



Building School-Housing Partnerships for Families Experiencing Homelessness

Kansas City, KS, and the 1400 Diplomas Initiative

Overview

Situated in a county with one of the highest rates of poverty in the state of Kansas, the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) identified a total of 1,400 students across 57 schools as experiencing homelessness at some time during the 2014-2015 school year. The *1400 Diplomas* initiative was launched, through the efforts of the local McKinney-Vento Program, to draw attention to this issue, and focus on the importance of a multi-system, broad-based community response to address homelessness and its impact on educational outcomes.

In 2015, the Mayor Mark Holland and KCKPS Superintendent Dr. Cynthia Lane jointly supported a Call to Action for collaborative partnerships across social services and affordable housing providers to end family and youth homelessness, with a focus on educational outcomes, including school stability and high school completion. As a result of the Call to Action, a community collaborative called Kansas Community Leadership Enterprise (KCLE), made up of the public and private sectors, implemented 'Impact Wednesday' to expedite access to emergency assistance and supportive services throughout the school year to meet the needs of households identified by the McKinney-Vento Program.

Functioning as a 'one-stop' opportunity to address the range of needs for families and children, Impact Wednesday brings together in one facility every Wednesday morning agencies and resources from homelessness services, TANF, Medicaid, child support, child care, employment services, utility companies, public housing and private landlords, and many others.

As described in more detail below, the coordinated and comprehensive community approach of Impact Wednesday is working.

- Families are being housed rapidly and staying housed.
- School stability is increasing.
- Mainstream systems are coordinating with the homelessness assistance system and streamlining access to supportive services and benefits.
- Community resources are being used more efficiently.
- Public and private partners are collaborating to increase the number of households being served.

Because of its success in Kansas City, the Impact Wednesday model is being adopted and adapted by neighboring school districts and communities.

Target Population

The *1400 Diplomas* initiative focuses on students and families identified by the KCKPS McKinney-Vento Program. Participation is voluntary. Households who are referred to Impact Wednesdays and choose to participate commit to ensuring their child(ren) attend school regularly.

Key Partners

In addition to access to an array of housing options, partnerships with mainstream resources and systems, such as TANF, employment services, and child care, are critical to the success of Impact Wednesday. A benefit to having mainstream systems engaged has been the ability to address challenges or barriers facing families. For example, the number one barrier identified by families being served through Impact Wednesday was a standard 30-day waiting period for childcare. To address this challenge, the Department of Children and Families now waives the waiting period for eligible families that enroll in employment services on Impact Wednesday. As a result, families can access a childcare voucher to start the following Monday, eliminating the waiting period.

As community partners become engaged in Impact Wednesday and related efforts, there has been an increase in collaboration to advance the impact of the *1400 Diplomas* initiative across the public and private sector. For example, one community agency identified additional grant funds to support increased case management capacity and access to flexible funding to supplement existing resources. Aligning efforts to alleviate and address poverty with actions under the *1400 Diplomas* initiative, faith-based organizations are also partnering with schools through local liaisons.

Key Strategies

Using a social business model, the *1400 Diplomas* initiative is framed by three key strategies — emergency assistance, access to housing, and legislative and policy action that wrap resources around the school district. The Impact Wednesday model supports implementation of strategies to mobilize and streamline access to emergency assistance and faith-based organizations to address identified housing barriers, as well as the development of new housing units to meet the needs of households identified through the McKinney-Vento Program. This includes using an outreach and engagement strategy to build relationships with landlords to prioritize referrals to targeted units, in addition to ongoing efforts to work with the local housing authority and multifamily owners to develop new units of affordable housing. Direct engagement by the mayor’s office has helped the development of housing units and helped to prioritize the local government’s efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

Key Lessons Learned

- There are multiple factors impacting student performance and educational outcomes. Many of these can be addressed by eliminating barriers to housing.
- Communities need an array of housing assistance (prevention, emergency housing, supportive housing, rental assistance, and public housing), as well as the services that are necessary to keep families housed.
- Schools do not have the capacity to meet all the needs of the students and their families; the school district has a big role to play, but preventing and ending homelessness among children, youth, and families requires a lot of other partners.
- Communities must understand the systems that impact families. Research and evidence that supports the intersection between homelessness and educational, health, socio-emotional, and overall well-being outcomes helps to build the case for a broad-based and coordinated systems approach.
- Partnerships matter. Take time to build relationships.
- Be bold! It takes thinking on a big scale to have a dramatic impact and strong leadership to drive efforts.

Outcomes

Between its launch in August 2015 and August 2016, 300 families have been served through Impact Wednesday.

Housing

- With better coordination of existing resources, the Case Management Team prevented homelessness for 10 families and permanently housed 58 families during the first year using a rapid re-housing approach – 53 of the 58 families remain housed to-date. No new resources were used.
- KCK Housing Authority’s project-based housing partnership expanded to target families identified through the school district.

Education

- School attendance increased to be consistent with the district average.
- Concerted efforts to keep students in their school of origin have resulted in reduced school mobility during the 2015-2016 school year, with the vast majority of students being served through the McKinney-Vento program experiencing one or fewer non-normative moves.
- Transportation costs borne by the school district for transporting students identified as experiencing homelessness have decreased by 22% as a direct result of increased school stability.
- School graduation rates will be tracked long-term. The national average is 82.3%, while 64.4% of students experiencing homelessness within KCKPS graduated in 2015.

Looking Ahead

Building Capacity

The Wyandotte County, Kansas, and Jackson County, Missouri, Continuums of Care (CoCs) have merged into one bi-state regional CoC (the Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness), with the KCKPS McKinney-Vento Liaison in the role of Board Vice Chair. This will allow for increased alignment of regional resources and support a more effective and efficient approach to service delivery. All shelters are located on the Missouri side of the Kansas City region, which means that families are frequently traveling back and forth between the two areas, adding a layer of complexity and constraining efforts to provide seamless supports for families due to differences in funding and governance structures. Coordinated entry, although early in implementation, will be a mechanism to support the merging of both CoCs under a single continuum. As landlord engagement increases and additional housing units are identified, the program will continue to increase capacity in the number of families that can be served.

Unaccompanied Youth

The increasing numbers of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness identified by schools have spurred efforts to identify legislative and policy actions that can be taken to address youth needs, including a proposal on the November ballot in Jackson County, Missouri for a levy that would go to the Children’s Services Fund for services for families and children including those experiencing homelessness. Two metropolitan area colleges have also agreed to pilot housing for unaccompanied high school students in available dorm rooms.

Learn More

Replicating Impact Wednesday

The lead community-based organization, Avenue of Life, has taken on the majority of the staffing and financial commitment, employing two full-time case managers and a social work intern specifically devoted to Impact Wednesday. During the 2015-2016 school year, Impact Wednesday cost approximately \$500,000 and projected expenditures for the 2016-2017 school year are approximately \$750,000. This includes barrier removal costs, staffing, and miscellaneous and overhead costs. The program partnered with existing agencies and utilized funding from local non-profit and faith-based organizations (no federal funding). [Learn more about the first year of the 1400 Diplomas initiative and Impact Wednesday.](#)