Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness: School Counselor Preparation

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This study of 207 school counselors revealed significant relationships between types of counselors' training, number of students in counselors' schools experiencing homelessness, and counselors' perceived knowledge and provision of services regarding students experiencing homelessness. In-service training and professional development, but not graduate training, were related to counselors' knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and their advocacy for and provision of services to students experiencing homelessness. Differences also existed by school level and school setting. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: **school counselors, homelessness, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, advocacy, professional development**

Homeless, although a difficult term to clearly define, refers to those who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 2). Families with children are the fastest growing homeless population in the United States, comprising one third of the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Twenty-two percent of all sheltered persons experiencing homelessness are under the age of 18, with over half of this group under the age of 6 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010). Some live *doubled-up* with other families, in transitional housing such as shelters or in inhumane conditions (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In 2012, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) reported that 1,065,794 children in schools experienced homelessness, an increase of over 50% since 2007. The rapidly increasing figures, due in part to the economic recession in the United States, are cause for grave concern because homelessness is detrimental to the emotional, social and cognitive development and well-being of children (Coker et al., 2009; Grothaus, Lorelle, Anderson, & Knight, 2011).

Families who experience homelessness are more likely to experience separation from each other, violence and serious health conditions (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Children experiencing homelessness may face high rates of abuse, neglect and mental health issues, as well as barriers that make it nearly impossible for them to succeed academically and emotionally without additional systemic supports (Buckner, Bassuk, Weinreb, & Brooks, 1999; Gewirtz, Hart-Shegos, & Medhanie, 2008; Swick, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Due to the challenges of homelessness, students can be worse off academically and socially than their middle-class peers (Obradović et al., 2009; Shinn et al., 2008). Unlike most of their peers, they may lack supports such as before- and after-school services, mentors, transportation to and from school, and attendance support (Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003; Miller, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Higher levels of mobility and absenteeism make it difficult for homeless students to acquire a consistent education (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003; Miller, 2009; Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Students experiencing homelessness, and those who

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are highly mobile, have lower reading and math scores from second through seventh grade than students living in poverty (Obradović et al., 2009). Further, relative to their peers, students experiencing homelessness are less likely to aspire to postsecondary education (Rafferty et al., 2004).

In response to the growing crisis among children experiencing homelessness, policymakers designed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) to provide access to education and remove barriers in order to ensure that schools address the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness. The provisions of the act require that school districts provide transportation to and from the school of origin for students experiencing homelessness, even when the students relocate to an area outside of their home school. Further, the act allows students to enroll in school immediately without the required paperwork (e.g., immunization records, educational records, lease or deed), assigns a homeless liaison to schools to ensure that provisions under McKinney-Vento are being met, and assigns a State Coordinator to coordinate services for students experiencing homelessness.

School counselors, teachers and administrators can help support students experiencing homelessness at the school level and ensure that the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act are met. In their roles, they provide supportive services that address the academic, personal, social and career planning needs of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). Interventions and services provided by school counselors include individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, academic advisement and planning, consultation with teachers and staff, collaboration with outside services, and parental support (ASCA, 2012). According to ASCA (2010), an important role of school counselors is to promote awareness and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Act and the rights of students experiencing homelessness. School counselors collaborate with other service providers in children's education to address the academic, career planning and personal/social needs of students experiencing homelessness (ASCA, 2010; Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Daniels, 1992, 1995; Grothaus et al., 2011). They should be knowledgeable about the issues faced by children and youth experiencing homelessness and be equipped to provide appropriate services to these students (Grothaus et al., 2011; Walsh & Buckley, 1994). In particular, school counselors must be aware of the McKinney-Vento program requirements (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004) and understand how to advocate for their effective implementation. However, without knowledge of the policies that impact students experiencing homelessness and the interventions necessary to help them, school counselors may find it difficult to serve this population. In order to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that systemically address the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness, school counselors need awareness of the policies that pertain to these students, and the emotional and educational issues they face.

To date, limited research exists concerning school counselors' knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act, knowledge about the educational and emotional issues that homeless students face, and service provision for these students (Gaenzle, 2012). Also, limited research exists on whether school counselors receive training regarding homelessness and the source of that training, whether graduate training, in-service training or professional development. Further, little is known about the size of school counselors' caseloads of students experiencing homelessness and whether these caseloads differ in some locations (e.g., urban schools, high schools). Given that 77% of the homeless population is found in urban areas (Henry & Sermons, 2010), perhaps school counselors in urban schools face larger caseloads and greater demands for services from students experiencing homelessness. Exploring school counselors' knowledge, service provision and experiences regarding students experiencing homelessness would help to better focus service delivery at the school level to this student population. To this end, this exploratory study attempts to investigate school counselors' knowledge and service provision regarding students experiencing homelessness and to examine related variables (e.g., school level, school setting, years of experience, training received). The results of this study may help to guide

future research and improve counselor preparation and interventions regarding homelessness. The following questions guided this research:

1. What is school counselors' knowledge about
    - the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act?
    - the emotional and educational needs of students experiencing homelessness?
2. What services and interventions are school counselors providing for students experiencing homelessness?
3. What are the relationships of demographic and other variables (e.g., school type, school setting, school level, number of students in the school who are homeless, years of experience as a school counselor, type of training received and knowledge of location of homeless shelters) to school counselors' knowledge and provision of services related to students experiencing homelessness?

