

**Final Research Report**  
Agreement T2695, Task 89  
HST Project Evaluation

**HOMELESS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION  
PROJECT EVALUATION**

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Prepared for

**Washington State Department of Transportation**  
and the  
**Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation**

December 2006

## TECHNICAL REPORT STANDARD TITLE PAGE

1. REPORT NO. <b>WA-RD 665.1</b>	2. GOVERNMENT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NO.	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>HOMELESS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION PROJECT EVALUATION</b>		5. REPORT DATE <b>December 2006</b>	
		6. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION CODE	
7. AUTHOR(S) <b>Daniel Carlson, Sheri Reder, Nathalie Jones, Andrea Lee</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NO.	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS <b>Washington State Transportation Center (TRAC) University of Washington, Box 354802 University District Building; 1107 NE 45th Street, Suite 535 Seattle, Washington 98105-4631</b>		10. WORK UNIT NO.	
		11. CONTRACT OR GRANT NO. <b>Agreement T2695 Task 89</b>	
12. SPONSORING AGENCY NAME AND ADDRESS <b>Research Office Washington State Department of Transportation Transportation Building, MS 47372 Olympia, Washington 98504-7372 Kathy Lindquist, Project Manager, 360-705-7975</b>		13. TYPE OF REPORT AND PERIOD COVERED <b>Final Research Report</b>	
		14. SPONSORING AGENCY CODE	
15. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>This study was conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.</b>			
16. ABSTRACT <p>Washington State funded pilot homeless student transportation programs from 2004-2006 to implement provisions of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (2001). The Act requires school districts to provide transportation to homeless students wishing to remain in their school of origin. This formative evaluation addressed four questions about those pilot efforts: (1) what modes of transportation were used; (2) what did they cost; (3) which were preferred; and (4) did staying in the school of origin affect students' academic performance? The study analyzed ridership and cost data from eight educational service districts and interviewed homeless students, parents, transportation coordinators, and homeless liaisons. Findings include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts used a wide array of methods to transport students, employing school buses, public transit, vans, taxis, private vehicles, fuel vouchers, mileage reimbursement, and transportation brokerage systems. School buses provided 38 percent of the trips, followed by third-party brokered transportation (cars, taxis, and vans) at 28 percent, and public transit at 22 percent.</li> <li>• Homeless student transportation was usually expensive. The cost to the school districts of one-way homeless student trips varied widely depending on locality and mode, from a low of \$0.14 to a high of \$54. Public bus service was the least costly mode; however, it was used mostly for older students and only available in selected areas. The cost for providing homeless students with public bus service ranged from \$ 0.14 to \$1.00 per one-way trip. By comparison, the cost for providing homeless students a one-way trip via school bus ranged from \$4.50 to \$54. (The average cost for a one-way school bus trip for the general student population is about \$0.67.)</li> <li>• Staying in one's school of origin was associated with better Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores. In our limited data set, homeless students had lower grade point averages and lower WASL scores than the general student population. However, among homeless students, those staying in their school of origin achieved better WASL scores and better high school grades than those who changed schools.</li> </ul>			
17. KEY WORDS <b>Homeless persons, students, school buses, school dropouts</b>		18. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT <b>No restrictions. This document is available to the public through the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA 22616</b>	
19. SECURITY CLASSIF. (of this report) <b>None</b>	20. SECURITY CLASSIF. (of this page) <b>None</b>	21. NO. OF PAGES	22. PRICE

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background and Purpose**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 2001 requires that states ensure homeless children and youth equal access to the same free public education as is provided to other children and youth. School districts are required to provide transportation to homeless students who want to remain in their school of origin. Senator Patty Murray secured \$1 million of federal funds to pilot homeless student transportation efforts in Washington State.

The Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation funded eight educational service districts and school districts in urban, rural and suburban parts of the state during the period 2004-2006. This report provides an initial evaluation of these efforts.

The study collected data from school districts and also spoke directly with homeless students, their parents, and school administrators to gain their perspectives about the pilot programs. The study tried to answer four basic questions about the homeless student transportation programs:

- What modes of transportation were used? By what age groups? In what geographic settings?
- What was the cost of each mode of transit?
- What modes of transportation were preferred? By students? By parents? By transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons? Why?
- Did staying in the school of origin affect students' academic performance?

### **Findings**

Many homeless students' domestic lives are unpredictable and unstable. When this is the case, it requires a great deal of extra effort for the students, parents, and school districts to organize a responsive system of homeless student transportation. Most of the users and implementers of the homeless student transportation we spoke with expressed general satisfaction with the ability of districts to transport homeless students. The findings from this formative evaluation provide new understanding based on a limited

sample of homeless student transportation systems and how some students, parents, and administrators view those systems.

The evaluation study has limitations, including the fact that data from districts was self-reported; that cost per trip rather than cost per student mile was collected, making comparisons across modes difficult; and that the number of homeless students was relatively small and the number actually interviewed even smaller. Further research should explore the extent to which these findings are valid for homeless transportation programs across the state, and the extent to which the findings are applicable to programs across the nation.

Major findings include the following:

- Districts used a wide array of methods to transport students, employing school buses, public transit, vans, taxis, private vehicles, fuel vouchers, mileage reimbursement, and transportation brokerage systems. School buses made up 38 percent of the trips, followed by third-party brokered cars, taxis and vans at 28 percent, and public transit at 22 percent.
- Homeless student transportation was usually expensive. The cost to the school districts of one-way student trips varied enormously, depending on locality and mode, from a low of \$0.14 to a high of \$50. Public bus service was the least costly mode for districts, used mostly for older students and only available in selected areas. School bus trips ranged from \$4.50 to \$50 per one-way trip. By comparison, an average one-way school bus trip for the general student population is about \$0.67.
- Preference for mode of transportation varied by age and user/provider status. Students and parents preferred private vehicle transportation, as did school officials when they could use gas vouchers, but many homeless families and students do not have access to private cars. Younger students liked smaller school buses. Older students liked public transit. District transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons favored yellow school buses and the people who were trained to drive them. Taxis were the least preferred mode by all respondents.

- Staying in one’s school of origin was associated with better Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)<sup>1</sup> scores. In our limited data set, homeless students had lower grade point averages and lower WASL scores than the general student population. However homeless students staying in their school of origin achieved better WASL scores and better high school grades than homeless students who left their school of origin.
- Most districts used homeless student transportation funds for expansion or extension of existing homeless student transportation. There were a few innovations: PSESD outsourced administrative and service functions to Medicaid transportation brokerages, which could utilize or expand their providers’ van and car capacity; another district used gas vouchers to avoid the cost of purchasing another district van; another trained and screened part-time district employees as bus drivers and had them operate vans and cars to transport homeless students.
- Funds were limited. While \$1 million sounds like a lot of money, once it is divided among large educational service districts and subdivided further to many school districts, transportation coordinators reported that pilot project funds were quickly used up, often in the first month.
- Long and costly trips concerned students, parents, and administrators. One transportation coordinator suggested funding districts through a homeless student ‘block grant,’ which could be used for transportation to the school of origin *or* housing proximate to the school, whichever made more sense.

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<sup>1</sup> As stated on the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website ([www.k12.wa.us](http://www.k12.wa.us)), the WASL assessments “require students to both select and create answers to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding in each of the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs)—from multiple-choice and short-answer questions to more extended responses, essays, and problem solving tasks.” EALRs include standards in Reading, Mathematics, Science, Writing, Communication, Social Studies, Arts, and Health and Fitness.





# HOMELESS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION EVALUATION PROJECT

## **BACKGROUND**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 2001 requires that states ensure homeless children and youth equal access to the same free public education—including a public preschool education—as is provided to other children and youth. States must eliminate barriers, including transportation barriers, faced by homeless children and youth so that they can continue to attend their school of origin. School of origin is defined by the McKinney-Vento Act as the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which he/she was last enrolled when he/she became homeless.

Literature describing the implementation of McKinney-Vento programs stresses the role and importance of homeless liaisons<sup>2</sup> in keeping homeless students in their school of origin.<sup>3</sup> Julianelle and Foscarinis noted the role of McKinney-Vento programs in ensuring continuous enrollment for homeless students, and providing access to special needs programs.<sup>4</sup> A key element to ensuring continuous enrollment is the provision of transportation enabling homeless students to remain in their school of origin.

In 2003 Senator Patty Murray secured \$1 million to fund a pilot program in the State of Washington to try out a variety of ways—from traditional yellow school buses to taxi cabs—to transport homeless students to their school of origin. The Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation, which includes the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, solicited proposals from school and educational service districts<sup>5</sup> statewide and funded

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<sup>2</sup> A homeless liaison (or local educational agency liaison) is defined by the McKinney-Vento Act as a staff person, who may also be a coordinator for other federal programs, designated as a local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths.

<sup>3</sup> James, B.W., and Lopez, P.D. (2003). Transporting Homeless Students to Increase Stability: A Case of Two Texas School Districts. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).

<sup>4</sup> Julianelle, P.F., and Foscarinis, M. (2003). Responding to the School Mobility of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness: The McKinney-Vento Act and Beyond. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).

<sup>5</sup> Washington State is divided into nine Educational Service Districts. As defined on the ESD 123 website (<http://www.esd123.org/Organization/about.html>), ESDs link local public and private schools with state and national educational resources. ESD programs allow districts to eliminate duplication of services,

eight combinations of school and educational service districts.<sup>6</sup> Proposed projects were then implemented in urban, rural, and suburban parts of the state during the period 2004-2006. This report evaluates these efforts.

## **STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this evaluation was to learn how the variety of transportation options employed in eight areas of the state met the objectives of the McKinney-Vento Act and could be best utilized by school districts around the country. It was designed to assemble information from the providers and users of transportation services about mode, cost, preferences, and usefulness for different age groups and in different geographic settings. In addition, the study addressed an underlying assumption of McKinney-Vento—that remaining in a homeless student’s school of origin is an important stabilizing influence that will result in higher academic performance than homeless students who are forced to move from their school of origin. The study collected data from school districts and also spoke directly with homeless students, their parents, and school administrators to gain their perspectives about the pilot programs. In short, the study tried to answer four basic questions about the homeless student transportation pilot programs:

- What modes of transportation were used? By what age groups? In what geographic settings?
- What was the cost of each mode of transit?
- What modes of transportation were preferred? By students? By parents? By transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons? Why?
- Did staying in the school of origin affect students’ academic performance?

In order to answer these questions, the evaluation team reviewed previous research in the field, interviewed users and implementers of homeless student transportation, and gathered relevant data from the participating school districts.

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realize significant savings and receive special programs that might otherwise be unavailable to them. Washington's ESDs are similar to regional support systems in other states.

<sup>6</sup> The eight participating districts and consortia are Clarkston School District, Educational Service District 112 (ESD 112), Everett School District, Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD), North Central Educational Service District (NCESD), Northwest Educational Service District (NWESD), Spokane School District, and Spokane Valley HEART (Homeless Education and Resource Team) Consortium.

## **FOCUS ON EIGHT AREAS OF THE STATE**

Table 1 provides descriptive information about each of the participating districts involved in the evaluation, including their geographic characteristics (city, metro and rural<sup>7</sup>, or a combination thereof), student enrollment, the number of homeless students served by the McKinney-Vento demonstration project (in cases where that number was not available, the total number of homeless students is listed, when possible), and the modes each provider employed to transport these students.

