to breakfast at school and a hot lunch, sometimes the only meals they get. Jose has difficulty reading and homework is sometimes not a priority as he works to stay quiet inside the house where they feel blessed to live. Yet, his teacher expects him to do a page of math problems, read to his mother for 15 minutes each day and study for the Friday spelling test. Jose struggles to hide from his teacher the crowded conditions of this one-bedroom home and the fact that he has no desk to sit at to do the work. He hides the fact that he only got a few hours of sleep in the bed they all share because his younger brother cried all night because of an ear infection that continues to go without medical attention. He hides the fact that he only gets to bathe once a week and that his only uniform gets washed more often than he does, so he can wear it the next day...We assume that children come to school well fed and rested, with homework completed and ready to learn. But this is not always the case...(SD 24 RFA, 2006).

These temporary living conditions can be uncomfortable and lead to high rates of mobility (Duffield et al., 2007). Consequently, homeless children encounter many barriers trying to be successful in school. Barriers often associated with homelessness include: difficulty enrolling in school due to missing paperwork, difficulty finding

transportation to and from school, mental and physical health issues, poor nutrition, residential instability and domestic violence (Buckner et al., 2001; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1993; Norum, 1996; Nunez, 2000; Quint, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2004; Rubin, 1996; Stronge, 1993a). To help mitigate barriers homeless children face in school, Congress passed federal legislation that requires every Local Education Agency (LEA) to have a homeless liaison to ensure homeless children's rights and needs are being addressed (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). Funding sources to implement intervention strategies are available through McKinney-Vento subgrants and Title I Part A Reservation funds (Education for Homeless Children and Youth, 2004). With these funds, many school districts have implemented programs that collaborate with agencies in the community to develop programs that remove barriers and facilitate academic success for homeless children.

### *Summary of the Study*

The majority of literature on homeless education focuses on identifying barriers homeless students encounter and offers suggestions for programs and policy, however few studies have explored protective components of programs serving homeless students that might contribute to enhancing their resilience. Resilience research is used as the theoretical lens to explore McKinney-Vento programs. The construct of resilience is based on the premise that, despite adversities (such as poverty and homelessness) children who are resilient are more likely to be successful in school and in life. Resilience researchers have found that children who are resilient have common protective mechanisms in place that facilitate positive adaptation. These protective components can be placed into five categories: forming meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, creating community

involvement in schools, and developing positive family relationships (Bernard, 1993; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Morrison et al., 2006; Wang et al, 1996; Werner & Smith, 2001). These protective components can also be found in homeless education literature in the form of suggestions for program and policy implementation for effective McKinney-Vento programs, yet prior studies have not explored their presence. Examples of suggestions that coincide with the protective components identified in resilience literature are: counseling, providing access to basic needs, implementing policies that facilitate increased access to school and create a welcome environment; initiating collaborative efforts with community agencies; and involving and educating the families of homeless children (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Masten et al., 1993; Nabors et al., 2004; Norum, 1996; Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 1993b).

Homeless students continue to face unprecedented challenges in terms of their ability to be successful in school. McKinney-Vento programs serving more than 1,000 homeless students have the daunting task of making school more accessible and creating more opportunities for success in education. The focus of this study was to explore the range of services offered McKinney-Vento programs in the state of California. The research sought to identify characteristics of districts serving more than 1,000 homeless children. This research study also sought to identify the protective components in these programs and explore how these components may be contributing or limiting academic success.

### *Overview of the Problem*

Despite the fact that federal legislation is in place to support homeless students, children continue to encounter many barriers when trying to access and succeed in public school. Many studies address the barriers homeless students encounter when trying to access school and possible strategies to remove these barriers; however, few studies explore the ways in which these programs and their strategies influence homeless children in terms of developing their resiliency and potential for increased academic achievement. What is lacking in the research are studies that provide rich descriptions of these key components in action and show similarities and differences among a range of approaches being used by McKinney-Vento programs.