Methods

Participants
Participants included 207 respondents from a random sample of 1,000 school counselors who were listed in the ASCA member directory. Of the participants, 72 (36.4%) worked in elementary schools, 35 (17.6%) in middle schools, 86 (43.4%) in high schools and 5 (2.5%) in both middle and high schools. Fifty-nine (29.6%) of the participants worked in urban settings, 55 (27.6%) in rural settings and 85 (42.7%) in suburban school settings. Most respondents (185 or 93%) worked in public schools while 7 (3.5%) worked in private schools and 7 (3.5%) worked in parochial schools.

Instrumentation
The survey (see Appendix) was developed by the first author to assess school counselors' perceived knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act and the needs of students experiencing homelessness as well as counselors' provision of services to these students (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Strawser, Markos, Yamaguchi, & Higgins, 2000; Walsh & Buckley, 1994). The survey was piloted on 12 second-year master's-level school counseling students at a large East Coast university who were completing their internships at the time. After students completed a paper version of the survey, they provided feedback on the clarity and comprehensibility of the survey items. Minor adjustments were made to improve clarity on several items.

Demographic items. Three items assessed school setting (urban, rural, suburban), school level (elementary, middle, high) and years of experience as a school counselor. Years of experience was reported as a continuous variable with a mean of 9.35 years ($SD = 7.25$) and a range from 1–31.

Training. Two items assessed training. The first item assessed the extent of training in work with students experiencing homelessness and was rated on a scale from 1 (no training) to 3 (extensive training). The second item assessed type of training (i.e., in graduate school, in-service training at their school, required professional development outside of school, voluntary professional development outside of school, two or more sources of training, and no training).

Number of students experiencing homelessness. One item measured the number of students experiencing homelessness that counselors reported as enrolled at their schools. Participants were asked to select a category that best fit the amount. The categories were 0, 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55 or over 55 students.

Perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento and emotional and educational issues. Seven Likert scale items were written specifically to assess school counselors' perceived knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act and the emotional and educational issues of students experiencing homelessness. Participants were instructed to rate their knowledge on a scale from 1 (no knowledge) to 5 (extensive knowledge). Items were designed to measure school counselors' perceptions of their knowledge on specific requirements under the McKinney-Vento Act, as well as their knowledge on general emotional and educational issues affecting students experiencing homelessness.

Provision of services. Two items focused on the services and interventions that participants reported implementing with students experiencing homelessness. One item prompted participants to report the frequency of their engagement in these interventions on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (always), where *interventions* signified nine specific services to students experiencing homelessness. The second item required school counselors to indicate any of 25 interventions provided to students experiencing homelessness, including the option *I have not provided any services or interventions*. The services and interventions were selected based on the McKinney-Vento requirements and the literature on education and homelessness.

Procedures

Using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), the survey was e-mailed to 1,000 randomly selected ASCA members selected via the ASCA member directory (www.schoolcounselor.org). Of the 1,000 surveys sent, 80 e-mails bounced back or were invalid, while 713 recipients did not reply and 207 responded. The total response rate was 22.5%, with 19.8% (*N* = 182) completing all sections of the survey. Completing the survey in its entirety included filling out one qualitative section (for results see Havlik, Brady, & Gavin, 2014). Several participants did not complete this section.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses. To answer research questions one and two, we examined frequencies and means of school counselors' responses to survey items.

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs). To answer question 3, we conducted four one-way ANOVAS: (1) one to examine whether elementary, middle and high school counselors differed in the extent of training they received for working with students experiencing homelessness; (2) a second to examine whether urban, rural and suburban school counselors differed in the extent of training they received for working with students experiencing homelessness; (3) a third to examine whether elementary, middle and high school counselors differed in the number of students experiencing homelessness at their school; and (4) a fourth to examine whether urban, rural and suburban school counselors differed in the number of students experiencing homelessness at their school.

Regression analyses. To answer the fourth research question, we conducted simultaneous multiple regression analyses to examine the relationships among the demographic variables (e.g., school setting, school level, number of students experiencing homelessness at school, years of experience as a school counselor, type of training received) and school counselors' knowledge and provision of services related to students experiencing homelessness.

