



# Supporting Homeless Students in Pursuing Post-Secondary Opportunities: Breaking Barriers Through Advocacy, Policy, and Partnership

Mikaela Zimmerman

Coordinator of Special Projects: Community Schools,  
Homeless/Foster Liaison

Emily Barney

College & Career Technician

Western Placer Unified School District



# INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

- Brief Overview
- Objectives:
  - Understand the impact of homelessness on post-secondary access
  - Explore systemic barriers and challenges
  - Learn actionable strategies and funding options
  - Identify ways to advocate and build partnerships



# UNDERSTANDING STUDENT HOMELESSNESS

- Definition under the McKinney-Vento Act
- Common causes and living situations
- Statistics:
  - Approximately 4% of California K-12 students experiences homelessness in the 2022-23 school year (CDE)



# IMPACT ON STUDENTS

- Academic challenges (attendance, engagement, achievement)
- Social-emotional and mental health implications
- Impact on post-secondary planning and access
- Educational outcomes: Only 69% of students experiencing homelessness graduated in 4 years in 2017-18, compared to statewide average of 83% [CDE, Learning Policy Institute]



# POST-SECONDARY ASPIRATIONS VS. REALITY

- High Aspirations: Over 90% of homeless youth interviewed in California expressed a desire for careers requiring education beyond high school;
- Low attainment: Only 16% believed they would be able to attend or graduate college within the next five years [Learning Policy Institute, SchoolHouse Connection]



# Barriers to Higher Education

- Lack of awareness/support in high school settings
- Inconsistent academic records and documentation
- Limited access to college prep and guidance
- Financial constraints and lack of awareness about available aid [CDE]



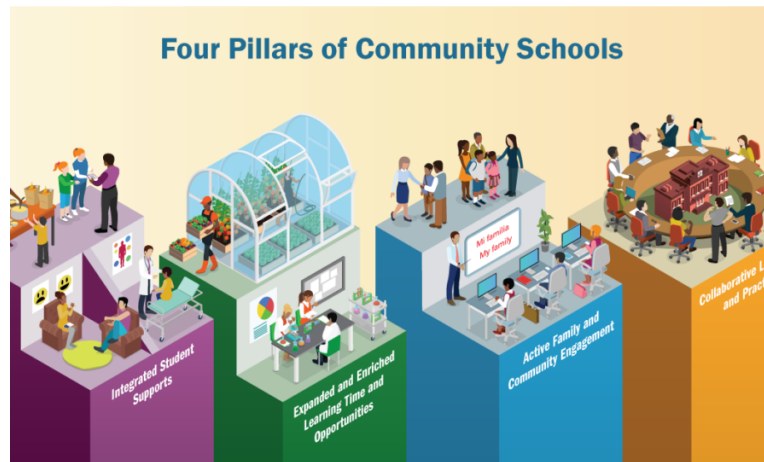
# ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Create post-secondary plans early for McKinney-Vento students (exposure and plans)
- Ensure access to college and career counseling (targeting students)
- Designate a point of contact or a transition coach (print lists)
- Empower student voice and choice in planning (google form)



# LEVERAGING FUNDING & RESOURCES

- Community Schools: Integrated supports and wraparound services [Learning Policy Institute]
- Title 1: Use of funds to support college and career readiness
- LCAP: Strategic goals and actions to support homeless youth
- Community Partners





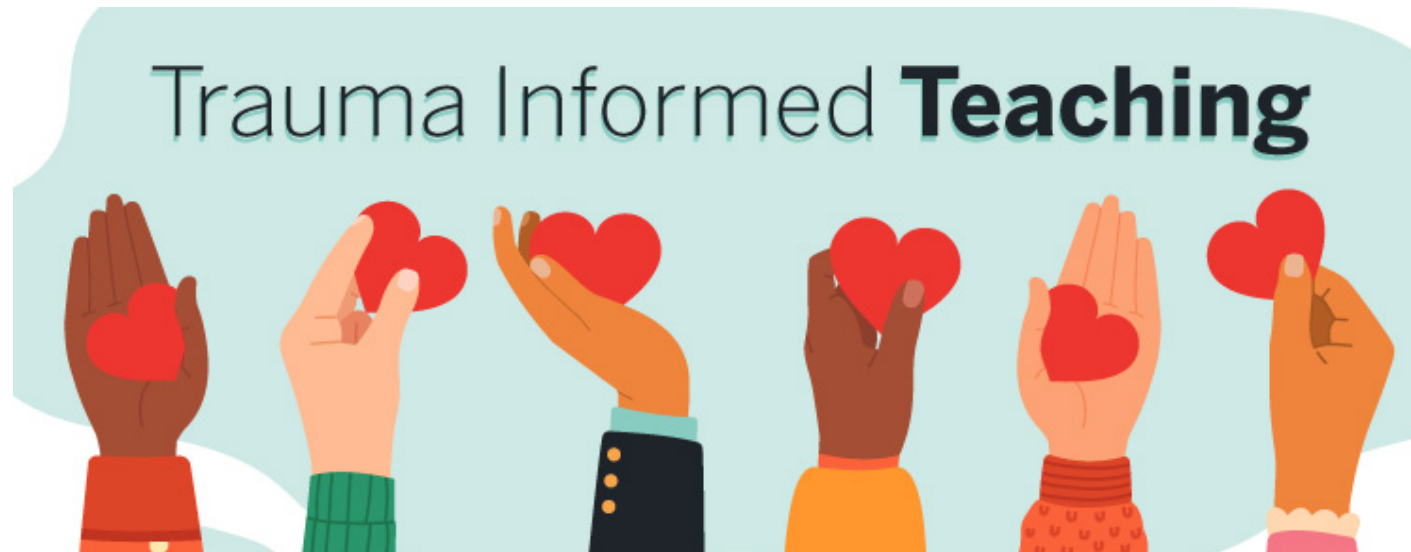
# BUILDING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- School counselors, social workers, and McKinney-Vento liaisons
- Colleges and universities (liaisons, admissions offices)
- Community-based organizations and workforce partners