### *Purpose Statement and Research Questions*

This issue of educating homeless children and youth is significant to my research because I am interested in the connection between poverty, homelessness and academic achievement and how school administrators can facilitate academic success for these students. As the homeless liaison for my school district, I have found that much of the research conducted on homeless families validates my observation that many of our homeless students experience residential instability, many within the boundaries of the district. I have also observed that the most challenged families appear to be those who are highly mobile both in school and residency. Thus, it is important to identify key factors that contribute to academic success of highly mobile students living in poverty.

My research questions are:

1. What are components of McKinney-Vento programs in districts serving more than 1,000 homeless students?
2. What are the risk factors that confront McKinney-Vento children and families that may inhibit academic success?
3. What protective components identified in the resilience literature can be found in McKinney-Vento programs?
4. What components and characteristics exist in McKinney-Vento programs that have higher rates of academic success as measured by the language arts portion of the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test?

#### *Review of the Methodology*

This study utilized a multiple case study with a cross case analysis design. In this research the phenomena of study are the characteristics of McKinney-Vento programs that serve homeless children in six California school districts. Fifteen school districts in the state of California were identified as McKinney-Vento grant recipients serving more than 1,000 homeless students in their district. Of these 15 districts, eight were selected to participate based on STAR LA scores and state coordinator recommendation. Of the eight selected districts, six agreed to participate in my study. Of particular interest are the ways in which successful programs reflect the components identified in previous research regarding resilience. Concepts drawn from the resilience literature served as the primary theoretical lens for analyzing the data I obtained from

interviews with coordinators of McKinney-Vento programs, principals and counselors and a review of documents such as state reports and local plans.

The first part of the study consisted of an analysis of data I gathered from the report of 2007-2008 survey administered electronically to homeless liaisons in California LEAs. The survey addresses key components of each LEAs' McKinney-Vento program. Included in the survey is a narrative describing successes of each McKinney-Vento program written by the McKinney-Vento coordinator. Responses to the survey were linked with identified homeless students' academic achievement data in the district to see if there was a relationship between survey responses and student achievement. The state coordinator for the McKinney-Vento program served as a key informant to the study, enabling a richer understanding of the survey data.

Finally I conducted a document analysis of the selected districts' RFAs (Request For Application), which presented a detailed description of the district's McKinney-Vento program. The data gathered from the interviews and documents were organized and analyzed by developing key themes across cases and coding the data using Hyper Research software as a tool.

### Major Findings

The analysis of the results revealed that the six districts in this study all exhibited evidence of the development of protective components in their programs. The five protective components identified in resilience research include: forming meaningful relationships, creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, creating community involvement in schools and developing positive family relationships. This section reviews major findings in the data and links these findings

to research on resilience and homeless education. The major findings discovered in my study were in the following areas: negative school environment, principal role, academic achievement, depth of McKinney-Vento program implementation, meaningful relationships, positive family programs, enrichment, and strengths-based focus.

### *Negative School Environment*

My study confirmed that a negative school environment inhibits the development of resilience (Condly, 2006). All six school districts listed “negative school environment” as a risk for homeless students in their district (SD 10, 20, 24, 27, 29 LEA coordinator interviews, 2009; SD 24 counselor interview, 2009). This finding supports resilience research that has found that negative experiences in school can decrease levels of trust in school (Doll & Lyon, 1998). The impact of negative school practices also corroborates homeless education research findings that list factors of negative school environment that create barriers for academic success such as denial of enrollment due to missing paperwork and discrimination (Quint, 1994; Robertson, 1998; Stronge, 2004).

### *Principal Role*

The findings discovered in this category are significant because this is the first time a principal’s role has been explored in relation to its link with the McKinney-Vento program. A principal’s role can have a strong influence on the environment at school. The principal sets the tone on how students are treated at school. My study also substantiates that, regardless of the level of the principal’s involvement in the McKinney-Vento program, his/her knowledge of key personnel and resources are an

important facet to facilitating academic resilience. I did not find research in the field of resilience or homeless education that confirmed these particular findings; however, both fields of research discuss the implications of a negative school environment as well as the positive impact of a positive school environment in terms of facilitating student success (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Stronge, 1993b; Wang, 1998).