Factor analysis. Prior to conducting the multiple regression analyses, we conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) of the seven items assessing counselors' perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento and students' emotional and educational needs, and the nine items assessing the extent to which counselors provided nine specific services for students experiencing homelessness (see Tables 1 and 2). The PCA with varimax rotation was conducted as a data reduction method (Costello & Osborne, 2005) to determine how participants' responses

were structured. The components or factors derived from the PCA comprised the dependent variables in the study. Decisions to retain the factors were based on (a) the scree test, (b) eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser criterion) and (c) the conceptual meaning of each item.

Post hoc analyses. One-way ANOVAs and Crosstabs analyses were used to take a closer look at any interesting findings from the multiple regression analyses.

Results

Descriptive Analyses
In Table 1, we present the means and standard deviations for the 16 items used to assess school counselors' knowledge and provision of services regarding students experiencing homelessness.

Question 1a: Perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento. The average response to the five items that assessed school counselors' knowledge of McKinney-Vento was 2.90 (*SD* = 1.38), slightly below the midpoint of 3 on the 5-point scale (1 = no knowledge to 5 = extensive knowledge). More specifically, school counselors reported about average knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act (*M* = 2.86, *SD* = 1.47). They also reported lower levels of knowledge of the role of the State Coordinator (*M* = 2.04, *SD* = 1.19), but slightly above average knowledge of the role of the homeless liaison (*M* = 3.19, *SD* = 1.45). Counselors reported above average knowledge of registration policies for students experiencing homelessness (*M* = 3.45, *SD* = 1.25), and about average levels of knowledge of transportation requirements (*M* = 2.97, *SD* = 1.53).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Factor Loadings of Knowledge and Provision of Services

| | | | Factor loadings | | |
| | | | | Component | |
Item	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
Knowledge of McKinney-Vento[a]	2.86	1.47	**.83**	.16	.25
I review the McKinney-Vento Act policies to ensure homeless students' needs are being met[b]	2.77	1.54	**.80**	.35	.12
Knowledge of transportation requirements under McKinney-Vento[a]	2.97	1.53	**.76**	.16	.30
Knowledge of role of the State Coordinator[a]	2.04	1.19	**.67**	.26	.23
I have contact with my school's homeless liaison[b]	3.48	1.66	**.59**	.21	.40
Knowledge of the role of the homeless liaison[a]	3.19	1.45	**.58**	.15	.59
Knowledge of registration policies for homeless students[a]	3.45	1.25	**.51**	.24	.52
I assess the emotional needs of homeless students[b]	3.86	1.21	.08	**.81**	.33
I make contact with homeless families[b]	3.42	1.32	.20	**.71**	.33
I ensure that homeless students with whom I work have equal opportunities compared to their non-homeless peers[b]	4.31	1.00	.07	**.68**	.40
I assist with the registration of homeless students[b]	3.45	1.25	.26	**.64**	-.01
I ensure that homeless students have transportation to attend before- or after-school programs[b]	3.01	1.57	.35	**.62**	.12
I provide mentorship programs for homeless students at my school[b]	2.43	1.34	.15	**.57**	.08
I visit shelters where homeless students at my school live[b]	1.44	.88	.41	**.46**	-.11
Knowledge of emotional/social issues[a]	3.85	.97	.23	.16	**.87**
Knowledge of educational issues[a]	3.87	.96	.29	.25	**.83**

[a] On these items the scale ranged from 1 = no knowledge at all to 5 = extensive knowledge.
[b] On these items the scale ranged from 1 = not at all to 5 = always.

Question 1b: Perceived knowledge of emotional and educational issues. The average response to the two items written to assess school counselors' knowledge of emotional and educational issues faced by homeless students was 3.86 (*SD* = 0.97), above the midpoint of 3 on the 5-point scale used (1 = no knowledge to 5 = extensive knowledge). School counselors reported above average knowledge of emotional issues (*M* = 3.85, *SD* =. 97) and knowledge of educational issues (*M* = 3.87, *SD* = .955), suggesting that counselors may perceive themselves as fairly knowledgeable about the emotional and educational issues faced by students experiencing homelessness.

Question 2: Provision of services and advocacy. The average response to the nine items written to assess school counselors' provision of services was 3.10 (*SD* = 1.35), slightly above the midpoint of 3 on the 5-point scale used (1 = not at all to 5 = always). School counselors provided responses close to average regarding their frequency of assisting with registration (*M* = 3.20, *SD* = 1.58). Their responses were above average for their frequency of assessing the emotional needs of students experiencing homelessness (*M* = 3.86, *SD* = 1.21). However, most school counselors reported infrequently conducting shelter visits (*M* = 1.44, *SD* = .88) or providing mentorship programs (*M* = 2.43, *SD* = 1.34). The highest average was of school counselors' reports on the extent to which they ensured equal opportunities for students experiencing homelessness (*M* = 4.31, *SD* = 1.04).

