

Student Homelessness, COVID-19, and Social-Emotional Strengths and Needs: A Case Study

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Abstract

Research indicates that student high mobility can create stress and trauma, disrupting learning and dismantling relationships with peers, teachers, and mentors. Students who experience homelessness and high mobility (HHM) are faced with traumatic events that negatively impact their mental well-being and their academic performance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, experts predicted that coupled with long hours at home during quarantine, students were returning to school having experienced great losses, deaths in their families, broken connections with peers and adults, and other adverse experiences. This qualitative case study bounded by a collection of districts including Midcity's Public Schools, a large southwestern city, were unprepared for the switch to distance learning and that teachers lacked the training to deal with the social and emotional needs of children. I observed these districts through three phases of COVID-19 and assessed how Social and Emotional Learning practices were being delivered during the pandemic. Teachers were being expected to bring education back to "business as usual" and prepping for state test mastery while dealing with students exhibiting symptoms of trauma, including students openly memorializing dead loved ones in jewelry and in their writing. Based on the findings of my study, I recommend that schools throughout the country consider universalizing SEL skills to help make students who are HHM feel like they belong at their new location.

Keywords: homeless, highly mobile, COVID-19, social and emotional skills, trauma, trauma informed care