#### *Academic Achievement*

Two of the school districts that had more established McKinney-Vento programs also had a higher percentage of homeless students scoring proficient on the STAR testing. SD 29 not only had the highest percentage of students scoring proficient, but their homeless population scored higher than the general student population. My study supports the idea that intervention strategies in McKinney-Vento programs may facilitate success in school (Stronge, 1993b). Particularly important are strategies that build strong relations with families and focus on student strengths and enrichment, which will be discussed in more depth below.

#### *Program Duration and Depth*

Significant findings were discovered in districts that had programs in place for a longer period of time. These programs offered more enrichment and positive family involvement in their schools. These programs also focused on student and parent strengths and seemed to be connected with increased self-efficacy and self-esteem as measured by LEA program surveys administered to students participating in these enrichment programs. Although there is no direct research specifically on program duration and academic achievement, resilience research does confirm that programs that are well integrated seem to facilitate academic success (Brown, et al., 2001; Henderson



& Milstein, 2003; Wang, 1998). In addition, this finding validates that educational success depends on linked developments over time that occur in family, school, peer and community contexts (Wang, 1998). The longer a program has been in place, the more opportunity to create linked developments with the family, school, peer and community contexts.

### *Meaningful Relationships*

All six school districts provided evidence of meaningful relationships being developed with students and families in their McKinney-Vento program. Advocacy was the primary role of relationships between McKinney-Vento staff or counselors and homeless families. This substantiates resilience research identifying advocacy as an important role that facilitates resilience (Bryan, 2005). An advocate is someone who supports the case of another person (Bryan, 2005). Advocacy is increased by effective partnerships with the community where the focus is on fostering success in school (Bryan, 2005).

### *Positive Family Programs*

The positive involvement also encouraged students and families to become more involved with their community and seemed to perpetuate a positive trajectory of mitigating risks for academic failure as evidenced in interview data by caseworkers and LEA coordinators. These results corroborates that parent involvement may be linked with academic achievement in students encountering risks such as poverty and homelessness (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Positive family programs also create increased self-efficacy in parents and help to build networks of trust (Bryan, 2005). My study also confirms resilience research that has focused on the development of African-

American children who have found that parent involvement in early schooling may impact the overall stability of the family (Taylor, 1991). This finding also substantiates research that has found that programs that focus on building family involvement enhances protective mechanisms of the structure of families as well as increased communication between the school and family and increased student attendance at school (Wang et al., 1996). Increased family involvement with homeless families may lead to increased access in school and success for homeless students (Stronge, 1993b).

### *Enrichment and Strengths*

My study found evidence of successful programs providing opportunities for enrichment with children and parents as well as evidence that focusing on program, student and family success may facilitate academic success. These results support research that found that providing enrichment opportunities facilitates the development of protective mechanisms and may link to academic achievement (Condly, 2006). My study also confirms that a strengths-based approach is important in facilitating academic success (DeCivita, 2006; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 20206; Quint, 1994). Because of the hardships they face, students often develop important skills such as independence, ability to focus in distracting environments, resourcefulness, and persistence (DeCivita, 2006). It is important for teachers and staff to look for and recognize these strengths and not assume that because these students are at risk, they do not have strengths. For example, Winfield (1994) tells the story of a first grade special education student navigating the public bus system by himself to get to an appointment with a counselor when his mother was not there to pick him up after school. We need to

refocus our efforts on identifying strengths that students develop to overcome adversities such as poverty and homelessness (DeCivita, 2006; Winfield, 1994).

### Conclusion

The results of this study imply that schools are ideal places to facilitate resilience (Brown, et al., 2001; Condly, 2006; Doll & Lyon, 1998; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Stronge, 1993b; Wang, 1998). Schools need to arm children with protective mechanisms that will facilitate academic success. The results of my study also suggest the importance of meaningful school experiences as well as a cohesive integrated program that offers seamless service delivery. Although many schools have identified negative school environment as a risk factor, this identification by participants in this study could be interpreted as a positive finding because all of these districts were aware of this barrier. They were actively training staff and increasing awareness to address and ameliorate risks associated with a negative school environment.