Types of interventions. In response to the item that requested for participants to report on their engagement in 25 types of interventions provided to students experiencing homelessness, nearly 70% of all participants reported making referrals to community resources (69.5%) and providing individual counseling (68.0%). Other frequent interventions reported included providing academic support (57.9%), teacher consultation (52.8%), parent consultation (50.3%) and advocating for homeless students (43.7%). Interventions infrequently reported included parent education workshops (6.6%), workshops/training for teachers (7.1%), behavioral skills training (13.7%), mentor programs (16.2%), communicating with shelter staff (17.8%), after-school programs (20.3%), college planning (21.8%), small group counseling (22.8%) and IEP (Individualized Education Program) planning (23.9%). Only 3% of counselors reported conducting shelter visits, while 13.2% of school counselors reported not providing any services at all to students experiencing homelessness.

ANOVAs

Question 3a: Training received for working with students experiencing homelessness. No significant differences existed among school counselors by school level or school setting in the extent of training received for working with students experiencing homelessness.

Question 3b: Number of students experiencing homelessness at their school. No significant differences existed among elementary, middle and high school counselors in the number of students experiencing homelessness at their schools. However, significant differences existed among urban, rural and suburban school counselors in the number of students at their schools experiencing homelessness, $F(2, 196) = 7.14$, $p = .001$, with a very small effect size, $\eta^2 = .07$. Urban school counselors had significantly higher numbers of students experiencing homelessness (*M* = 3.09, *SD* = 2.34) than rural (*M* = 1.98, *SD* = 1.82) and suburban (*M* = 1.89, *SD* = 1.72) school counselors. A rating of 3 is equivalent to 11–15 students, a rating of 2 is equivalent to 6–10 students, and a rating of 1 is equivalent to 1–5 students experiencing homelessness.

Principal Component Analysis

A PCA of the 16 items resulted in three components or factors, which were the dependent variables in subsequent regression analyses. A four-factor model was initially considered; however, the three-factor model was selected based on the scree test and eigenvalues greater than one. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of

sampling adequacy was .88, indicating that factor analysis of these variables was appropriate. Barlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, indicating that the items were excellent candidates for PCA. The factor loadings of each factor are presented in Table 1. Factor 1, perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento, comprised seven items with factor loadings ranging from .83–.51 with 24.2% of the variance explained and a Cronbach's alpha of .91. Items loading on this factor measured school counselors' perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento and the policies that schools must implement under McKinney-Vento. Factor 2, advocacy and provision of services, comprised seven items with factor loadings from .45–.81 with 21.19% of the variance explained and a Cronbach's alpha of .81. Items on this factor described services and forms of advocacy that school counselors provided for students experiencing homelessness. Factor 3, perceived emotional and educational issues, comprised two items with loadings of .87 and .83 with 17.78% of variance explained and a Cronbach's alpha of .96. Factor scores were created for each factor using the regression method approach so that participants had a score on each factor. The factor score is a linear combination of the items that load on that factor and is a standardized score. Therefore, the three factors used in the following regression analyses were standardized variables, each with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Following the PCA, we conducted three simultaneous multiple regression analyses with each factor serving as a dependent variable in each regression. The B coefficients and standard errors for each regression analysis appear in Table 2.

Table 2

Regression Analyses of Variables Related to School Counselors' Knowledge and Service Provision Regarding Students Experiencing Homelessness

Variables	Perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento		Knowledge of emotional and educational needs		Advocacy and provision of services	
	B	SEB	B	SEB	B	SEB
Intercept	-1.83***	.33	-1.44***	.30	-1.99***	.36
Elementary	.32*	.15	.22	.15	.15	.16
Middle	.19	.18	.10	.19	.21	.20
High (reference category)						
Public	.38	.30	.50	.29	.70**	.32
Private/parochial (reference category)						
Urban	-.12	.16	-.12	.16	-.23	.17
Rural	.13	.16	-.21	.16	.26	.18
Suburban (reference category)						
Years of experience	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.01
1–25 homeless students	.58*	.26	.52**	.24	.80**	.27
26–55 homeless students	.61	.34	.72**	.34	.87**	.36
55+ homeless students	1.08**	.40	1.13**	.37	1.37**	.40
No homeless (ref)						
Graduate training	.28	.25	.66**	.26	.58*	.28
In-service training	1.16***	.17	.83***	.18	.65**	.19
Professional development	.93***	.19	.54**	.19	.65**	.21
Two or more sources	1.11***	.20	.96***	.21	.82***	.23
No training (ref)						
R^2	.45***		.28***		.28***	
(adj. R^2)	(.41)		(.23)		(.23)	

***$p < .001$. **$p <. 01$. *$p < .05$.

Perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento. The independent variables explained 47% of the variability in school counselors' perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento, $R^2 = .45$, Adjusted $R^2 = .43$, $F(23, 146) = 10.87$, $p = .000$. Participant grade levels, $\beta = .15$, $t = 2.18$, $p = .003$, numbers of students experiencing homelessness and training predicted knowledge of McKinney-Vento. Relative to school counselors who had received no training, responses of having received in-service training, $\beta = .54$, $t = 7.32$, $p = .000$, professional development outside of school, $\beta = .39$, $t = 5.65$, $p = .000$, and two or more sources of training, $\beta = .43$, $t = 6.03$, $p = .000$, predicted perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento. However, no relationship with perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento existed among those who received their training in their graduate program and those who had no training.