## **EVALUATION DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

We collected quantitative data on transportation cost by mode and per student trip, as well as academic achievement. We collected qualitative data from homeless students and their parents, school district homeless liaisons, and transportation coordinators.

### **Transportation Cost by Mode and per Student Trip**

The eight districts were responsible for submitting quarterly reports to the Washington State Department of Transportation on the number of student rides provided, total cost to the district of rides provided, and average cost to the district per student trip for each mode of transportation employed. In most cases, reports were submitted for the 2005-06 academic year. In one case, reports came from the second portion (January-June) of the 2004-05 academic year and the first part (September-December) of the 2005-06 academic year. In another case, reports were submitted for the 2004-05 school year, from December to June. Each of these reporting cycles was considered the “project period” for the given district. Each district was also asked to submit a summary of the administrative costs of the provision of homeless student transportation for a one month period.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cities have the most dense residential areas and highest employment concentrations, school districts contiguous with the city boundaries, and public transit systems. Metro service areas include suburbs, small towns, and unincorporated areas adjacent to or near one or more larger cities; school districts can serve one or more cities. Rural service areas have low population density, are typically resource or agriculture-dependent, with combined school districts bringing students from the outlying areas to a central facility.

<sup>8</sup> One administrative report was outstanding at the end of the data collection period, and one was not submitted because administrative costs were irrelevant to the provider’s arrangements, as homeless student transportation services were contracted with an outside party. See Appendix E for administrative cost reporting form.

Table 1: The Eight Participant Districts in the Homeless Student Transportation Study

Districts <sup>9</sup>	Geographic Service Area			Student Enrollment	Number of Homeless Students Transported <sup>10</sup>	Modes of Transportation Employed					
	City	Metro	Rural			School Bus	Transit Bus	Taxi	Third Party Brokered Services <sup>11</sup>	Volunteer Driver	Other
Clarkston School District			,	Less than 25,000	118 (total)	,			,	,	
Educational Service District 112	,	,	,	50,000-100,000	250	,					
Everett School District	,	,		Less than 25,000	135	,	,			,	,
North Central Educational Service District			,	25,000-50,000	88	,	,	,		,	
Northwest Educational Service District	,		,	100,000-200,000	254 <sup>12</sup>	,	,			,	
Puget Sound Educational Service District	,	,		More than 200,000	Not available				,		
Spokane School District	,	,		Less than 25,000	699 (total)	,	,	,			
Spokane Valley HEART Consortium		,	,	Less than 25,000	382	,		,			

<sup>9</sup> A partial list of the participating school districts in each of the educational service districts includes ESD 112 – Vancouver School District; North Central ESD – Wenatchee School District; Northwest ESD – Lake Stevens, Sedro-Woolley, and Granite Falls school districts; Puget Sound ESD – Kent, Sumner, Bethel, Auburn, Federal Way, and Tacoma school districts; Spokane Valley HEART – Central Valley, East Valley and West Valley school districts.

<sup>10</sup> Number of Homeless Students Transported refers to the number of homeless students provided transportation through the pilot project. In cases where this number was not available, the total number of homeless students in the district is provided when possible and indicated as such.

<sup>11</sup> Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) used pilot project funding to outsource the ride-match administration and provision of van and taxi service to two independent agencies, Hopelink and Paratransit Services, Inc, which managed fleets of para-transit vehicles primarily carrying Medicaid patients. The innovation was to use these third party brokers to provide existing van and taxi capacity and take that responsibility off the hands of school district staff. At least one other district used a similar outsourcing approach but on a very occasional basis.

<sup>12</sup> This updates an estimate of 178 contained in an earlier version of Table 1.

## **Academic Achievement**

Each district was asked to report data on Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test scores and grade point averages for the students. We were interested in looking at how the academic performance of homeless students remaining in their school of origin compared to the academic performance of homeless students who entered the district from another school. We also wanted to relate how both of these groups compared to the academic performance of all students in a given grade.<sup>13</sup>

The WASL data requested included the percentage of students meeting the state standard for homeless students and all students in the district for grades 4, 7 and 10. GPA data were requested for all grade levels (this varied by district; generally GPA does not apply at the elementary level).<sup>14</sup> We also requested aggregated on-time attendance records for all homeless students in the district as a measure of transportation reliability. (Attendance information for homeless students was not available).<sup>15</sup>

## **Homeless Students and their Parents, School District Homeless Liaisons, and Transportation Coordinators**<sup>16</sup>

To complement our quantitative data collection, we spoke with the users (students and parents/guardians) and implementers (homeless liaisons and transportation coordinators) of homeless student transportation. The perceptions and preferences of the people most closely involved in the programs enriched the quantitative data and allowed greater opportunity for interpretation and recommendation at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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<sup>13</sup> To compare academic achievement results related to school stability, we would ideally compare homeless students who remained in their school of origin to those who moved and started attending another school as the control group. Since this study did not include the resources to track homeless students who moved and began attending another school, we used homeless students new to one of the participating districts as a proxy control group.

<sup>14</sup> As with the WASL data, we requested GPA data grouped by homeless students remaining in their school of origin, homeless students who entered the district during the project period, and students in the district overall.

<sup>15</sup> Academic achievement data were received from six providers. In most cases, we received academic data on all McKinney-Vento eligible students, though in the case of one provider, only academic data on homeless students receiving McKinney-Vento transportation were available.

<sup>16</sup> All student interviews were conducted in person. Parent/guardian and school district administrator interviews were conducted by telephone for the most part, although two group interviews of homeless liaisons were held. The entire interview procedure received University of Washington Human Subjects Review Board scrutiny and approval. All participants signed a consent form prior to participating in the study, and their anonymity is protected.

We interviewed homeless liaisons and transportation coordinators from seven of the eight provider districts/consortia.<sup>17</sup> We conducted interviews with seven students: three elementary school girls, one middle school boy, two high school girls, and one high school boy. We also conducted interviews with the parent of two elementary school students and the parent of a high school student.

The responses of students and parents were consistent, which supported the reliability of the responses, even though the sample was smaller than initially planned (Our goal was to conduct interviews with twelve students and six parents.) The problems that prevented us from conducting more interviews were themselves illustrative of the issues that homeless students and parents face when attempting to go to school. The lives of the students and their parents are often unpredictable. Scheduled interviews often fell through for reasons such as the parent's car was broken and there was no money for a rental car, the student was sick or absent for some unknown reason, the family had moved during the past week, or the person who signed the consent for the student interview was no longer the legal guardian or had changed his/her mind and didn't want the student to participate in the project.

## **WHAT WE LEARNED**

### **What Modes of Transportation Were Used?**

Most districts employed three or more modes to transport homeless students, as summarized in Table 1. Traditional yellow school buses accounted for 38 percent of student rides provided. In some instances regular routes were used; in others, special school bus routes were created or transfers were arranged with neighboring districts. Third party brokered van, car, and taxi services accounted for 27.9 percent of the student rides, public transit buses<sup>18</sup> represented 22 percent of rides, and 12 percent were provided by other modes (including district cars/vans, volunteer drivers and taxi cabs). This mode split is presented graphically in Figure 1 and shows that a wide variety of methods were used to transport homeless students to their school of origin. In fact, when taken together,

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<sup>17</sup> Homeless Liaison and Transportation Coordinator interviews were conducted with individuals from Central Valley, Clarkston, Everett, NCESD, NWESD, PSES, and Spokane.

<sup>18</sup> One district reported issuing annual transit bus passes to students. In this case, the total number of rides for the school year was estimated to be 180 rides per student.

the combination of brokered third party transportation services, public buses, taxis, and private vehicles supported by gas vouchers provided more student trips (53.3 percent) than the single most commonly used mode, the yellow school bus (38.0 percent) in the pilot programs.

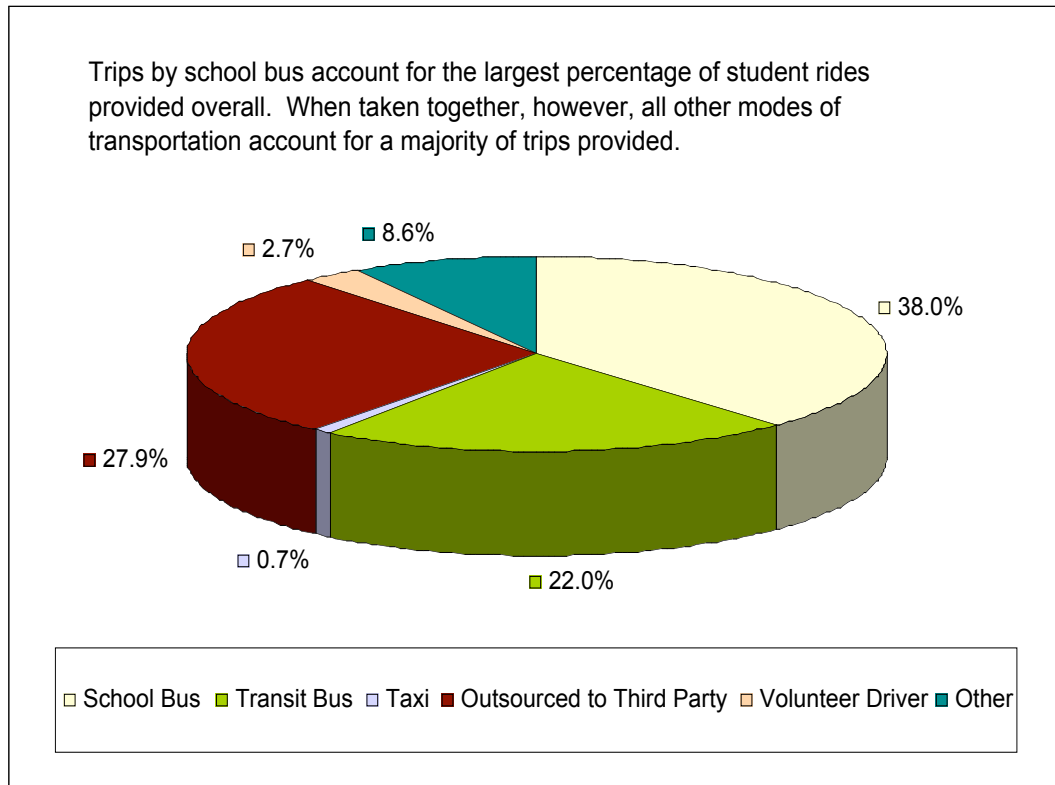


Figure 1: How Districts Transported Homeless Students

### **PSESD Innovation: Outsourcing Homeless Student Transportation**

While many districts used vans as a small part of their school bus fleet, Puget Sound Educational Service District used its pilot funds to outsource much of its homeless student transportation function to third party transportation brokers that used van, car, and taxi services. PSESD's experiment accounted for the large number of trips outsourced to a third party in the pilot project, as shown in Figure 1. The educational service district provided out-of-district trips to McKinney-Vento eligible students by contracting with the existing Medicaid transportation services, established by the State Medical Assistance Administration. It was an opportunity to explore how transportation provided by a third

party contracted service would perform in terms of cost effectiveness, capacity, and service quality, and the service was evaluated separately by PSESD.<sup>19</sup>

### **Other Transportation Innovation**

Districts were resourceful and employed many means of getting homeless students to school. When available, districts provided public transit bus passes so that students could ride free. However, homeless students often live far from existing school bus or public transit routes. So some districts used district-owned cars and vans driven by school district personnel to transport homeless students. Most districts utilized taxi service at times, especially when trips crossed school district boundaries and other alternatives were unavailable. A number of districts provided mileage reimbursement or fuel vouchers so that homeless students could be transported in privately owned vehicles (their own, parents', or relatives'). A few districts paid for students' driver education classes, enabling them obtain a license and drive to school.