Although some children may not come into our schools with positive attributes identified in resilience literature, it is possible that protective mechanisms that are built into programs and focus on student and parent strengths will ameliorate some of the negative impact of exposure to the risk of homelessness. As previously shown in Figure 2, the variables academic success, positive family school connections, positive school interaction and positive community interactions are mutually reinforcing and all function as protective mechanisms. Each variable also can facilitate positive outcomes that continue to project a resilient child on a positive pathway (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Wang, 1998).

Clearly, there is a need to study McKinney-Vento programs in order to identify protective components that facilitate resilience. Although the construct of resilience is an interactive process, the relationship between school programs and student attributes may initiate positive pathways with students exposed to extreme risk associated with poverty (Doll & Lyon, 1998).

#### Implications for Practice

In order for homeless children and children living in poverty to be successful in school, this study strongly indicates that it is crucial that schools develop protective mechanisms to facilitate academic resilience. Schools can be ideal protective environments for children who are highly mobile (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Programs that are successful in facilitating success for students in poverty have a *Web of Protection* for students that mitigate risk exposure and facilitate development on a positive trajectory. Figure 4 illustrates the function of this *Web of Protection*.

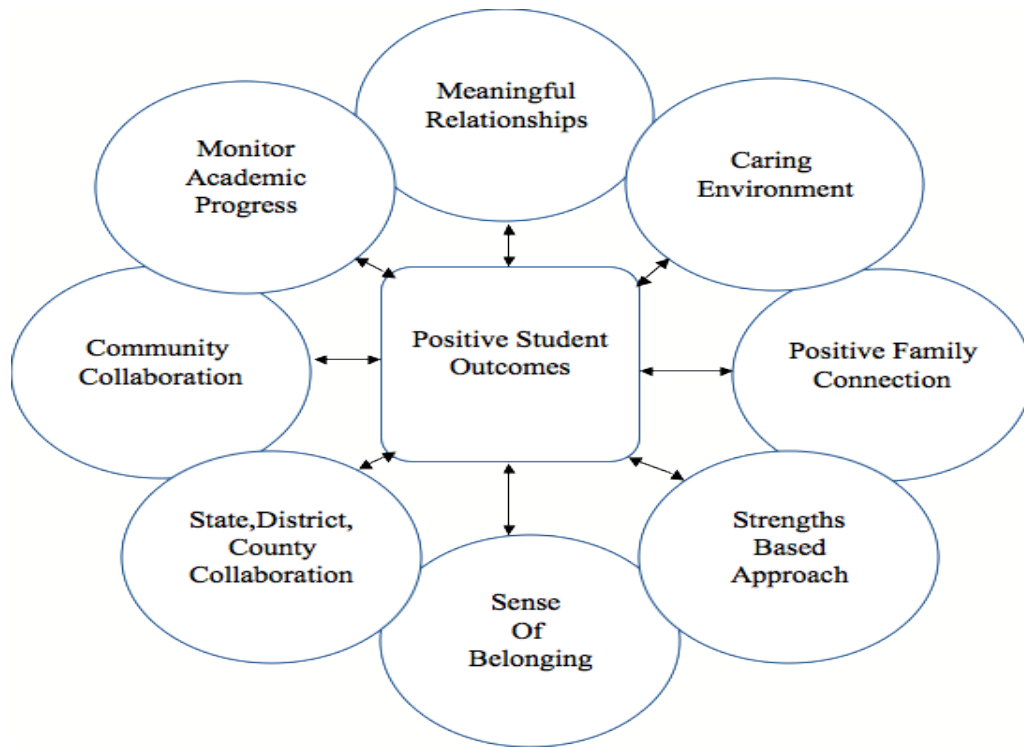


Figure 6 *Web of Protection*

This Web of Protection illustrates how these protective mechanisms overlap with each other and elicit positive outcomes. This figure also shows how positive student outcomes can elicit the implementation of protective mechanisms. School environments that support students in poverty with these protective mechanisms are addressing a student's basic, socio-emotional and academic needs. This process is interactive and can help guide the student onto a positive academic pathway and facilitate continued resilience.