Perceived knowledge of emotional and educational issues. The independent variables explained 30% of the variability in school counselors' perceived knowledge of emotional and educational issues, $R^2 = .28$, Adjusted $R^2 = .23$, $F(12, 175) = 6.24$, $p = .000$. Number of students experiencing homelessness predicted participants' perceived knowledge of emotional and educational issues in schools with 1–25 students, $\beta = .32$, $t = 3.50$, $p = .001$, in schools with 26–55 students, $\beta = .22$, $t = 2.62$, $p = .010$, and in schools with more than 55 students, $\beta = .32$, $t = 4.00$, $p = .000$. Type of training received also predicted perceived knowledge of emotional and educational issues in participants who received their training in their graduate program, $\beta = .14$, $t = 2.11$, $p = .000$, as well as those who received in-service training, $\beta = .39$, $t = 5.13$, $p = .000$, professional development outside of school, $\beta = .27$, $t = 3.74$, $p = .000$, and two or more sources of training, $\beta = .36$, $t = 4.92$, $p = .000$.

Advocacy and provision of services. The independent variables explained 30% of the variability in school counselors' reported advocacy and provision of services, $R^2 = .28$, Adjusted $R^2 = .23$, $F(12, 151) = 5.31$, $p = .000$. Number of students experiencing homelessness in the school and type of training received both predicted school counselors' reported advocacy and provision of services. As expected, when compared to participants who reported having no students experiencing homelessness, the number of homeless students at each school predicted advocacy and provision of services from participants who reported having 1–25 students experiencing homelessness, $\beta = .39$, $t = 3.72$, $p = .000$, 26–55 students, $\beta = .24$, $t = 2.47$, $p = .014$, and 55 or more students, $\beta = .36$, $t = 4.02$, $p = .000$. Type of training received also predicted advocacy and provision of services. Compared to participants who had received no training on homelessness, training responses that included in-service training, $\beta = .31$, $t = 3.69$, $p = .000$, professional development outside of school, $\beta = .29$, $t = 3.61$, $p = .000$, and two or more sources of training, $\beta = .43$, $t = 4.06$, $p = .000$, predicted advocacy and provision of services. However, no relationship was reported in advocacy and provision of services among those who received their training in their graduate program and those who had no training on homelessness.

Post Hoc Analyses

To take a closer look at the significant differences between elementary, middle and high school counselors on perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento, we conducted a one-way ANOVA, $F(2, 157) = 6.44$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .07$. Elementary school counselors fell significantly above the mean on perceived knowledge of McKinney-Vento ($M = .33$, $SD = .91$), while high school counselors fell significantly below the mean ($M = -.27$, $SD = .97$). Middle school counselors ($M = -.10$, $SD = 1.06$) also fell below the mean, although the difference was not significant. To shed further light on this relationship, we conducted a crosstabs analysis with school level and source of training. Although the previous ANOVA (see research question 3a) revealed no significant differences in extent of training by school level or setting, a post hoc examination of the frequencies regarding source of training revealed that elementary school counselors (59.3%) were more likely than high school counselors (29.6%) or middle school counselors (11.1%) to receive training from two or more sources (i.e., from some combination of graduate school, professional development outside of school and in-service training). High school counselors (52.9%) were more likely to report that they had received no training from any source than were elementary school counselors (28.6%).

Discussion and Implications

This national study explored school counselors' perceived knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act, perceived knowledge of the emotional and educational needs of students experiencing homelessness, and perceived involvement in advocacy and provision of counseling services. In general, school counselors in the current study appear to view themselves as less knowledgeable about the McKinney-Vento Act and its requirements, but more knowledgeable about the general emotional and educational issues of students experiencing homelessness. However, due to the general nature of the questions, reporting greater knowledge of emotional and educational issues may be a result of self-report bias, since specific knowledge was not solicited. A lower level of knowledge about McKinney-Vento is not surprising given that about 40% of school counselors in the study reported never having received training related to working with students experiencing homelessness. In addition, whether they had no or some training, school counselors reported working in various ways with students experiencing homelessness, including enrolling them in school and assessing their needs. However, regarding more collaborative services such as visiting shelters and involving students in mentoring programs, school counselors reported less involvement. As recommended in the school counseling literature on homelessness (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Strawser et al., 2000; Walsh & Buckley, 1994), these school counselors appear to provide more services such as referrals, individual counseling and teacher consultation to students experiencing homelessness. Yet, Miller (2009, 2011) emphasized the importance of school personnel's collaboration with families and community stakeholders and building bridges to connect homeless students to after-school programs and community services to improve their academic and emotional outcomes. Previous research suggests that training specifically related to building partnerships is a prerequisite of school–community collaboration and that 40% of school counselors lack this type of training (Bryan & Griffin, 2010).