# INCLUSIVE POLICIES & SCHOOL CULTURE

- Enrollment flexibility
- Fee waivers and access to extracurriculars
- Trauma-informed practices and staff training



# Case Study- Phoenix High School

- 126 students: 78% UC, 26% MV
- 1 FT School Counselor
- 1 FT College & Career Tech
- 6 Teachers



# Case Study-What We Noticed

- Students had no post-secondary plans
- Students had no belief in themselves as “college students”
- Students had no experience with college campuses and/or systems



# Case Study-What We Did- Site Level

- Created a school-wide survey
- Created curated experiences based on results
- Piloted an Academic Enrichment Program with our local CC
- Fostered community partnerships to support with monetary donations and incentives
- Offered after-school workspaces



# Case Study-What We Did- Site Level

- School-wide survey:
  - Administered to every student at the beginning of the school year (interests, college knowledge, & mental health)
  - Data to school counselor, C&C tech, and MV liaison





# Case Study-What We Did- Site Level



- Created curated experiences based on results:
  - Field trips:
    - San Jose State, UC Santa Cruz, Cabrillo College
    - Sierra College (local CC)- construction expo & CTE tours
    - Cosmetology (Paul Mitchel, Citrus Heights Beauty School)
    - American River College (culinary)
    - Sacramento State (Planetarium & tour)
    - Carrington College- Sonography program
    - Chico State- Concrete Day
    - Universal Technical Institute

## School-Wide presentations:

- Military branches- including administering the ASVAB on campus
- Local dental academy
- Sorptomist Intl.- Dream It, Be It workshop
- Horticulture
- Sound Production school
- CA State Park Ranger career
- Sierra College- Certification programs
- FAFSA Workshops (list of MV students shared)



# Case Study-What We Did- Site Level

- Piloted an Academic Enrichment Program with our local CC
  - Targeted students who needed credits
  - Lured them with the “double-dipping: of credits
  - Hand-held them during the process
  - Weekly follow-ups- including checking Canvas and assigning to tutors
  - Paid for books and/or supplies
  - Opened up the C&C center after hours
  - Bribeed them w/meals :)





# Case Study-What We Did- Site Level

- Fostered community partnerships to support with monetary donations and incentives:
  - Sierra College (local CC)- comes on-site throughout the year to sign kids up in person, host workshops and provide on-site counseling appointments
  - Kiwanis- school-day snacks
  - Chick fil-a- free food cards
  - Leatherby's (local ice cream parlor)- free food cards
  - Local donations for books/supplies



# Case Study-What We Did- District Level

- Advocated for a specific line item in the LCAP
- Created a policy for equal application of credits
- CCSPP Grant- Community-wide C&C Center



**WESTERN PLACER**  
Unified School District



Diving Deep Into Implementation

© 2024 CA Homeless Education Conference

# Case Study-What We Did- District Level

- Next year-
- Community-wide C&C Center:
  - Access to help after graduation
  - C&C Tech
  - Resources for parents & students



Caption

Diving Deep Into Implementation

© 2024 CA Homeless Education Conference

# Case Study-Results

- Increased the college-going rate (local CC stats only) from 1.32% to 12.54% in one school year!
- Had 10 continuation HS students take and pass a college course while in high school.



# ADVOCACY IN ACTION

- What advocacy looks like at the site, district, and community level
- Encouraging staff awareness and training



# SHARE IDEAS!

- What is working for you right now?
- How does this look in your district?





# THANK YOU!!!

Feel free to reach out:

Mikaela Zimmerman:

[mzimmerman@wpusd.org](mailto:mzimmerman@wpusd.org)

Emily Barney:

[ebarney@wpusd.org](mailto:ebarney@wpusd.org)