### **By What Age Groups? In What Geographic Settings?**

Certain transportation options were only available to older students. Obviously, gas vouchers for students and driver training support were only available to students old enough to drive. Generally only high school students received public transit passes. The exceptions to this were a few cases where public bus passes were provided to both the younger student and an accompanying parent or guardian so that they could ride together. School district personnel provided school bus, van, and private vehicle options as a first choice and taxi service as a second choice for elementary and middle school students. A trained, caring school bus driver or parent driving a private vehicle was seen as the most appropriate for younger children by school district administrators.

Public transit was used primarily in urban and suburban settings and occasionally when it was available in rural areas. Distant and dispersed locations make regular routing by school bus impractical and expensive; hence district vans and cars or private vehicles were preferred for more far-flung, primarily rural areas. Taxis were sometimes employed for long distance, out-of-district trips. Districts would sometimes coordinate school bus

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on PSESD's McKinney-Vento Student Transportation Demonstration Project, see the 2007 ACCT Report to the Legislature at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/acct>.



routes so that either a transfer point was established for students traveling across districts, or one district would take the student all the way *to* the school of origin (SOO) and the other district would take the student back *from* the SOO. Some geographical settings are difficult to serve by standard-size school buses, such as trailer parks or remote rural places with gravel roads. Such places are more easily served by vans or cars.

### **What Was the Cost of Each Mode of Transit?**

Transporting homeless students to their school of origin was expensive for school districts. The majority of homeless student trips (79 percent) cost the school districts from just under \$3 per one-way trip to over \$40 per one-way trip. As a base of comparison, the average cost for a one-way yellow school bus trip for the general school age population in the pilot project was about \$0.67.<sup>20</sup>

Public transit bus was the only mode that cost comparable amounts for both the general student population and homeless students, and it had a consistent per trip cost across four districts (trips by transit bus accounted for 22 percent of total trips). Figure 2 shows that among the four providers utilizing transit buses to provide homeless student transportation, the per trip cost to the district ranged from a low of \$0.14<sup>21</sup> to a high of \$1.00. The per trip costs for all other modes used by districts were higher, and the range was much larger. The per trip cost of transporting homeless students by school bus, for example, ranged from a low of \$4.24 in one district to \$53.79 in another. The per trip costs also ranged widely for taxis and transportation outsourced to third party services, from \$6.02 to \$24.84 for taxis and from \$8.00 to \$35.36 for outsourced transportation.

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<sup>20</sup> Average per trip cost for standard school bus transportation was calculated by using OSPI data for total 2004-05 district expenditures on pupil transportation for the Clarkston, Everett, and Spokane school districts. This figure was then divided by the average district enrollment to get a cost per student per year. This figure was then divided by 360 (180 school days x 2 rides per day) to get the per trip cost.

<sup>21</sup> This cost per trip comes from a district that used a combination of single-trip bus tokens and annual bus passes, which cost \$30.00 for the entire school year.

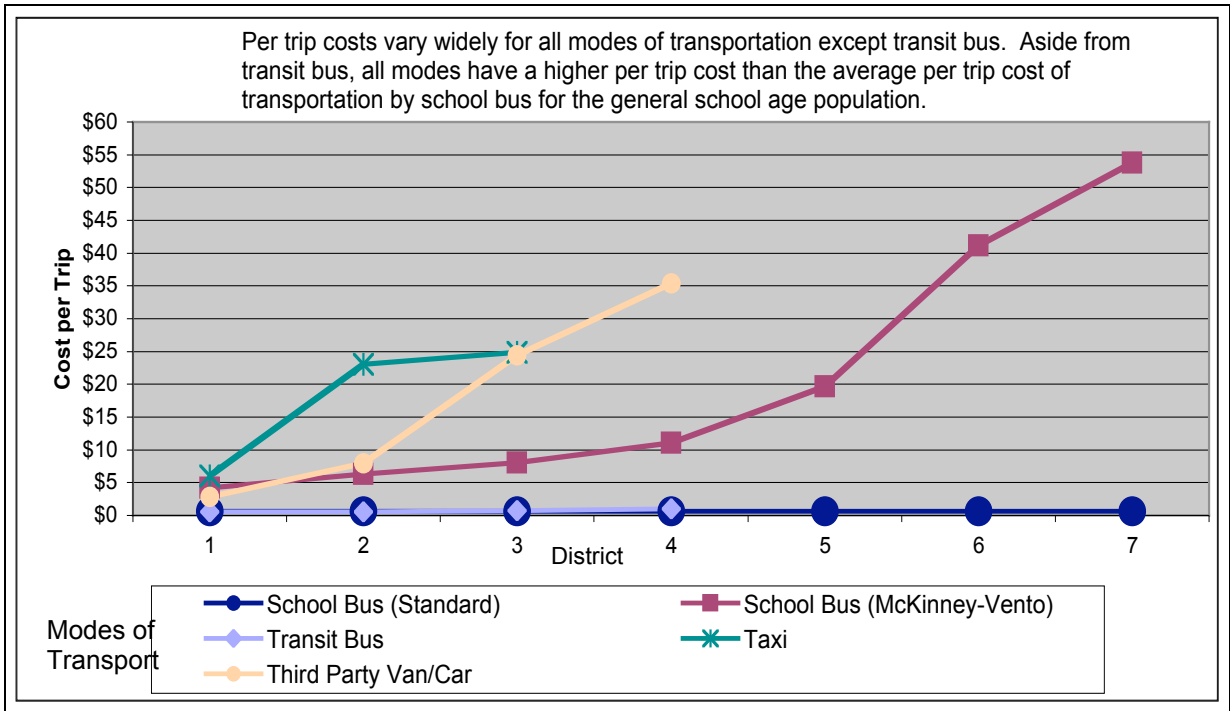


Figure 2: Range of Per Trip Costs, by Mode as Reported by Districts

Three factors stand out about costs to school districts:

- (1) Public transit was the least costly mode for transporting homeless students.
- (2) The comparative costs of other modes of transportation were highly variable.
- (3) School buses were not, contrary to common perception, the least costly mode of homeless student transport.

District transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons experimented with a variety of arrangements to provide service and reduce costs. In some cases, costs were shared among districts within a given educational service district, where one district would cover the cost of transporting students to school, and another district would cover the cost of transportation home from school. Among other districts, transfer points between buses from different school districts were scheduled and routed appropriately. One district made use of part-time paraprofessionals, who were interested in more work hours, by providing them with bus driver training and security screening, and then dispatching them to transport homeless students in district vans and cars when a regular school bus route or taxi would be more costly.

Figure 3 illustrates the ratio of reported administrative costs to the number of student trips provided. Districts reported a typical month's administrative costs

associated with the homeless student demonstration project. As previously mentioned, PSESD outsourced homeless transportation services as an experiment in reducing administrative and service costs. Higher administration costs were not associated with a greater number of trips. On the contrary, districts with the largest number of trips reported lower administrative costs. Is this due to economies of scale? An investigation of itemized administrative costs would be beneficial, as this information was self-reported for this evaluation.

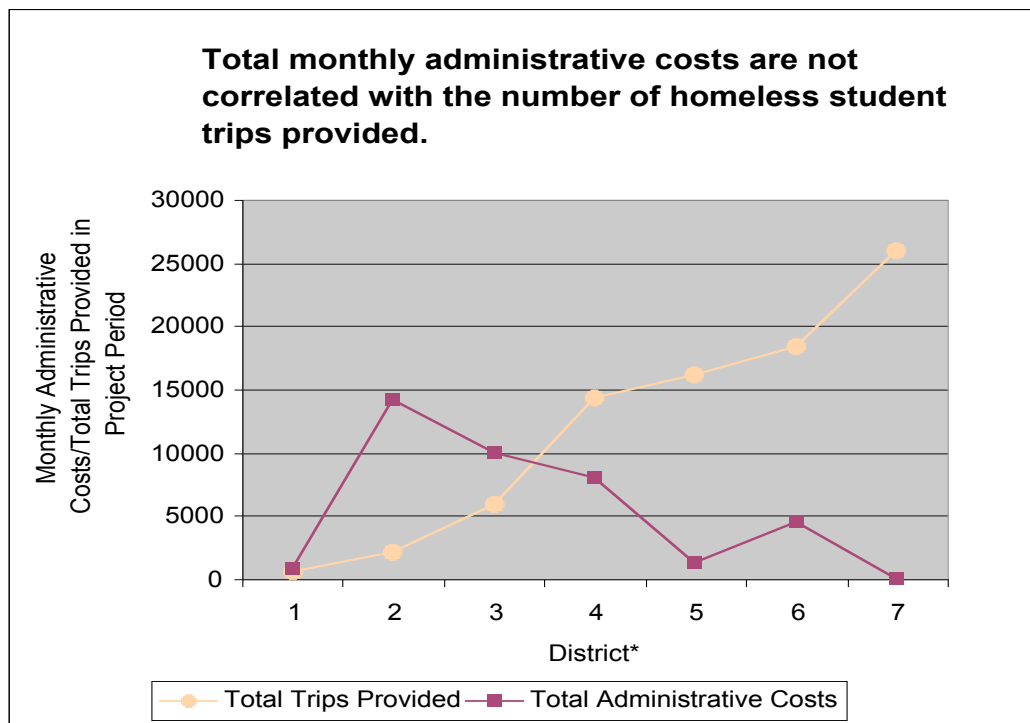


Figure 3: Comparison of Monthly Administrative Costs and Total Student Trips, by Provider<sup>22</sup>  
 \* One district did not provide administrative cost data, and thus is omitted from the graph.

### Costs and Benefits

“It is expensive, but the benefit is phenomenal. Think of a 7-year-old child that changes schools in one year—that’s when you’re supposed to be learning to read. They don’t learn to read! They get to have some things stay the same. Homelessness is always due to a crisis: it’s a divorce, it’s fleeing domestic violence, it’s a family getting kicked out of their home because they don’t have enough money. I don’t think the financial cost is that great compared to the benefits.” —A Homeless Liaison

<sup>22</sup> Administrative costs were reported for a typical one-month period by six providers; given that PSESD outsourced the administrative function, the district’s administrative costs are listed as zero.

## **What Modes of Transportation Were Preferred? By Students? By Parents? By Transportation Coordinators and Homeless Liaisons? Why?**

Overall, students and parents interviewed in this study were satisfied with and appreciative of the transportation to the school of origin. Elementary school students liked staying with their friends and having the stability of familiar teachers and classmates. Older students offered mixed responses, some citing the same factors as younger students with the addition of a girl- or boyfriend. Others had developed social networks outside of school, including at places of work, and for them staying in the school of origin seemed less significant. Homeless liaisons saw multiple benefits for students to stay in their SOO, including increased stability in an otherwise tumultuous life and the chance to do better academically.

Below are summarized perceptions and preferences expressed by users and implementers about the various modes of homeless student transport.