Developing meaningful relationships between students, family and key staff in the community as well as the school is a critical component to facilitating academic resilience for students facing adversity. The focus of these relationships should be on creating stability by advocating for the student and family in regards to meeting basic needs and facilitating access to resources for academic support as well as socio

emotional support. A successful program would also adopt a strengths-based approach towards supporting students and families in need. It is crucial for school and community service workers to believe in their clients' or students' ability to succeed because of their exposure to risk. Support staff and school leaders alike must recognize the skills that students and families have developed because of their exposure to adversity and help them to utilize these strengths in a positive way. A successful program will also focus on identifying students' interests to help develop self-esteem and self-efficacy. Meaningful relationships focused on identifying student and family strengths can direct students and families on positive pathways of academic success.

A support program in a district that facilitates academic success would also have policy and strategies in place that assists with creating a caring environment. Key staff, who is knowledgeable of resources in the community and the school, should be placed in positions to maximize support to families. Specific resources that create a caring environment include those that address a child's basic needs. Office staff and teachers should be aware of the challenges students in poverty face and have strategies to help mitigate these barriers to be successful in school, such as clothing banks, school supplies, lists of community resources, etc.

An ideal program would also include a high level of collaboration with the state, county, community and school. Specifically collaborative efforts should be directed towards staff who provides leadership and supports to students and families in need.

Important collaborative partners include coordinators from other districts, coordinators from the county as well as the state. Here information sharing regarding program successes and relevant legislation regarding support for students in poverty can

be exchanged and can assist with strengthening program success. Communication with other district programs can also ensure seamless delivery of services, such as transportation, especially when a student is bouncing back and forth between the boundaries of two school districts.

Collaboration with school site principals is important in terms of ensuring successful implementation of interventions for students in need. Involving teachers is especially critical because teachers have the most contact time with students and can have a powerful influence on how a student perceives himself and how other students perceive him. Teacher training regarding how to relate with students in a positive manner by focusing on student strengths and becoming more aware of the environment and challenges students in poverty face when trying to succeed in school is an important component to program success. In addition, awareness training for office staff in how to interact in a positive manner with parents and students in need is also crucial to successful program implementation. Office staff offers the first impression of a school and are critical in terms of creating a welcoming environment where students and families feel a sense of belonging to the school. Principals and district coordinators also benefit from awareness training because their leadership determines the level of implementation and seamless delivery of services. Consistent and efficient communication is necessary for successful implementation of the program.

It is also important for community agencies to be aware of the educational rights and needs of homeless students and families because they have daily contact with students and families. If good relationships exist between the agency and the school, then the student will receive expedient access and support for success in school.

Involving school and community leaders as well as support providers in decision-making roles for program success facilitates program continuity. Other successful collaborative efforts with the community include partnerships with higher education. Involving local colleges and universities in training and academic support creates opportunities for meaningful relationships to develop between potential role models for students in need. In addition, schools may have the benefit of learning and implementing successful research based strategies with students and families in poverty.

Seamless delivery of services and positive parent involvement are important components to successful programs. A “piecemeal” approach to services can exacerbate a child’s fragmented life (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Suggestions for ensuring a seamless approach to service delivery include the involvement of school and community leaders as well as parents in the planning, implementing and participating of programs. Parent involvement is also crucial in creating a positive climate in school. Parent involvement also needs to be an integral part of the school, not a temporary add-on program. Attention should be focused on developing relationships with parents as allies in the development of successful learning for their children. As with children, relationships with parents should be developed with a strengths-based lens rather than a deficit-based approach. Opportunities should be made for parents to share their experiences and strengths with the community. This sharing empowers the parent who experienced the success, and motivates other parents as well as school and community support providers to continue their efforts. Hearing their parent’s stories can also reinforce their children progress on positive developmental pathways.



A sense of belonging at school is created by ensuring students have access to the necessary materials and academic support to be successful in school. This study suggests that enrichment focused extended day and summer school programs facilitate a higher level of connectedness to school. The provision of materials for completing homework and participating in extracurricular activities also enhances a sense of connection to the school. A sense of belonging is also established when a student is allowed to remain at the same school despite encountering frequent moves. Staying at the same school allows the student to maintain meaningful, caring relationships and increases the likelihood of regular attendance, thus increasing opportunity for academic success.