Overall, while 90% of school counselors in the current study appear to work with students experiencing homelessness, school counselors in urban settings appear to face larger caseloads of homeless students than counselors in rural and suburban schools. Yet, no differences exist between the surveyed urban, rural and suburban school counselors' levels of knowledge about McKinney-Vento and about emotional and educational issues or advocacy and provision of services. Given the increasingly large number of families experiencing homelessness in urban areas (Henry & Sermons, 2010), though a variable not investigated in this study, one might expect that with larger caseloads, urban school counselors would report higher levels of advocacy and provision of services. Provision of services and levels of advocacy are related to training. Without adequate training, counselors in urban schools may find themselves ill-equipped to perform the boundary-spanning role that is integral to providing these students with adequate support—that is, linking them to information, resources and programs (Miller, 2009, 2011). Note that the numbers related to participants' school location should be interpreted with caution due to the lack of specific percentages of students experiencing homelessness on their caseloads available for this study.

In general, elementary, middle and secondary school counselors appear to face similar situations regarding the numbers of students experiencing homelessness and their perceived training for working with this population. However, elementary school counselors reported above average knowledge of the McKinney-Vento provisions, significantly higher than high school counselors, although these groups do not differ in the perceived extent of training received. The findings suggest that their knowledge of McKinney-Vento may be attributed to the source or type of training they are receiving. Also, this difference may reflect the fact that most school counseling publications on students experiencing homelessness, although few, have focused on elementary school counselors (e.g., Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Daniels, 1992, 1995; Strawser et al., 2000).

According to the results of this study, training on homelessness is positively related to school counselors' knowledge of McKinney-Vento, knowledge of emotional and educational issues, and advocacy and provision of services. Overall, school counselors with no training regarding students experiencing homelessness reported less knowledge of McKinney-Vento and of their emotional and educational issues, and less advocacy and provision of services compared to counselors who with some training (with the exception of those who received their training in graduate programs). For the participants in this study, graduate program training regarding homelessness is only indicative of higher knowledge of emotional and educational issues of students experiencing homelessness when compared to counselors with no training. These findings suggest the need for an intentional focus in counseling graduate programs on the McKinney-Vento Act and its provisions as well as on specific practices for advocating and implementing service delivery to students experiencing homelessness. Graduate students in school counseling programs and related degree programs in education would benefit from specific training that helps them develop skills as effective boundary spanners and information brokers who function within and across the contexts of families and children experiencing homelessness (Miller, 2009, 2011).

Taken together, the relationships between the number of students experiencing homelessness, school counselor training, and advocacy and provision of services are particularly interesting. These findings suggest that school counselors' exposure to issues related to homelessness, through both training and direct contact with students experiencing homelessness, may compel them to learn about homelessness and to advocate for and provide recommended services to these students. Indeed, as their caseloads of students experiencing homelessness increase, school counselors may feel compelled to find resources and supports for these students. More importantly, for counselors who have caseloads with only a few students experiencing homelessness, these findings highlight the value of training and its implications for services. Perhaps these findings hint at the need to couple school counselor training on homelessness with direct exposure to students experiencing homelessness—that is, with immersion experiences. Intentional and coherent integration of service learning experiences with families and children experiencing homelessness into counselor education programs can provide school counseling trainees with appropriate and invaluable real-world learning experiences for developing the requisite skills for working with students experiencing homelessness (Baggerly, 2006; Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007).

Implications for School Counselor Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for the practice of school counselors. We recommend that school counselors (a) seek professional development to enhance their knowledge of the policies and needs related to students experiencing homelessness, (b) build relationships with the students experiencing homelessness in their schools, and (c) build partnerships with families experiencing homelessness, homeless liaisons, homeless shelters, and community organizations in order to better advocate for and provide services to students experiencing homelessness.

Professional development on homelessness. School counselors are required to promote awareness and understanding of McKinney-Vento and the rights of students experiencing homelessness and provide services aligned to meet their needs (ASCA, 2010). Based on the results of this study, school counselors who do not receive training regarding students experiencing homelessness may lack knowledge of McKinney-Vento. Without knowledge of policies that impact students experiencing homelessness and the interventions necessary to work with them, counselors may provide students with ineffective support.

School counselors must take the initiative to seek training on the McKinney-Vento Act and the specific needs and challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness. They may seek this knowledge by attending state, regional or national conferences on homelessness, and should advocate for the topic to be included at state,

regional and national conferences of counseling associations. In the absence of these opportunities, school counselors may arrange to meet with the local homeless liaison to discuss the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act and the needs of students experiencing homelessness and to explore available services in the school district.