### **Private Vehicles**

Students and parents agreed that transportation by private vehicle was a preferred mode, as it offered the most freedom, flexibility, time efficiency, and perceived safety with the least chance for negative stigma associated with being ‘different’ or homeless. School district officials also liked the option of providing gas vouchers and mileage reimbursement to subsidize private vehicles for several reasons: there was little administrative hassle coordinating with service providers or routing a school bus; gas vouchers actually resulted in increased attendance by older students in one district; and in another district the use of gas vouchers reduced demand for school-supplied transportation enough to allow it to buy one less van. However many homeless families do not own or have access to a car. Thus in most cases the mileage reimbursement, gas vouchers, and drivers’ education subsidies for private vehicles filled a limited niche.

### **School Buses**

Students, parents, transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons liked school bus drivers and spoke of them as dedicated individuals who would go the extra mile to help their passengers, even staying with a child if no one was waiting at a bus stop or at

home. Younger students, in particular, favored small buses and vans. They liked the scale and the camaraderie with other riders.

Transportation coordinators favored school buses for a variety of reasons: it was their system and they were positively predisposed to it; they believed it was safer, as they knew and trusted the drivers and had confidence in the screening and selection process; they believed it was more reliable, as they controlled the routing and scheduling so that students arrived a few moments prior to school starting and were picked up promptly at the end of the school day; and they had confidence in the structural safety standards built into the school buses themselves<sup>23</sup>.

Students and parents preferred that school bus trips be less than 30 minutes long for elementary students and less than 45 minutes for middle and high school students. District officials were similarly concerned about trip length. Districts addressed this issue in a variety of ways. Some made do with long routes. Others shortened existing routes and added new ones. In some cases routes specifically designed for homeless students were created (especially in cases where multiple homeless shelters existed). One transportation coordinator tried to protect the identity of homeless students by designing the route to pick up at the homeless shelter at the start of the run and drop off at that location at the end of the run so other students would not know where the homeless students got on and off.

### **Public Transit Buses**

Older students liked the freedom and anonymity of the public transit system. School district administrators liked the ease and low cost of providing public transit passes. However, public bus service with convenient routes, schedules, and transfers is not universally available, limiting the reliability of this mode for homeless student transportation even when a public bus system does exist. No one questioned the safety of the vehicles, but in one case a transportation coordinator advised a high school student not to take public transit because the bus stop was in a dangerous section of town and the student would be boarding the bus in the dark.

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<sup>23</sup> Further information on safety by mode of transportation can be found in *The Relative Risks of School Travel*, a study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences in 2002. The study found that school and

## **Taxis**

It was hard to find many supporters of taxi transport. Students and their parents did not trust taxi drivers and felt that it was unsafe for students to ride in taxis.<sup>24</sup> Transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons were concerned that taxi drivers are not attuned to the needs of school children and are not required to take the same background and fingerprinting screening that bus drivers must take. Furthermore, they would tend not to be reliable, as students going to an out-of-the-way school do not represent a ‘desirable’ fare (as would a downtown or airport fare). Two homeless liaisons cited problems with inappropriate behavior of taxi drivers. A parent indicated that if a taxi were the only mode of transportation available to transport her child to the school of origin, she would elect to have her child change schools.

However, there were no reports of harm to any students. Two large districts contracted with preferred providers who screened and fingerprinted their taxi drivers. Some no-shows and late arrivals at school were reported, but that was matched by several students who failed to show up when the taxi arrived at their address (a problem identified by transportation coordinators for all modes, which is discussed later in this report).

## **Vans**

Two types of vans were employed by districts. The first type was operated by the district as part of its school bus or school district fleet. Student reaction to them was similar to the small school bus. Transportation coordinators liked them because they can more easily go to remote, harder to access locations and can be operated by part-time school district personnel. The second type was provided through Medicaid transportation brokerages under contract to PSESD. From the vantage point of some transportation coordinators, the Medicaid passenger vans, cars, and taxis were less reliable than school buses in that they arrived at school within a 20-minute window, whereas school buses arrived within a 5-minute window. As with taxis, there was some friction about student

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public buses were the safest mode of travel and private vehicles driven by teenagers the least safe. The study is available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/transportation/publications.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> During the study design we hypothesized that students might think it was “cool” or a status symbol to pull up in front of school in a taxi. We were wrong. Homeless liaisons noted that taxis prompted questions and brought potentially unwanted attention to the student, and thus were thought of as less desirable.

arrival and departure times competing with their traditional customers going to physician and hospital appointments.

### **Did Staying in the School of Origin Affect Students' Academic Performance?**

The intent of McKinney-Vento is to ensure that one very important part of a student's life, school, can remain a point of stability. The act infers that remaining in the school of origin will result in better academic performance. In our interviews, homeless liaisons believed that grades and WASL scores improved by staying in the school of origin and were consistently supportive of helping homeless students to stay there. Research on the subject of school mobility related to academic achievement is less conclusive. Much depends on *why* students and their families move from one school to another (moving to a school district with a better academic reputation is very different than being forced to move to a homeless shelter because of job loss or drug problems). However, studies do show that repeated mobility leads to decreased achievement<sup>25</sup> and that the disruptive impact of school mobility is greatest in the early elementary school years<sup>26</sup>.

Did a relationship between staying in school of origin and academic performance exist among students in the pilot projects? We examined two measures of academic performance, grade point average (GPA) and scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), compared the performance of homeless students staying in their SOO with those who moved, and compared homeless student scores with those of the general school population. In both cases homeless students scored below the general student population. But the WASL scores of SOO students were consistently better than those of homeless students who changed schools, as shown in Figure 4. GPA scores of SOO students were similar to those of homeless students who changed schools, although

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<sup>25</sup> Ingersoll, G.M., Scamman, J.P., and Eckerling, W.D. (1989). Geographic mobility and student achievement in an urban setting. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11, 143–149. Buckner, J.C. and Bassuk, E.L. (2001). Predictors of Academic Achievement among Homeless and Low-Income Housed Children. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39(1). <sup>25</sup> Wood, D., Halfon, N., Scarlata, D., Newacheck, P., & Nessim, S. (1993). Impact of family relocation on children's growth, development, school function, and behavior. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 270, 1334–1338.

<sup>26</sup> Ingersoll, G.M., Scamman, J.P., and Eckerling, W.D. (1989). Geographic mobility and student achievement in an urban setting. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11, 143–149. Heinlein, L.M. and Shinn, M.B. (2000). School Mobility and Student Achievement in an Urban Setting. *Psychology in the Schools*, 37(4).

they improved in high school, as shown in Figure 5. Note that the numbers of homeless students entering the district and factored into the weighted GPA and WASL averages for each grade are very small (between 6 and 20 students per grade).

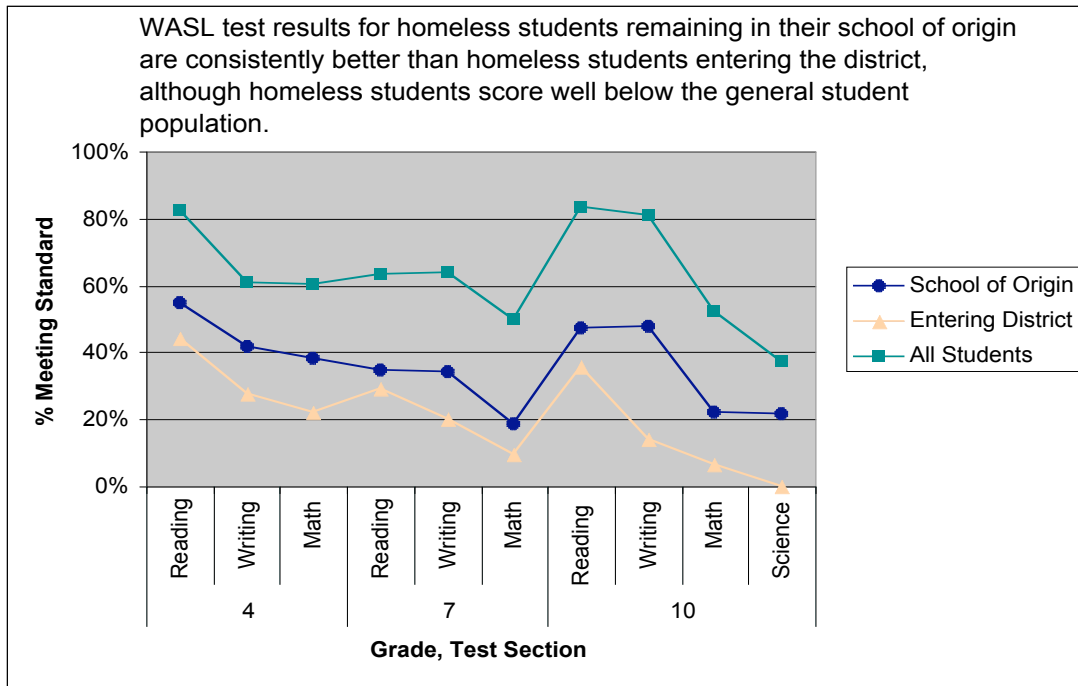


Figure 4: Percentage Meeting WASL Standard by Student Group in Grades 4, 7 and 10

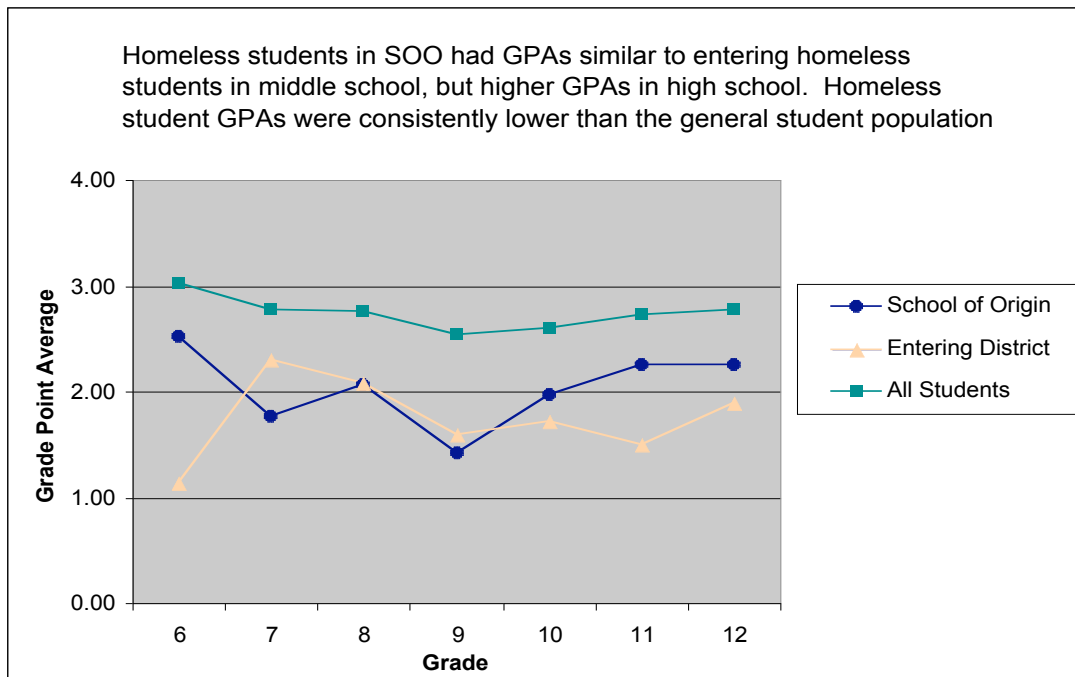


Figure 5: Average GPA of Homeless Students in School of Origin, Entering District, and Students Overall, by Grade and Test Section



## **WHAT ELSE DID WE LEARN?**

Homeless liaisons and transportation coordinators described the lives of homeless families and students as fluid and unpredictable, filled with rapidly changing circumstances in which a student might not know from day to day or week to week where s/he would be staying or where a school bus should arrive for a pick-up. This description is in sharp contrast to the school district day, which is highly scheduled and predictable, with precise start and end times and regular school bus routing. Hence planning, organizing, and implementing homeless student transportation service can be, in the words of more than one transportation coordinator, “very difficult.”

