

## **Support SB1494 by Senator Uresti to promote high school completion among youth who are homeless.**

In the 2011-2012 school year, public schools in Texas identified 18,281 homeless high school students. These students face extreme challenges in completing their education. Homeless students do not know where they will sleep from one night to the next. They frequently go hungry, suffer chronic and acute illnesses more often than their housed peers, and are subjected to constant stress.<sup>i</sup> Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every local educational agency in the state has a designated homeless liaison to assist homeless students. For over a decade, these liaisons have been identifying homeless students in their schools and working to support their academic achievement. However, they need additional statutory backing to combat the challenges of homelessness successfully.

Students who are homeless may change schools frequently.

Students experiencing homelessness have high levels of school mobility. They move frequently due to limits on the length of their stay in a shelter or temporary accommodations or to escape abusive family members. Too often, these moves lead to school changes. Although the McKinney-Vento Act provides homeless students with the right to remain in a single school despite housing changes, the reality of their living situation often forces students to transfer schools multiple times in a single year.

Homeless students are less likely to complete high school than their peers.

The challenges of homelessness and mobility lead to disproportionately low rates of high school graduation among homeless students. Data show that students who experience homelessness even one time while in high school have higher dropout rates than other economically disadvantaged students.<sup>ii</sup> Studies have found that three quarters of older homeless youths drop out of school.<sup>iii</sup> In fact, a young person who experiences homelessness is 87% more likely to stop going to school—higher than any other risk factor, including placement in foster care.<sup>iv</sup>

The costs of failing to complete high school are very high.

The costs of low graduation rates are very high, for students and for the state. A 2007 report by the National Center for Policy Analysis, the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, and the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, asserts that the annual public costs associated with just one year's class of dropouts in Texas is \$377 million, or about \$3,168 per dropout. Over an expected lifetime of 50 years, one year's class of dropouts will cost Texas taxpayers \$19 billion. The figures include costs from only three sources: lost revenue from taxes and fees, increased Medicaid costs and increased incarceration costs. Since dropouts incur many other expenses, the costs may be higher.<sup>v</sup>

There are effective strategies to help youth in unstable living situations complete high school.

Education Code Sections 25.007(b) and 28.025(i) provide several effective strategies to boost the academic achievement and high school graduation of students in foster care. Due to their high mobility and low graduation rates, homeless students need the same protections. School district staff working with homeless students strongly support extending these protections to homeless students.

SB1494 would extend protections, which already cover youth in foster care, to homeless students.

- Transfer of school records to a student's new school within 14 days and systems to ease a student's transition to a new school;
- Partial credit for students who change schools in the middle of the year;
- Assistance accessing extracurricular, summer and tutoring programs, credit transfer services, and on-line learning;
- Procedures to allow students the opportunity to complete courses required for graduation;
- Review of course credit accrual and graduation plans and intensive instruction programs for students unlikely to complete high school within five years; and
- Award of diplomas from a previous high school for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders who transfer schools and are ineligible to graduate from the new school district.

**These protections are already in place for youth in foster care, as a result of SB1404 last session, which was co-authored by then Senator Dan Patrick and Senator Carlos Uresti. SB1404 passed unanimously, on the local and uncontested calendar.**

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<sup>i</sup> Toro, P., Dworsky, A. and Fowler, P. (2007). "Homeless Youth in the United States: Recent Research Findings and Intervention Approaches." *Toward Understanding Homelessness: The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. Levin, Rebekah, Bax, Elizabeth, McKean, Lise and Schoggen, Louise (2005). *Wherever I Can Lay My Head. Homeless Youth on Homelessness*. Center for Impact Research. National Center on Family Homelessness (1999). *Homeless Children: America's New Outcasts*. Newton, MA: Author.

<sup>ii</sup> Data available from the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

<sup>iii</sup> Cauce, A., Paradise, M., Ginzler, J., Embry, L., Morgan, C., Lohr, Y., et al. (2000). The characteristics of mental health of homeless adolescents: Age and gender differences. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8(4), 230–239.

<sup>iv</sup> America's Promise Alliance, Center for Promise at Tufts University (2014). *Don't Call Them Dropouts*. <http://gradnation.org/report/dont-call-them-dropouts>

<sup>v</sup> Gottlob, Brian J. (2007). "The High Cost of Failing to Reform Public Education in Texas." *Issues: School Choice In the State*. National Center for Policy Analysis, the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, and the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation. <http://www.ncpa.org/pdfs/sp20070101.pdf>