Build relationships with students experiencing homelessness. In order to support the educational and emotional development of children and youth experiencing homelessness, school counselors must first identify which students are experiencing homelessness in their school and then determine their specific needs (Daniels, 1992). Identifying students experiencing homelessness requires that all stakeholders, including teachers, know the variety of definitions that qualify students as experiencing homelessness (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Zerger, Strehlow, & Gundlapalli, 2008). Educating all teachers and staff on the definitions of homelessness will allow them to quickly and confidentially report if they suspect a student is experiencing homelessness and recognize issues that may arise due to their housing status. When students and families are identified as experiencing homelessness, school counselors may then plan interventions accordingly to support their educational and developmental needs.

Build partnerships with stakeholders. One critical way in which school counselors can support the needs of students experiencing homelessness is by building collaborative relationships with partners in the community (ASCA, 2010; Grothaus et al., 2011). Determining student needs may require visiting shelters to find ways to connect with families and children. Given that shelters offer families a variety of resources that may or may not adequately meet their needs (Shillington, Bousman, & Clapp, 2011), it is important for school counselors to know what services local shelters provide in order to understand what additional supports are needed. For instance, determining what educational support is available at the shelter (e.g., whether there is allotted space for students to study) may help counselors determine what academic enrichment and support programs (e.g., tutoring, computer access, homework help) are needed at the school level.

As previously mentioned, McKinney-Vento requires that every local educational agency has a designated local homeless liaison. This person ensures that students experiencing homelessness are identified and have equal opportunities to be successful. Therefore, when coordinating services and planning interventions for students, counselors should collaborate with the assigned homeless liaison at their school (Grothaus et al., 2011; Strawser et al., 2000). Counselors and homeless liaisons can collaborate to plan appropriate interventions for meeting the identified needs of students experiencing homelessness. They also may partner to educate staff members about the emotional and educational challenges that homeless students face. In some cases, school counselors may be assigned as the local homeless liaison, which requires them to better understand the requirements of McKinney-Vento and initiate partnerships between all stakeholders.

School counselors also might partner with teachers and community stakeholders to provide supportive services for students experiencing homelessness. They may collaborate to coordinate tutoring or mentoring programs and to develop safe classroom and school environments for students (Bryan, 2005). They also can plan culturally sensitive classroom guidance units that relate to the personal and social issues faced by students experiencing homelessness. For example, a classroom lesson on the topic of developing social skills might be particularly beneficial for all students, including those experiencing homelessness (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004).

Limitations and Future Research
The limitations of this study include self-report bias, sample bias, low response rate, and the validity and reliability of the survey itself. The survey measures participants' perceptions of their knowledge rather than their actual knowledge, which may have led to self-report bias in reporting levels of knowledge. Further, the

low response rate might render these findings ungeneralizable to all school counselors. The response rate may be due to the e-mail-only method of sending out the survey, which has been shown to generate lower response rates than mailing surveys (Dillman et al., 2009; Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004; Kongsved, Basnov, Holm-Christensen, & Hjollund, 2007; Shih & Fan, 2009). For instance, one study suggested that e-mail surveys have a response rate approximately 20% lower than that of mail surveys (Shih & Fan, 2009). However, the response rate also may suggest that the counselors who chose not to participate in the survey did so because they did not have or were not aware of any students experiencing homelessness on their caseloads. Another limitation concerns the selection of respondents exclusively among ASCA members. Thus, this sample may not be representative of all counselors in the United States. As a caveat, the results of this study should not be interpreted in causal terms because the findings suggest relationships between variables, not specific causality. Finally, since the survey is newly developed, its reliability and validity should be considered with caution. Though there are several limitations, due to the exploratory nature of this study, the results provide insight into school counselors' work with students experiencing homelessness and guide future research on this important subject.

This exploratory study is one of only two studies (e.g., Gaenzle, 2012) to examine the relationship between counselor demographics and their knowledge, advocacy and provision of services for students experiencing homelessness. This initial information lays the foundation for further research on the topic. It is possible that other variables, such as actual (rather than perceived) knowledge, may predict school counselor advocacy and provision of services. The omission of certain variables may explain the low R squares (e.g., $R^2 < .30$) in some of the regression models. Future research should use a larger sample to explore school counselors' knowledge about and advocacy for students experiencing homelessness as well as examine additional variables that may influence school counselors' and other service providers' advocacy and service provision for students experiencing homelessness. Further, this study suggests a need for future research that examines the efficacy of current school counseling programs with students experiencing homelessness.

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Appendix

Knowledge and Skills with Homeless Students Survey
Self-Administered Questionnaire

The following survey will be on the topic of homeless students. Please take some time to answer each item. The survey should take you 3–5 minutes to complete. You will not be asked for any identifying information. Therefore, all responses to this survey are anonymous.