### **Only a Few Districts Piloted Innovations**

Most of the districts applied funds to their existing homeless student transportation systems, thus receiving a funding boost for a portion of the school year. However, a few districts experimented with new services or delivery systems. PSESD’s was the most intentional experiment, by outsourcing the brokering function and transport service to Medicaid van, car, and taxi providers. Clarkston and NWESD used these new funds to provide gas vouchers, and Clarkston also provided mileage reimbursement, all things the districts previously did not do. This had positive results, including improving the attendance of older students and deferring the purchase of a district van. Another district innovated by hiring and training part-time district employees to drive homeless students in district cars and vans (the bus drivers contract and union rules permitted this), resulting in loyal employees, cost savings, and responsive service to homeless students.

### **Funds Were Limited**

While \$1 million sounds like a lot of money, once it is divided among large educational service districts and subdivided further to many school districts, transportation coordinators reported that pilot project funds were quickly used up, often in the first month.

### **The Homeless Student Population Grew during the School Year**

School district personnel reported that there was a substantial increase in homeless students during the course of the academic year and an increase in demand for

transportation to the school of origin. Transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons reported that it is typical for homeless student enrollment in September to surge around the winter holidays and continue to increase through the winter and spring. Increases of up to tenfold were reported.

### **Fall Student Ridership Counts Under-Fund Homeless Student Transportation**

Statewide, transportation funding is apportioned to school districts on the basis of a once-annual student ridership count during one week in September or October. This formulation unintentionally, but systematically, under-funds districts that are required to transport homeless students, as districts report that many of these students are not counted in the fall ridership count. Transportation coordinators suggest that ridership weeks occur in the fall and spring of each school year as a remedy.

### **Reliability of Transportation Mode Requires the Participation of Users and Implementers**

We asked users and implementers about the reliability of various modes used to transport homeless students—did they show up; did they bring students to school on time? While, not perfect, most of the homeless transportation system components were well regarded. But we learned that many times the bus, van, or taxi would show up at the appointed time and place, and the student or parent would not. Homeless families would forget to inform the school district of an address change, or parents would not be waiting at the stop to pick up a first grader. While this is obviously difficult for the student, it is also difficult for the transportation planner, dispatcher, or taxi driver.

### **Concern Over Long and Costly Trips**

Several transportation coordinators were thoughtful and troubled about the length, in terms of distance and time, of some of the trips they were legally responsible for implementing. These were trips of one to two hours in length each way, in some cases using taxis for a significant portion of the trip. They felt this could not be good for the student and their learning. One suggestion was to enable the school district to provide housing close to the school with McKinney-Vento funding instead of transportation. This could be less costly to the district and more beneficial to the student.

### **Concern Over Duration/Definition of Homelessness**

Transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons demonstrated a deep commitment to the needs of their students and wanted to meet the intent of McKinney-Vento. But some felt there were instances when the system was being abused. For example, one district was transporting students from another community for two years from the same address where they were living with a relative. At what point does a new residence become permanent (especially in a society that in general moves with great frequency)? Greater guidance on this definition would be helpful.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

This was a formative, not a definitive, study: By formative we mean that this study was exploratory and identified new issues; it did not attempt to arrive at definitive conclusions. The findings from this formative evaluation provide new understanding on the basis of a limited sample of homeless student transportation systems and how some students, parents and administrators viewed those systems. Further research should explore the extent to which these findings are valid for homeless transportation programs across the state, and the extent to which the findings are applicable to programs across the nation.

### **Data Were Self-Reported**

School districts were asked to provide administrative costs, but they did not define ‘administrative cost’ the same way or for the same period of time.

### **Attendance Data Were Absent**

We had hoped to use on-time attendance by homeless students as a measure of transportation mode reliability, and attendance in general as an indicator of academic success, since previous research has pointed to a positive relationship between attendance and achievement.<sup>27</sup> However, participating school districts could not provide us this information.

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<sup>27</sup> Caldas, S.J. (1993). Reexamination of Input and Process Factor Effects on Public School Achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 86(4); Roby, D.E. (2004). Research on School Attendance and Student Achievement: A Study of Ohio Schools. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28(1); Lambdin, D.J. (1996). Evidence of Student Attendance as an Independent Variable in Education Production Functions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 89(1).

### **Cost Data Were per Student Trip, Not per Mile**

We collected information from school districts on the number of homeless student trips provided by mode. We did not obtain the cost of trips by mile because many districts did not maintain records in this way. Cost per mile would have allowed for meaningful comparisons between modes of transport. Our study findings cannot reveal the length of trips and if certain modes were used primarily for long or short trips.

### **Small Sample Sizes**

The study findings are based on quantitative information from interviews with a limited number of districts, school officials, and homeless students and parents. While this is useful and new information, it cannot be used with any statistical reliability to generalize to other programs and localities.

## APPENDIX A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### **Introduction**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act<sup>28</sup>, amended in 2001 as part of the No Child Left Behind Act, establishes the rights of homeless students in five main areas, including the following:

1. the right to remain in the school of origin despite moving residences
2. the right to enroll in school despite lacking documents of residency, immunization, school records, or other documentation
3. the right to be transported to school
4. the right to all needed services
5. the right to challenge decisions made by schools and districts.

This literature review is concerned with exploring the underlying assumptions behind transporting homeless students to their schools of origin by examining existing literature for findings in the following areas:

- the relationship between school mobility<sup>29</sup> and academic achievement
- the relationship between school attendance and academic achievement
- the appropriateness and effectiveness of various transport modes for different age groups
- documented implementation of McKinney-Vento transportation programs.

### **Search Terms**

- Academic Achievement / Student Achievement / Attainment / Performance
- Attendance / Truancy / Absenteeism
- Homeless / Homelessness / Low-Income
- McKinney-Vento
- Mobility / Geographic Mobility / School Transfers
- Student / Child / Children

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<sup>28</sup> From *Educating Homeless Students And Youth: The 2005 Guide to Their Rights*, a publication of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty located at [www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org).

<sup>29</sup> 'School Mobility' refers to any movement of a student from one school to another.

- Transport / Transportation

### **Clarification of Terms**

‘Mobility,’ ‘school transfers,’ and ‘geographic mobility’ are all used in this review to denote school changes. Research indicates that mobility associated with positive changes and increased opportunities for students are associated with positive academic effects, while mobility associated with negative causes such as household disruption or homelessness are associated with negative academic effects. ‘Mobility’ thus encompasses both positive and negative moves, and the type of mobility associated with research results are clarified within descriptions of specific research.

‘Truancy’ and ‘attendance’ are treated as separate but interconnected issues in the literature; ‘truancy’ is often defined as absence without a valid reason but lacks a standard definition across the literature. For our purposes, ‘truancy’ will be used to indicate a student’s absence by choice, while ‘attendance’ and ‘absenteeism’ will refer to the student’s presence or absence beyond his or her choosing.

### **Methods**

The literature search consisted of searching social science, education, and general academic databases for relevant academic journal articles using combinations of the above search terms in each database. Cited works from articles revealed further relevant literature. An internet search was also conducted by entering names of journal articles as search terms, which revealed further relevant articles and the number of times articles were cited by other sources, an indicator of credibility among peers. Organizations and conferences dedicated to homelessness and education provided additional resources but often did not provide presented materials.

### **School Mobility and Academic Achievement**

1. Ingersoll, G.M., Scamman, J.P., and Eckerling, W.D. (1989). Geographic mobility and student achievement in an urban setting. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11, 143–149.
2. Wood, D., Halfon, N., Scarlata, D., Newacheck, P., & Nessim, S. (1993). Impact of family relocation on children’s growth, development, school

- function, and behavior. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 270, 1334–1338.
3. U.S. Government Accountability Office. (1994). *Elementary School Children: Many Change Schools Frequently, Harming Their Education*. Washington, DC: Author.
  4. Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R., and Dauber, S.L. (1996). Children in Motion: School Transfers and Elementary School Performance. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90 (1).
  5. Heinlein, L.M. and Shinn, M.B. (2000). School Mobility and Student Achievement in an Urban Setting. *Psychology in the Schools*, 37(4).
  6. Mantzicopoulos, P. and Knutson, D.J. (2000). Head Start Children: School Mobility and Achievement in the Early Grades. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(5).
  7. Buckner, J.C. and Bassuk, E.L. (2001). Predictors of Academic Achievement among Homeless and Low-Income Housed Children. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39(1).
  8. Kerbow, D., Azcoitia, C., and Buell, B. (2002). Student Mobility and Local School Improvement in Chicago. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).
  9. Rumberger, R.W. (2003). The Causes and Consequences of Student Mobility. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).
  10. Rafferty, Y., Shinn, M., and Weitzman, B.C. (2004). Academic achievement among formerly homeless adolescents and their continuously housed peers. *Journal of School Psychology*, 42(179-199).
  11. Hanushek, E.A., Kain, J.F., Rivkin, S.G. (2004). Disruption Versus Tiebout Improvement: The Costs and Benefits of Switching Schools. *Journal of Public Economics*, 88(1721-1746).

This category comprises the bulk of literature about homeless students but is inconclusive about the relationship between school mobility and academic achievement, since individual studies offer conflicting findings and draw very different conclusions.

Ingersoll et al. provided a much-cited basis for research in this area. Their data compared mobile versus non-mobile students within the Denver Public Schools across

elementary, middle school, and high school ages. ‘Geographic mobility’<sup>30</sup> was linked to lower academic achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic factors, with the most pronounced negative effects occurring for the elementary-aged set.

Wood et al. found that mobility led to a 35 percent increase in repeating a grade. A 1994 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Representative Marcy Kaptur (OH) supported this finding and noted that children of low-income families or those attending inner-city schools were more likely to have greater mobility. The GAO found that negative effects of mobility could be mitigated by better information sharing between schools and advocated for an interstate student database.

Alexander et al. concluded that Baltimore city schoolchildren transferred frequently during the period of study in 1982, leading to lowered achievement. But, after controls were introduced for background characteristics and prior school performance, the findings lacked statistical significance.

Heinlein and Shinn found that more mobility prior to third grade was related to lower academic achievement, measured by grades and standardized test scores. The authors speculated that poor basic skills developed in the early grades may have contributed to lower achievement. Buckner and Bassuk examined various factors contributing to academic success and found that gender, age, race/ethnic status, and mobility had the greatest impact on academic success. Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman compared the academic achievement of formerly homeless students with their peers and found that early achievement was the greatest indicator for later academic success, although homelessness did lead to less academic achievement.

