



## **“Deeper Dives” for Schools**

### **Practical Strategies to Serve Young Children Experiencing Homelessness**

#### **2. Preparing staff and systems**

The realities of homelessness can make it challenging for families to comply with standard policies of many early care and education programs. Families may struggle to organize documents; they may have challenges keeping children’s clothes clean. Children receiving classroom-based services may arrive late or early; they may forget their backpack; they may arrive without having eaten.

##### Think of the small things that make a big difference.

- Do your attendance slips say “tardy” or do they say “We’re so glad you made it today”?
- Do you have signs on your door that say “No entry until 8:00 am” or do the signs say “Come in. We are so happy to see you.” **OR** “This room will open at 8:00 am. You are welcome to go to \_\_\_\_\_ if you arrive before then.” (Designate a safe, comfortable, indoor space where children can go.)
- If possible, create a laundry space, with a washer/dryer that parents can use discreetly. Provide the detergent.
- Set up a computer that parents can use to fill out forms, job applications, and other documentation. They are unlikely to have this resource elsewhere, and offering it can help build a partnership with parents. Provide a printer with paper free of charge.

##### Prepare your staff to understand and respond to the needs of families experiencing homelessness.

- Provide training on homelessness and poverty locally and trauma-informed care.
  - This training should not be a “one and done” training, but ongoing.
  - Provide information to staff in multiple ways, including paper copies, online resources, videos, and social media.
- Provide training on the differences between poverty and safety concerns. Staff might feel that something is a safety concern, when really it is a troubling but not dangerous consequence of the living situations families are experiencing.

##### Work as a team to meet the needs of children and families.

- Make sure whoever maintains data is identifying children experiencing homelessness and able to report that data.
- Help transportation providers understand the reality of homelessness and mobility, and their importance in making sure children can access services.
  - Example: If a child needs a bus to access services, and the family is living in an unstable or hidden location (such as a park, car, or domestic violence shelter) does the transportation database support “little grocery store on the corner of X and Y Streets” for the transportation request? Does the transportation office know who to connect with if they run into problems arranging transportation for a child who is experiencing homelessness?"