Finally, a successful program component would include monitoring of student progress and using this information to implement changes or link students to necessary support. The programs that showed academic progress by their homeless population also were monitoring student progress and communicating with schools regarding targeted intervention strategies for students who needed academic support. In addition, the academic support included enrichment activities that focused on student strengths and the development of the students' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Students were also surveyed to measure program success. Student feedback is helpful in determining program effectiveness and measuring how well students learn. It is important for education leaders to learn from these successful programs in order to duplicate efforts in McKinney-Vento programs for all students in poverty. A recommendation for school staff is to apply these intervention strategies identified in this study to all students facing

risks such as poverty. This broader application could prevent further risk, such as homelessness.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Although each district that receives McKinney-Vento funds is required to submit an annual report regarding the status of their program, there is no requirement for researching the effectiveness of programs in terms of facilitating academic success. Future research should continue to explore links between academic success and protective mechanisms that facilitate this success. This study suggests that there is a link between positive home school relations and strengths-based approaches that needs further study. Future research should also focus on districts that do not have McKinney-Vento programs in place. How are these districts meeting the needs of homeless children? Are they identifying all students experiencing high mobility and exposure to negative school environments and providing interventions to ameliorate these and other risks associated with poverty?

## APPENDIX A

### State Coordinator Interview Protocol

**This appendix includes the interview protocols for: 1) state coordinator, 2) selected LEA coordinators and 3) selected principals and / or counselors.**

#### **1. State Coordinator Interview (45 minutes to take place in March, 2009)**

(Introduce self and make sure all consent forms are signed).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project *Homeless Education: Supporting Student and Family Resilience in the Face of Poverty and Hardship*. This project is designed to help me explore how McKinney-Vento programs impact student success as well as to hear first hand your feelings and ideas about which key factors LEA programs facilitate student success for homeless students in California. Please feel free to name specific districts in your examples when answering the questions. This will help me to analyze data more accurately.

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts with me.

1. Please share with me your role as the state homeless coordinator.
2. How many homeless students have been identified in the state of CA?
3. Do you feel this is an accurate measure? Why? Why not?
4. Can you share with me the types of services that are offered in mid-sized districts serving between 1000-3500 homeless students? Which ones are most effective in terms of student success? Please share examples and stories from these districts that illustrate their success.
4. What would you say are some of the most effective components of the programs in these districts in terms of facilitating academic success? (will use following probes if necessary to gain a deeper understanding of these programs)
  - a. Please share any peak experiences or examples from these programs that you are aware of?
  - b. Have you heard any particular stories about student success from any of these districts?
  - c. How did the program help to create this success for their students?
  - d. In what ways have you observed these programs are able to focus on student strengths?
5. How do these programs connect families with the school?
6. In what ways have you observed or heard that these programs create a sense of belonging for homeless students?
7. Why do you think some of these programs create opportunities for student success and others may be struggling to have the same outcomes?
8. Can you describe some collaborative efforts made by these districts...does this facilitate academic success in school?
9. In what ways does your office try to support local districts in their program development?
10. If you had three wishes for strengthen district programs to better serve homeless student and family needs, what would they be?
11. Is there anything else you would like to

## APPENDIX B

### LEA Coordinator Interview Protocol

#### 2. LEA Coordinator Interview (45 minutes to take place in March- June, 2009)

(Introduce self and make sure all consent forms are signed).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project *Homeless Education: Supporting Student and Family Resilience in the Face of Poverty and Hardship*. This project is designed to help me explore how McKinney-Vento programs impact student success as well as to hear first hand your feelings and ideas about which key factors of your program facilitate student success for homeless students in your district.