Mantzicopoulos and Knutson noted that many studies do not account for initial differences between mobile and non-mobile students, a possible reason for ambiguous findings. Hanushek et al. found that students moving from one school district to another often exhibit improved academic achievement, since those moves are characteristic of students seeking better academic environments. Conversely, moves within a district usually occur with a disruption in residence and is correlated with lower academic achievement.

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<sup>30</sup> Ingersoll does not explicitly define ‘geographic mobility’; however, based on his data sources, this term can be inferred to mean school transfers within a school district and new transfers into a school district.



Kerbow et al. qualified the negative effects of student mobility by differentiating between students moving once versus those moving multiple times, asserting that single movers are able to compensate for the disruption if they remain in the same school.

Rumberger provided a comprehensive description of the incidence, causes, and consequences of generic student mobility through the analysis of other studies and is particularly helpful for his synthesis of other findings. Specifically, he found that African- and Hispanic-American children change schools more frequently than other children and that large, urban, and predominantly minority school districts experience greater student mobility than their more homogenous and rural counterparts. Rumberger found that residential mobility, single- or step-parent structure, and behavioral issues indicate a greater incidence of student mobility and show that, when background factors of family and previous academic histories are controlled, mobility is more a consequence of other factors than a factor leading to negative events. That is, negative consequences of behavioral or emotional issues more often cause a student to change schools (at the request of the school or the student) than the school change causes negative consequences in the student's academic achievement or well-being. Rumberger concluded that a student's lowered academic achievement after a school move can be attributed to a difference in curriculum and knowledge of the student's skill level, and he suggested methods for schools and states to mitigate the negative effects of mobility, such as improving assessment methods for incoming students and providing more introductory information to help acclimate new students to new school environments.

Hanushek et al. also cited negative effects on the classmates of mobile students, since exiting and entering students create disruptions and cause teachers to repeat lessons. Suggestions for diminishing these effects are creating standardized curricula, establishing transition programs, and encouraging careful placement of new students.

No clear consensus is reached regarding the specific effects or extent of the impact of mobility on students. However, while the impact of a single move is debatable, it can generally be concluded by reviewing this literature that repeated mobility leads to decreased achievement and that the impact of mobility disruption is greatest in the early elementary school years.

### **School Attendance and Academic Achievement**

1. Caldas, S.J. (1993). Reexamination of Input and Process Factor Effects on Public School Achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 86(4).
2. Rothman, S. (2001). School Absence and Student Background Factors: A Multi-Level Analysis. *International Education Journal*, 2(1). (cited by 3)
3. Hinz, E., Kapp, L., and Snapp, S. (2003). Student Attendance and Mobility in Minneapolis Public Schools. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).
4. Roby, D.E. (2004). Research on School Attendance and Student Achievement: A Study of Ohio Schools. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28(1).
5. Lambdin, D.J. (1996). Evidence of Student Attendance as an Independent Variable in Education Production Functions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 89(1).

Literature is scarce in this topic area in compared to research of other policy variables that impact academic achievement, such as teacher-student ratios and expenditures per student. Articles addressing truancy or absentee patterns among students were excluded from this review, since the patterns themselves do not impact the relationship between attendance and achievement.

Caldas examined various factors influencing student achievement in Louisiana public schools and found that a strong correlation exists between attendance and achievement on standardized tests.

Rothman studied attendance rates in Australia based on background factors such as sex, race, and economic background. While this is beyond our concern, his summaries of prior research are useful. Rothman stated that C.W. Odell reported in 1923 that small correlations exist between attendance and intellectual development, although a significant correlation exists between attendance and grades awarded, signifying a reward structure for attendance alone. Finch and Nemzek similarly concluded in 1935 that a Minneapolis high school class' grades were correlated with attendance. Rothman also states that Kersting (1967) evaluated the attendance of the top and bottom 100 students of a given class and discovered significant attendance differences between the groups. Rothman noted that, although correlations between attendance and achievement have been documented, no threshold of attendance has been identified.

Hinz et al. stated the existence of a “well-documented connection between attendance and achievement at all grade levels” (141), although no references were given. However, this article most closely addresses the connection between attendance and achievement, since it documents the efforts of Minneapolis Public Schools (MSP) to achieve a 95 percent attendance rate. The Comprehensive Attendance Plan developed by the MPS Board recommended that changes be made in policy and procedures, clarification of staff roles, and by engaging students, families, and community members. Several indicators were identified; for example, student attendance was tracked as percentages of increases or decreases in the numbers of students meeting attendance goals. No results of the implemented program were given, since the article was written shortly after the adoption of the guidelines.

Roby used statistical correlation of aggregate test scores and attendance records of different Ohio schools to determine whether

- a significant relationship exists between attendance and achievement
- a significant difference in attendance patterns exists between the highest and lowest ten percent of classes
- a significant difference in achievement exists when students are ranked by highest and lowest attendance averages.

Roby concluded that a correlation ranging from moderate to strong exists between attendance and achievement. Additionally, he indicated that further research may be warranted in the areas of school size and other factors as contributing to attendance rates.

Lambdin noted the large body of research existing about other inputs affecting student achievement and speculated that the lack of research addressing the impact of attendance on achievement may be due to researchers’ beliefs that attendance coincides with other factors, such as socioeconomic status, and may be difficult to extricate from data with meaningful results. Lambdin then used a production function and aggregated data to reveal that average attendance in school has a positive impact on student performance.

### **Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Transportation Modes for Different Age Groups**

No relevant studies were found.

### **Documented Implementation of McKinney-Vento Programs**

1. James, B.W., and Lopez, P.D. (2003). Transporting Homeless Students to Increase Stability: A Case of Two Texas School Districts. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).
2. Julianelle, P.F., and Foscarinis, M. (2003). Responding to the School Mobility of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness: The McKinney-Vento Act and Beyond. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).
3. Bowman, D. and Barksdale, K. (2004). Increasing School Stability for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Overcoming Challenges to Providing Transportation to the School of Origin. *Publication of The National Center for Homelessness Education at SERVE, UNC Greensboro.*  
[http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/nche\\_transp\\_full.pdf](http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/nche_transp_full.pdf)

These articles specifically document the McKinney-Vento Act in implementation. James and Lopez extensively described the incidence of homelessness aided by statistics about poverty, then used interviews, administrative documents, evaluation reports, and informal communication to anecdotally describe the efforts of two school districts' attempts to implement the McKinney-Vento Act. The importance of homeless liaisons to coordinate transportation efforts is highlighted.

Julianelle and Foscarinis discussed the detrimental effects of mobility on students' achievement, including lack of parental attention due to other pressing survival needs, misdiagnosis of students' needs by educators (e.g., students needing sight or hearing aids were mistakenly diagnosed with learning disabilities), and lack of stable social relationships (which contribute to higher self-esteem). According to this article, McKinney-Vento programs eliminate enrollment delays to provide immediate access for homeless students, ensure continuous enrollment while disputes about enrollment eligibility are settled, and provide access to special needs programs. The stipulation that a homeless liaison be designated and trained in every school district allows for the necessary funds to execute the program successfully. Many court cases have also upheld the provisions of McKinney-Vento Act, providing a mandate for services when necessary. This article concludes with suggested initiatives that will reduce

homelessness, such as affordable housing and addressing the abuse issues that characterize unaccompanied youth homelessness.

Bowman and Barksdale conducted a review of literature that indicates higher academic achievement among students remaining in their schools of origin, although their literature review is lacking in sources reaching contradicting opinions. They presented the difficulties and possible solutions to implementing the McKinney-Vento Act through interviews of the homeless coordinators of eight school districts. Through these interviews, Bowman and Barksdale provided recommendations for easing the financial and logistical burdens on school districts based on their ‘best practices.’ Five of the eight districts surveyed indicated that funding was the greatest challenge; others reported vehicle scheduling conflicts and logistical problems with transporting students as far as 50 miles away to their school of origin. Recommendations for utilizing funds efficiently include creating a database of student, shelter, and transportation information while retaining the student’s privacy; creating strong community support to adapt to students’ changing locations and needs; and collaborating between districts to utilize available resources most effectively.

### **Other Policy Implementations and Suggestions to Address Mobility Issues**

1. Franke, T.M., Isken, J.A., and Parra, M.T. (2003). A Pervasive School Culture for the Betterment of Student Outcomes: One School’s Approach to Student Mobility. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).
2. Kerbow, D., Azcoitia, C., and Buell, B. (2003). Student Mobility and Local School Improvement in Chicago. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 72(1).

Franke et al. described a southern California elementary school focused on providing the best possible learning conditions for all students through the adoption of innovative teaching techniques. In one classroom, students overcame their associations of shame by learning to play the keyboard and feeling pride and accomplishment in a school setting. By targeting programs at students who need additional support instead of treating mobile students as a characteristically distinct population, pervasive school

programs<sup>31</sup> provide more seamless and comprehensive services while addressing the various needs of mobile students.

Kerbow et al. suggested a dual approach to reduce mobility as well as decrease negative impacts. Specific suggestions include the following:

- supporting families in remaining in the same location or aiding the student in remaining in the same school if the residence must change
- strengthening connections within schools to reduce moves based on conflicts or dissatisfaction
- increasing information flows about students between schools or developing portfolios of student achievement to provide better assessments
- implementing initial assessments of entering students
- collaborating between schools that share frequent transfers
- standardizing curriculum within school districts.

Initiatives cited by Kerbow as already in place in Chicago include *Staying Put*, an awareness campaign designed to inform parents and educators about their rights and responsibilities under the Chicago Public School policy and state law, in addition to establishing a commitment to reducing mobility in Chicago schools. Informational brochures include information about resolving conflicts that often lead to school transfers and providing statistical information about academic impacts of moves to discourage schools transfer.

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Pervasive school programs’ refers to implemented programs aimed at ensuring that entering students receive comprehensive services and experience a smooth transition. These include training intake staff in homeless sensitivity issues, providing academic and psychological evaluation for proper placement, referring students to school counselors if necessary, assigning a peer ‘buddy’ to assist students in adapting to the new culture, and ensuring inclusion of new students in extra-curricular activities.

**APPENDIX B**  
**STUDENT AND PARENT SURVEY INSTRUMENTS AND RESPONSES**

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**Parent Survey Instrument**

**Introduction**

Hi. I'm Sheri Reder, from the University of Washington in Seattle...part of a study team trying to learn how transportation for homeless students is working. We think talking directly with parents/guardians and students is a good way to find out. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I have several questions to ask you that should take 15 to 30 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer all the questions. Your answers and this discussion are completely confidential and any records of our discussion will be tracked anonymously; all records will be destroyed by the end of the year. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Questions**

1. A. How does name of student get to school usually? (van, car, taxi, school bus, public bus, other)  
B. Thank you. Please tell me if that mode of transportation works well for you and your child. To start with, did name of student get picked up on time?  
Probe on items including:
  - On-time arrival at school
  - Like being with the other students
  - Like the driver
  - Amount of time trip took
  - Directness of the route
  - Ease of arranging for the trip
2. In the past month has name of student taken other kinds of transportation to school? If yes, what? <Repeat probes for these modes.>
3. Which type of transportation do you prefer? \_\_\_\_\_ Why?
4. Are you satisfied that the type of transportation name of student takes is safe?
5. Do you think that transportation has contributed to name of student being able to stay in their current school?
6. Do you think that transportation has helped name of student to attend school more regularly?
7. Does the transportation enable participation in before or after-school activities?

