STUDENT HOMELESSNESS: LESSONS FROM THE YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

PART III:
SEXUAL ORIENTATION EQUITY: DISPROPORTIONALITY AND ACTION STEPS FOR SCHOOLS

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess the health risk behaviors of youth and adults in the United States. For the first time since the survey has been widely administered, the 2017 YRBS optional question list included two questions pertaining to homelessness. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed demographic and risk factor data from the YRBS in 17 states[i], comparing high school students experiencing homelessness and those not experiencing homelessness. This series shares the striking and heartbreaking results of that analysis, with tangible action steps schools can take to promote safety and health for students experiencing homelessness.

SchoolHouse Connection's analysis of YRBS data found that high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning (LGBQ) are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness, with 29.8% of students experiencing homelessness identifying as LGBQ, compared to 13.8% of all students. YRBS data are not sufficient to determine the prevalence of homelessness among transgender high school students, although other research indicates disproportionality.

Survey results show:
29.8% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IDENTIFY AS LGBQ *compared to 13.8% of all students*

For every 10 high school students experiencing homelessness, **3 identify as LGBQ**.
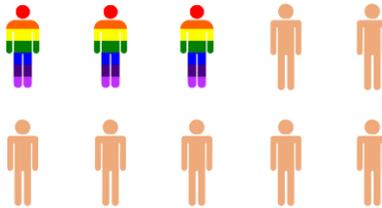
Risk and Resilience: Differences in Risk Factors and Health Outcomes Between Homeless and Non-Homeless Students in 2017 YRBS Data
Read the full paper: http://bit.ly/SHC-YRBS2018

These data mean that LGBQ high school students are 2.94 times more likely to experience homelessness than heterosexual high school students.

LIKELIHOOD TO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

LGBQ high school students — 2.94 TIMES — Heterosexual high school students

29.8% of homeless high school students are LGBQ (compared to 13.8% of all high school students)

Data: Risk and Resilience: Differences in Risk Factors and Health Outcomes Between Homeless and Non-Homeless Students in 2017 YRBS Data
Read the full paper: http://bit.ly/SHC-YRBS2018

YRBS homelessness data include high school students who experience homelessness as part of families, as well as those who are homeless by themselves. While the data do not establish the reasons for a student's homelessness, they clearly demonstrate a disproportionate likelihood that LGBQ high school students will experience homelessness. Studies of unaccompanied homeless youth that also include young adults have found similar disproportionalities for LGBTQ youth.

Additional research has found that LGBTQ youth also are more likely to be bullied in school and to be victims of both physical and sexual violence than heterosexual youth. In schools, equity and safety for **all** LGBTQ students, including those who experience homelessness, requires a deliberate, district-wide commitment over time.

Action Steps for Schools

1. Ensure that strong anti-bullying policies and practices are in place and respected.
2. Locate LGBTQ organizations in your community and invite them to lead trainings at school, consult on district policies and practices, and provide guidance on curricula and extra-curricular opportunities that respect and elevate the experiences of LGBTQ students.

LYRIC, a LGBTQ youth organization in San Francisco, runs a successful school transformation program, demonstrating how schools and LGBTQ organizations can partner to improve school climate and reduce bullying. At Horace Mann Middle School and Balboa High School, students participated in a year-long regular school day Social Justice Course exploring justice, culture, identity, and diversity through an LGBTQ lens. Each participating youth was assessed for LGBTQ youth risk factors and provided access to individualized case management and weekly lunchtime support/discussion groups. Course-enrolled students formed a peer-based leadership team—engaging peers around LGBTQ inclusion, leading activities and events for all students throughout the school year, and promoting LGBTQ visibility and inclusion throughout the school community. Students and staff reported reduced harassment and bullying, improved safety, and enhanced school connectivity.

3. Prioritize creating a positive school climate for the district. Provide ongoing training, coaching, and support for all school staff to build a positive school climate, including topics such as gender identity, cultural competency, and empathy. Ensure that these efforts accommodate the harsh reality of students experiencing homelessness.
4. Engage LGBTQ youth in school climate and equity efforts. Ask them for help spreading the word about McKinney-Vento services.
5. Ensure that the McKinney-Vento homeless liaison has adequate time and capacity to participate in school climate training and to collaborate with community agencies that provide food, health and mental health care, transportation, and housing, to meet students' needs outside of school. These added services help show students they are valued by their school.

Resources

GLSEN, *National School Climate Survey*.
GLSEN, Tools for Student Organizers.
Lambda Legal, Working with Homeless LGBTQ Youth.
StopBullying.Gov, Creating a Safe Environment for LGBTQ Youth.
StopBullying.Gov, Bullying of LGBT Youth and Those Perceived to Have Different Sexual Orientations.
True Colors United, At the Intersections.
Online resources

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[i] AK, AR, CA, CO, DE, HI, ID, IL, KS, KY, ME, MT, NH, NC, PA, VA, WI.