This survey is about your work with homeless students. For your information, the following is the definition for homeless students:

> The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (U.S Department of Education, 2004) defines homeless children and youth as those who are sharing housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as *doubled-up*); living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; abandoned in hospitals; or awaiting foster care placement (p. 2). This additionally includes children or youth who reside in locations that are not suitable for humans and those who live in places such as in cars, substandard housing, or places like bus or train stations, and migratory children who fall into any of the above descriptions (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Please read carefully and respond to the following items:

1. For the following items, please check the category that **best** applies to you:

Your current school setting (select one):	___ Urban	___ Rural	___ Suburban
Your current school type (select one):	___ Private	___ Public	___ Parochial
Your current school level (select one):	___ Elementary	___ Middle	___High

2. Please fill in the blank: How many years have you been a school counselor? _____

3. Estimate the number of homeless students in your school. Please check the range that best fits (if you are not sure, take your best guess!):

___ 0	___ 11–15	___ 36–45
___ 1–5	___ 16–25	___ 46–55
___ 6–10	___ 26–35	___ 55+

Training

1. Have you received training to work with homeless students (no training, some training, or extensive training)? Rate this item on a scale from 1–5, 1 being no training, 5 being extensive training:

    No training   1-------------2-------------3-------------4-------------5   Extensive training

2. If you marked a 2, 3, 4 or 5, please answer the following question (if not, move onto the next section): Where did you receive training? Check all that apply.

    ___ Graduate school
    ___ In-service training while at my school
    ___ Required professional development outside of school
    ___ Voluntary professional development outside of school
    ___ Other: _____

Knowledge

1. For the following items, please rate your knowledge on a scale from 1–5, 1 meaning that you have no knowledge and 5 meaning that you have extensive knowledge

    No knowledge   1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5   Extensive knowledge

    ___ The McKinney-Vento Act
    ___ The registration policies for homeless students entering your school
    ___ The role(s) of the local homeless liaison for your school
    ___ The role of the State Coordinator for homeless services
    ___ The transportation requirements for homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Act
    ___ The emotional and personal/social issues (e.g., feelings of isolation, difficulty making friends, embarrassment) faced by homeless students in schools
    ___ The educational issues that homeless students face in school (i.e., the academic issues)

2. Do you know the location of homeless shelters near the school where you work? Please check the category that **best** applies to you.

    ___ I know none of them.
    ___ I know some of them.
    ___ I know all of them.
    ___ There are no shelters near my school.

3. Can you identify the students who are homeless on your caseload? Please check the category that **best** applies to you.

    ___ I can identify none of them.
    ___ I can identify some of them.
    ___ I can identify all of them.
    ___ There are no homeless students on my caseload.

4. Do you know where homeless students in your school reside? Please check the category that **best** applies to you.

    ___ I know where none of them reside.
    ___ I know where some of them reside.
    ___ I know where all of them reside.
    ___ There are no homeless students in my school.

Interventions

1. What types of programs/interventions do you provide to homeless students and parents? Check all that apply.

    ___ I have not provided any services or interventions.
    ___ Parent consultation
    ___ Parent education workshops
    ___ Teacher consultation
    ___ Community partnerships
    ___ Mentoring program
    ___ Academic support
    ___ Small group counseling
    ___ Individual counseling
    ___ Communication with shelter staff
    ___ Shelter visits
    ___ Home visits
    ___ After-school programs

    ___ Tutoring
    ___ Referrals to community resources
    ___ Provided workshops/training for teachers
    ___ Classroom guidance
    ___ Career exploration
    ___ Behavioral skills training
    ___ IEP planning
    ___ 504 planning
    ___ Advocating for homeless students
    ___ Postsecondary planning
    ___ College planning
    ___ Other (please specify): _____

2. Is there anything else you would like to add about your interventions with homeless students? Please write below.

Knowledge and Experience
1. List the FIVE most important academic/educational, personal/social and career/college planning needs of homeless students. If you are unable to list 5, list as many as you can.

    a. _____

    b. _____

    c. _____

    d. _____

    e. _____

2. Please answer the following items on a scale from 1–5, 1 meaning not at all and 5 meaning always.

    Not at all   1--------------2--------------3--------------4--------------5   Always

    ___ I ensure that homeless students with whom I work have equal opportunities compared to their non-homeless peers.
    ___ I assist with registration of homeless students.
    ___ I assess the emotional needs of homeless students.
    ___ I visit the shelter(s) where homeless students in my school live.
    ___ I ensure that homeless students have transportation to attend before- or after-school programs.
    ___ I have contact with my school's homeless liaison.
    ___ I make contact with homeless families.
    ___ I provide mentorship programs for homeless students at my school.
    ___ I review the McKinney-Vento Act policies to ensure homeless students' needs are being met.

nbcc