8. Do you think that staying in this school has helped name of student learn more or get better grades?
9. Are there other things you want to tell me about transportation to/from school?

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Here is a phone card, a token of appreciation for spending time with me.

## **Student Survey Instrument**

### **Introduction**

Hi. I'm Sheri Reder, from the University of Washington in Seattle...part of a study team trying to learn how transportation for homeless students is working. We think talking directly with you and other students is a good way to find out. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I have several questions to ask you that should take 15 to 30 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer all the questions. Your answers and this discussion are completely confidential and any records of our discussion will be tracked anonymously; all records will be destroyed by the end of the year.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Questions**

1. A. How do you get to school usually? (van, car, taxi, school bus, public bus, other)  
B. Good. Now I have some specific questions about the (van, car, taxi etc):
  - a. Did you get picked up on time?
  - b. Did you arrive at school in time for homeroom and your first class?
  - c. What did you like/dislike about the (van, car, taxi etc)?
  - d. Comfortable ride \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Felt safe \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Like being with the other students \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Like the Driver \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Amount of Time Trip Took \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Directness of the Route \_\_\_\_\_
2. In the past month have you taken other kinds of transportation to school? If yes, what? <Repeat questions above for each mode.>
3. Which type of transportation do you prefer? \_\_\_\_\_ Why?
4. Do any of the kinds of transportation you take make you stand out from your classmates? If yes...In what way? Do you like/dislike that?
5. Does your transportation drop you off right at school? Nearby? Somewhere else?



6. Does your transportation allow you to participate in before or after-school activities?
7. What do you like or dislike about staying in this school?
8. Do you think that staying in this school has helped you learn more or get better grades?
9. Are there other things you want to tell me about your transportation to/from school?

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Here is a phone card as a token of thanks.

### **Student and Parent Responses (from 7 students and 2 parents)**

#### **1. Trip Characteristics**

*How do you (for student)/does (name of student) (for parent) get to school usually? (For parent) Please tell me if that mode of transportation works well for you and your child.*

Students and parents generally reported that students were picked up and delivered home on time, had a comfortable and safe ride and liked their driver. Some issues that were raised include:

- *Dissatisfaction with Long Trips:* Parents and students expressed dissatisfaction with long trips – those that took more than 30 minutes for elementary students and more than 45 minutes for middle and high school students. Young students found long trips tiring. Older students expressed concern that a long trip meant less time for part-time employment or homework. These factors made staying in the school of origin less appealing for them.
- *Desire for Peer Companionship:* Parent and student interviewees liked having students travel to school with other students. Students liked the camaraderie of being with their friends, and being with other students also made parents and students feel safer.

#### **2. Modes of Transportation**

*Which type of transportation do you prefer? Why?*

Students liked being transported in a private vehicle when possible. Of the transit options, small school buses or mini-vans were preferred while taxis received poor ratings. The possible stigma of using a transportation program for homeless students did not appear to be an issue.

- *Small school buses or mini-vans.* Small school buses (or mini-vans) were seen as a desirable form of transit by students and their parents. Parents reported that the drivers seemed well-trained, and that they had confidence in them. Students of all ages appreciated that the music on the buses, the flexibility of the drivers, and the general camaraderie with the other students on the bus. One student called the bus driver “cool”.

- *Taxis.* Children and parents agreed that taxis are not a desirable way for students to get to and from school. Neither parents nor students trusted the taxi drivers, they did not feel it was safe for students to be in a taxi, and students wanted to be with other students, not alone in a taxi. There were also complaints that the taxi drivers were not on time. One student said she waited two hours after school for her taxi to arrive. While students sung the praises of small school bus drivers, criticism of taxi drivers was consistently strong. One student relayed stories of “all the strange things that happen to kids in taxis”. A parent said that if taxi was the only choice for her child she wouldn’t send him to his school of origin.
- *Private Vehicle:* Students thought that transportation in a private vehicle was the best option whenever it was available. Some students had friends, or the parents of friends, who took them home after sports practice or other school events. One student spent a day or two a week with a friend whose mother drove him to and from school. All the students were happy when a parent was able to pick them up or drop them off at school. It was the flexibility of private transportation, combined with the shorter travel time that made it most appealing to the students. The dysfunctional nature of some parents came through when one student explained that her mother could not drive her because she was “drunk all the time”, and the father would not drive her because he just “yelled and then watched television”. Parents appreciated not having to drive their children to school. One parent expressed that with work and school having transportation provided to her children was extremely helpful.

### 3. Stigma of Using Homeless Transportation

*(For student) Do any of the kinds of transportation you take make you stand out from your classmates?*

Neither students nor parents expressed any awareness of a social stigma being associated with using the homeless student transportation program. One elementary school student did say that she was glad that she was now transported in a small school bus instead of a mini-van because now she was dropped off on the same side of the school as all the other students instead of on the other side of the school building. Otherwise interviewees didn’t think that other students even noticed what type of transportation they used.

### 4. School of Origin

*(For student) What do you like or dislike about staying in this school?*

Elementary school children wanted to remain in their school of origin while high school students had varying views.

- *Elementary School Children:* Elementary school children wanted to stay in their school of origin. These children were very connected to their friends and their teachers, the school counselor and other administrative staff. One fourth grader described how her teacher “made her feel safe”. Changing schools was upsetting for these children and not something they wanted to do. They often had lots of experience with multiple moves. One second grader described the six places she could remember living in the past year. Parents understood this and wanted their children to stay in their school of origin. Parents also understood that a new living situation that might seem permanent to a child, such as living with a grandparent,

might well be a temporary situation. So, having transportation support for keeping their child in his/her school of origin was greatly appreciated.

- *High School Students:* For high school students the benefits of staying in the same school were less clear. The high school students had connections in their school of origin, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, but they often felt alienated from that school as well. Students expressed anger that the teachers often didn't understand the complexity of their lives and were not supportive when they missed assignments or classes due to family related problems such as moving (again), a parent's sickness, a broken car, etceteras. One student related great frustration that her teacher did not understand that when you have to take a public bus and transfer two times to get to school, you are sometimes going to be late. High school students may also have social networks outside of their school, such as one student whose friends were mostly at their place of work. Staying at the school of origin may not be seen as a plus. One student was excited by the possibility of going to a new school, where she could "make new friends" while another student said that she wanted to stay at her school of origin because she is "not a fan of changing".

##### 5. Academic Performance

*Do you think that staying in this school has helped name of student (parent)/you (student) learn more or get better grades?*

Neither students nor parents attributed improving academic performance to staying in their school of origin. The benefits of the program were seen much more as the psychological benefits of maintaining a social network and community where you are known and supported. Even this benefit was more applicable to elementary than high school students. One high school student said that her "grades were no better from staying at school but she liked seeing her friends". Another student said that it "isn't transportation problems, but the family problems that keep her away from school".



**APPENDIX C**  
**HOMELESS LIAISON SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND RESPONSES**

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**Survey Instrument**

**Introduction**

As you know I'm part of a University of Washington study team evaluating Washington State's Homeless Student Transportation Project. Your school district and several others around the state are using a variety of transportation modes and delivery models to transport homeless students to their school of origin. We want to ask you a few questions today about transportation provided under the McKinney-Vento Act either by the school district itself or by independent providers. In this evaluation we are analyzing quantitative data collected by school districts, but we also want to talk with the transportation coordinators and homeless liaisons in the participating school districts to gain a fuller understanding of how these pilot programs are working.

**Questions**

1. Let's begin by confirming what mode or modes of transportation your school district employed. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did the transportation mode(s) meet or exceed your expectations for reliability? (on-time performance, students arrived at school for homeroom and first period classes)
3. Did some modes prove more effective for a) different age groups? (elementary vs. secondary) b) different geographies? (exurban/rural vs. suburban/urban)
4. What are the benefits for homeless students of remaining in their school of origin?
5. Do students attend school more regularly because of this program?
6. Do you find that remaining in their school of origin enables homeless students to get better grades and WASL scores?
7. Why do you think homeless students choose to remain in their school of origin? Why do you think others move?
8. Would you utilize the same arrangement next year? What changes, if any, would you make? Why?
9. Is there any additional information you would like us to know?

Thank you very much for your help.

## **Responses (from 7 homeless liaisons)**

### **1. Modes of Transportation**

*Let's begin by confirming what mode or modes of transportation your school district employed.*

Administrators reported using a variety of transportation modes with varying frequency. Passenger cars and vans owned by the district and operated by district employees, small (special education) and large yellow school buses, public transit by providing bus passes, and taxi. Taxi drivers are required to receive special training before transporting homeless students. Parents driving private vehicles are sometimes provided mileage reimbursement or gas cards, depending on the district. Students sometimes receive public transit passes from DSHS prior to requiring transportation to their schools of origin; also, transit passes enable students to attend extra-curricular activities. One district reports using brokered taxi services. A rural district reports using private shuttle and is presently considering bicycles for an area where most residents walk or bike. Some students have received funds for drivers' education to allow them to be the primary driver in their family.

### **2. Reliability**

*Did the transportation mode(s) meet or exceed your expectations for reliability? (on-time performance, students arrived at school for homeroom and first period classes)*

Overall, districts report that their methods are reliable. One service district reports attendance increases since the implementation of their transportation program. Districts attribute this reliability to a variety of factors including owning the transportation vehicles (such as passenger cars and vans). Two districts reported that their transportation methods are reliable but that parents may neglect to inform the school that they have relocated; thus, the student is absent from the designated pick-up location. One district acknowledged that parents may lack the ability to inform the school.

Another problem affecting reliability is that different schools may have different beginning and ending times. One district adjusts the schedules of their high school students to accommodate their arrival times. Another district uses cabs or private vehicles on days when students have different starting and ending times, and will apply for a grant to purchase a van for the districts to use. One school district reports that sometimes students arrive at school too early which may leave 45 minutes of the student being unsupervised.

### **3. Effectiveness**

*Did some modes prove more effective for a) different age groups? (elementary vs. secondary) b) different geographies? (exurban/rural vs. suburban/urban)*

Liaisons working with rural and urban areas hold different opinions of the effectiveness of various transportation modes. The variance in opinion may result from differing transportation modes in addition to the varying geography. Most liaisons reported that traditional yellow school buses were most effective for younger students due to their

safety and regularity. Several liaisons noted that school districts within their service district share cost burdens by transporting to school while the other district transports from school. One liaison mentioned that arriving at school in a taxi prompts questions from other students since it is an abnormal mode of transport. Several homeless liaisons report that district cars or parent cars (through mileage reimbursement) are effective in transporting younger students since they feel more comfortable riding with a parent or familiar adult. In districts using cars, the same driver picks up the same students along routes, which encourages interaction and comfort with the student. However, ‘unaccompanied youth’<sup>32</sup> lack an able adult to transport them using mileage reimbursement. One district uses mileage reimbursement to fill gaps in coordinating school bus routes after a household relocates.

Liaisons report that public transit is effective for students in households moving often between friends’ and families’ houses since the passes allow transportation to easily adapt, although many areas lack adequate public transit.

Two liaisons reported problems with taxi drivers despite a requirement that drivers are fingerprinted. One liaison reported a parent complaint that drivers smoked in the car with their student, while another reported a driver giving a student the number to a “chat” line.