Coordinator interview guide

1. Can you describe to me your role in the MV program? How long have you served as coordinator?
2. How many homeless students do you have identified? How many are you serving?
3. What types of services does your program offer for homeless children?
4. Providing services for homeless children is a challenging task. Can you describe to me a time in which you felt this program was helping homeless children be at their best. What was your role? Who else was involved? What happened for the students? For their families?
5. Based on this peak experience, what would you say are some of the most effective components of your program in terms of facilitating academic success for homeless children?
6. How does your program create opportunities for students to succeed?
  - a. Academically? Can you share any special success stories? (Probe for any program attributes that contribute to academic success)
  - b. Socially and emotionally?
  - c. In terms of health and well-being?
7. In what ways does your program facilitate a sense of belonging for homeless students? Are there any stories you can share?
8. Does your program supplement programs that emphasize teaching social skills?
9. In what ways do you collaborate with other agencies or programs? How do you think this facilitates academic success in school for homeless children?
10. How does your program focus on student strengths?
11. How does your program connect families to the school?
12. How does the district support your work?
13. How does the state MV program support your work?
14. If you had three wishes for strengthen your program to better serve homeless student and family needs, what would they be?
15. Can you please recommend a principal, assistant principal or counselor who would be able to speak about how the McKinney-Vento program has assisted students in their school?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX C

### Principal/Counselor Interview Protocol

#### 3. Principal/Counselor Interview (45 minutes to take place in March, 2009)

(Introduce self and make sure all consent forms are signed).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project *Homeless Education: Supporting Student and Family Resilience in the Face of Poverty and Hardship*. This project is designed to help me explore how McKinney-Vento programs impact student success as well as to hear first hand your feelings and ideas about which key factors McKinney-Vento programs facilitate student success for homeless students in your school. Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts with me.

1. Tell me about your role in regard to the McKinney Vento Program, which serves students in your school.
2. How many homeless students do you have at your school?
3. What types of services does the McKinney-Vento program offer for homeless children? Which ones are the most effective in terms of student success? Examples/Stories?
4. What would you say are some of the most effective components of the McKinney-Vento program in terms of facilitating academic success for homeless children?
5. Can you share some peak experiences students have had with the McKinney-Vento program? What impact did the program have on students? What was your role in helping to achieve those successes? What about the role of others at the school or in the community? What role did the LEA coordinator play?  
Potential probes if these are not mentioned in stories:
  - a. How has the MV program supported students' academic success? Are there any special stories you can share in regard to academic success?
  - b. How has it affected the students socially and emotionally?
  - c. How about their overall well-being?
6. Are there any other ways the McKinney-Vento program create opportunities for students to succeed? (Probe: are there any support programs that are especially helpful?)
7. In what ways do you think the McKinney-Vento program focuses on student strengths?
8. How do you think the McKinney-Vento program connects families to the school?
9. In what ways does the McKinney-Vento program facilitate a sense of belonging for homeless students? Stories..examples?
10. In what ways does the McKinney-Vento program supplement or complement programs that emphasize teaching social skills?
11. Describe any collaborative efforts made by the McKinney-Vento Program...do you think this facilitates academic success in school?
12. In what ways does the LEA coordinator support or guide what you do here at the school to support homeless students.
13. If you had three wishes of ways you would like to see the program work with your school to improve its success with homeless students, what would they be?
14. Is there anything else you might like to add?

## APPENDIX D

### **Document Analysis Protocol**

#### **Extant Document Analysis:**

Each LEA receiving McKinney-Vento funds has an RFA (Request for Application), which includes a plan on how their proposed program will be implemented. In addition, each awardee must complete an annual key survey reporting narrative data on the successes of their program. The document analysis will include narrative data from the key survey from the 2007-2008 school year as well as the RFAs from 2006 for three-year McKinney-Vento funding. The RFA and key survey will be reviewed to identify commonalities and differences across LEAs in the following areas:

- Forming meaningful relationships (i.e.: connecting students/family to counseling resources)
- Sense of belonging (i.e.: policies facilitating increased access to school and students/families feeling more welcome in school)
- Community involvement in schools (i.e.: collaboration with outside agencies)
- Internal locus of control (i.e.: Identifying families and educating families, staff and communities about student rights/needs and providing information and referrals to resources in the community)

#### **Document Summary Forms (Miles & Huberman, 1994)**

For each RFA document one summary form will be generated. The documents will be coded with specific attention to a document analysis. Themes for coding schema will include:

- **Meaningful relationships**
- **Sense of belonging**
- **Community involvement**
- **Caring environment**
- **Positive family connections**

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