#### 4. Benefits

*What are the benefits for homeless students of remaining in their school of origin?*

All liaisons expressed an overwhelming positive benefit to students by remaining in their schools of origin. Stability was the most mentioned benefit; liaisons noted that schools may be the only stable element in a homeless students’ life. Social and emotional supports provided by teachers and friends were mentioned as vital to maintain during the trauma of homelessness, especially during adolescence. In the words of one liaison, “school is a safe haven for most kids.”

Several liaisons mentioned the importance of educational continuity and noted that research demonstrates that students lose 4-6 months of schooling each time they move. Different schools may be at different stages of a lesson entailing that a student changing schools may not complete a lesson and may not have the foundational knowledge to learn the lessons of the new school. This can be compounded by lack of information-sharing. One liaison stated that unnecessary problems arise if a student’s records are not released, possibly because of a library fine, although the student is allowed to be enrolled as mandated by the McKinney-Vento Act. Thus, a student arrives at a new school with no records.

#### 5. Attendance

*Do students attend school more regularly because of this program?*

All liaisons reported that attendance likely increased as a result of the transportation program. Some reported lacking staff to track attendance related to transportation. Others

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Unaccompanied youth’ refers to youth that are not in the custody of a parent or guardian.

reported that parental competence in getting students to the appropriate place at the appropriate time affected students' attendance. One liaison mentioned that attendance statistics show the total attendance rate but not the rate during which transportation is arranged. Therefore, if a move results in several weeks of non-attendance, the student's statistics show a lower attendance rate than is accurate during coordinated transportation to one's school of origin.

#### 6. Grades and WASL scores

*Do you find that remaining in their school of origin enables homeless students to get better grades and WASL scores?*

All liaisons agreed that grades and WASL scores were improved due to the consistency of curriculum in staying in one school. Again, liaisons mentioned that students lose 3-4 months of education each time they move. One liaison stated a need for testing to be done after a student is in a stable home environment to measure whether the benefit is demonstrated later. Another liaison noted that this is the first year of WASL testing in more grade levels, which will yield more test results.

#### 7. Student Choice

*Why do you think homeless students choose to remain in their school of origin? Why do you think others move?*

Liaisons often mentioned that homeless students chose to remain in their schools because of stability and loyalty to their school. Several liaisons mentioned that students want to be close to their friends. One liaison speculated that students may feel scared to go to a new school. Another thought that they may feel driven to finish school, while another mentioned that students often feel a connection to one staff person and thus seek to remain close to that person.

In determining reasons why students choose to leave schools, liaisons listed several possibilities including behavior problems or other negative experience such as the stigma of being homeless. Others mentioned that students may not be invested in their school since they may have been forced to move in the past and an attachment to the school may have made the move more difficult. Some liaisons thought that students may think that another school seems more exciting than their current school, or that the student would like a clean start for a variety of reasons.

#### 8. Program Arrangement

*Would you utilize the same arrangement next year? What changes, if any, would you make? Why?*

Each liaison mentioned that more money was needed; some mentioned that additional vehicles were needed, and others described the need for staff to assist in coordination and program tracking, while another district would like to assist homeless parents in reaching needed services to increase the family's stability. Several districts mentioned that costs far exceeded the allotted funds, as in one case the funds were spent in the first few



months. Another liaison mentioned a problem in reimbursement, since the costs are incurred along roads while the reimbursement is paid by “as the crow flies”. All liaisons expressed that the program was worthwhile. One liaison also mentioned the need for different districts to share information about best practices.

9. Additional Information

*Is there any additional information you would like us to know?*

“It is expensive, but the benefit is phenomenal. Think of a 7 year old child that changes schools in one year – that’s when you’re supposed to be learning to read. They don’t learn to read! They get to have some things stay the same. Homelessness is always due to a crisis: it’s a divorce, it’s fleeing domestic violence, it’s a family getting kicked out of their home because they don’t have enough money. I don’t think the financial cost is that great compared to the benefits.”

“I think it’s a really great program, so I certainly hope it continues.”

“Give us more money!”



**APPENDIX D  
TRANSPORTATION COORDINATOR SURVEY INSTRUMENT  
AND RESPONSES**

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**Survey Instrument**

**Introduction**

As you know I'm part of a University of Washington study team evaluating Washington State's Homeless Student Transportation Project. Your school district and several others around the state are using a variety of transportation modes and delivery models to transport homeless students to their school of origin. We want to ask you a few questions today about transportation funded under the McKinney-Vento Act either by the school district itself or by independent providers. In this evaluation we are analyzing quantitative data collected by school districts, but we also want to talk with the transportation liaisons in the participating school districts to gain a fuller understanding of how these pilot programs are working.

**Questions**

1. Let's begin by confirming what mode or modes of transportation you have employed.
2. Did the administrative arrangement relieve administrative burden on you and your staff?
3. Did you experience cost savings?
4. Did the transportation mode(s) meet or exceed your expectations for a) reliability? (on-time performance, students arrived at school for homeroom and first period classes) b) safety? (accident rate, responsible drivers)
5. Did some modes prove more effective for a) different age groups? (elementary vs. secondary) b) different geographies? (exurban/rural vs. suburban/urban)
6. Would you utilize the same arrangement next year?
7. What changes, if any, would you make? Why?
8. Is there any additional information you would like us to know?

Thank you very much for your help.

**Responses (from 8 transportation coordinators)**

1. Mode of Transportation

*What mode(s) of transportation were employed?*

School districts employed a range of transportation options to get homeless students to their school of origin, including: yellow school buses, public transit, taxis, third party and school district operated vans, and gas vouchers for private vehicles. Almost all

respondents employed more than one mode, but relied primarily on traditional school buses.

## 2. Administrative Burden

*Did the administrative arrangement relieve administrative burden on you and your staff?*

In most cases, transportation coordinators experienced no change in their duties and responsibilities as a result of the demonstration project funding. The primary reason is that any additional funds were used to support the system already in place or to provide an increment more service in the form of additional van time or additional gas vouchers for parents or homeless students themselves, not in a change of administrative system. The exceptions were two districts that shifted homeless student scheduling and coordination to the new 'homeless liaison' position, and one district that contracted with a van/taxi broker to arrange trips for students.

## 3. Cost Savings

*Did you experience cost savings?*

Cost savings due to demonstration project funding were not generally reported. One district was able to use new funds for gas vouchers and substitute them for the purchase and operation cost of an additional van.

## 4. Reliability and Safety

*Did the transportation modes meet or exceed expectations for reliability and safety?*

Transportation coordinators were certain that yellow school buses were the safest mode of transport because the equipment and the school bus drivers met higher safety standards. School bus drivers had background checks, extra training, and cared about children's well being. Some coordinators believed all modes of transport were safe and had no problems to report from parents or students. Others believed that one or more modes were less safe citing examples such as inappropriate cab driver behavior, or public transit stops on desolate streets in early morning darkness. No incidents of harm to any students were reported.

In general, the coordinators believed school buses to be the most reliable mode because they controlled the scheduling and routing, and often employed the personnel. Students taking public transit or third party operated vans were more often early or late to school as compared to school buses whose routes were designed to arrive at school just prior to class starting. School bus drivers were praised for paying special attention to the needs of students and knowing where to stop to pick them up.

## 5. Effectiveness for Different Ages and Locations

*Did some modes prove more effective for different age groups and geographies?*

The consensus was that elementary school students were best served by school buses, vans and private vehicles using gas vouchers, and not by public transit or taxis.

Secondary school students, especially high school students, were provided public transit tokens/vouchers and gas vouchers (in instances where they could drive and had access to a private car). Small buses were more of an embarrassment to older students while often preferred by very young students. Some coordinators reported that arriving at school by taxi would also call attention to the student being “different”, also a source of discomfort. Some coordinators made an effort to de-stigmatize students living in homeless shelters by routing buses to pick them up first and drop them off last so other students would not know where they got on and off.

In selected urban and suburban areas, public transit worked very well. In rural areas public transit was usually not an option. School districts transporting students in rural areas often had long distances to cover and routing a school bus to serve one or two students was logistically difficult and quite costly. Taxi, private auto, and shared school bus routes were employed to deal with longer trips and those that crossed school district boundaries. Several districts worked cooperatively by splitting responsibility for arrival and return transport or by scheduling and routing for transfer points between two school district’s buses. One district identifies part-time para-professionals who would like to work more hours, puts them through bus driver screening and training, and then assigns them to transport homeless students in district owned cars and vans. This arrangement provides great flexibility, responsiveness and reliability at costs below adding school bus routes (and is allowable under union rules in the district).

## 6. Changes

*Would you utilize the same arrangement next year? What changes, if any, would you make?*

The additional funds from the demonstration grant were valued and put to use. Coordinators wished there was more of them. They were thoughtful about the intent and application of McKinney-Vento to help students stay in their school of origin, employed innovations and had a variety of suggestions for future funding and programmatic efforts.

- Homeless student ridership increases over the course of the school year. Coordinators reported as much as a ten-fold increase in homeless students using transportation services from fall to spring with large increases of homeless students around the winter holiday period. This phenomenon requires constant and increased routing and funding. The state funds school districts on the basis of an annual ridership count during one October week. This schedule undercounts and under-funds homeless student transportation; it could be augmented by an additional ridership week in the winter or spring.
- Gas vouchers are very effective at keeping driving age homeless students at their school of origin. But they also were beneficial in keeping parents connected with the schools, after-school activities, and their students (enabling parents to come to school if their child was sick. etc). One district prioritized driver-training education for homeless students so they could reliably get themselves to school. However, many homeless families do not have access to a car, hence the gas voucher is frequently not a viable alternative.

- It is difficult to justify some very long (1.5 hours plus) one way trips to school as they are very time consuming to the student and costly to the district requiring a taxi or specially dedicated school bus route. Might it not be preferable to provide a 'block grant' of funds to school districts to either provide transportation OR temporary/transitional housing proximate to the school of origin? In this way the McKinney-Vento objective could be achieved with shorter trips and less cost.
- At what point is a homeless student permanently housed? Some coordinators were providing transportation to students who were living at the same address for several years. Clarifying when housing becomes permanent would be helpful.
- A van driven by a school district employee can service certain homeless students much more effectively than a large school bus. It can access certain locations such as trailer parks more easily, it can get to more far flung rural locations and does not require changes to an entire school bus route, potentially shortening trip length.

**APPENDIX E  
ADMINISTRATIVE COST REPORTING FORM**

**McKinney-Vento Transportation Administrative Costs  
Daily Tracking Form**

Please use this daily tracking form to calculate the administrative costs of providing or purchasing transportation to McKinney-Vento eligible students during the month of March 2006. Please work with your transportation director and other appropriate staff to summarize everyone's contributions into one form for each classification.

School District: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:	A	B	C	D	E	For Internal Use		
						F	G	H
	Hours for in district trips	Hours for out of district trips	Total Hours (Column A +Column B)	Average Hourly Rate	Subtotal (Column C x Column D)	Benefits (Calculated at 25%)	Average Overhead (Calculated at 10%)	Total Admin Cost
Identifying students that need transportation								
Dispatching, scheduling, eligibility identification								
Communicating and coordinating with parents and others								
Responding to inquiries								
Processing trip forms; contracts; payments								
Monitoring contracts for safety; contract compliance								
Collecting and reporting transportation data								
Other related administrative tasks								
<b>TOTAL</b>								

