

Research Summary

Homelessness & Education Cross-System Collaboration:
A Literature Review & Tools



National Center for Homeless Education
www.serve.org/nche

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Homelessness and Education Cross-System Collaboration: Applied Research Summary and Tools

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Supporting the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

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Introduction

Since the economic recession of 2008, the number of children that school districts have identified as homeless has increased significantly (NAEHYC, 2014). In fact, the number of school-age children who experienced homelessness reached approximately 1.23 million in 2013, which is the highest level since such data were first collected (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014; NAEHCY, 2014).

Children who are homeless represent one of the highest need and most challenging to serve groups. They are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, and are highly mobile because of their unstable living situations. Many of them have economic, health, educational, social, and mental health needs that cannot be addressed by a single service system and have experienced other traumas, such as experiencing or witnessing domestic violence. Homeless education liaisons—those potential “boundary spanners,” a role we explore in this document—have a powerful and important role to play in serving the needs of these young people to prevent a repeat cycle of adversity. The right support for these youth includes an array of remedial education and other nonacademic support services that will enable them to stay in school and thrive. To be successful, education liaisons must navigate across several systems of care—a process that requires knowledge and competencies to forge collaboration with other youth and family serving systems in the community. This research summary examines the research on collaboration generally and field experiences between two systems of care: education and homeless services.

The effects of homelessness on children’s well-being vary depending on age, duration of homelessness, living conditions, and family health (Miller, 2011a). Despite this variation, children who are homeless are at a higher risk than their housed peers of facing health, social, or academic challenges within the educational and child welfare systems. Homeless students are more likely to miss school, repeat a grade, have behavior problems at school, experience developmental delays, and show high rates of mobility and family separation. All these risk factors adversely affect school performance and limit potential opportunities to escape poverty (Canfield, 2015; Hong & Piescher, 2012; Losinski, Katsiyannis, & Ryan, 2013; Miller, 2011). Children who are homeless are more likely to experience traumatic events that threaten their sense of safety and security, including violence, unsafe living conditions, parental stress and mental health challenges, and risk of separation from family members. Exposure to trauma can have a significant, negative effect on healthy development and can lead to a range of emotional and behavioral health problems, impairing a student’s ability to cope with the requirements of a normal school day (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014).

The significant increase in the number of children experiencing homelessness raises concerns about the capacities of education liaisons and other service providers as well as the urgency for systems to develop better forms of collaboration to best support the needs of these students. During the past decade, there have been significant increases in collaborative approaches for assisting students experiencing homelessness, particularly after the passing of the HEARTH Act of 2009. This legislation requires greater interaction between the education and homeless service systems. Increasingly, educators and homeless service providers are observing the benefits of

collaboration to serve homeless students and their families, and they are being required to do so through federal regulations. Because of the multidimensional challenges associated with homelessness, practitioners—especially homeless education liaisons—must navigate multiple service systems, as well across the communities in which families live, to address the needs of the children and youth whom they serve. This process can seem daunting when communication and collaboration are not effectively practiced by service providers (Moore, 2005).

For years, many have presented on interagency coordination, a necessity for this topic, and used various frameworks, usually with a continuum on which one can move back and forth over time. This document seeks to support coordinators who are stuck in a collaboration that is important to them or their students but who do not know how to advance the collaboration along the continuum. Things may have begun well but failed to progress. Drawing on new materials—some with a systems perspective—this document offers a fresh look at an age-old problem that is nevertheless dynamic, changing as our programs and the population change.

The purpose here is to provide education liaisons and homeless service providers with a framework, strategies, and tools for more effective collaboration to improve the academic outcomes, well-being, and lifelong trajectory of young people who have experienced homelessness or trauma. The goals are to provide:

1. A framework for collaboration that accounts for stakeholders' assumptions (or mental models), vision, incentives, rules and regulations, organizational cultures, needs, and experiences.
2. Resources and tools for practitioners to use in their efforts to collaborate more effectively.

The document is designed for practitioners working at the intersection of school districts and homeless services to ensure that young people (prekindergarten through secondary grades) have access to the same quality education as their housed peers, receive support services, and thrive. The audience includes homeless liaisons, school counselors, teachers, and administrators, as well as homeless services caseworkers and service providers who work with prekindergarten and school-aged children.

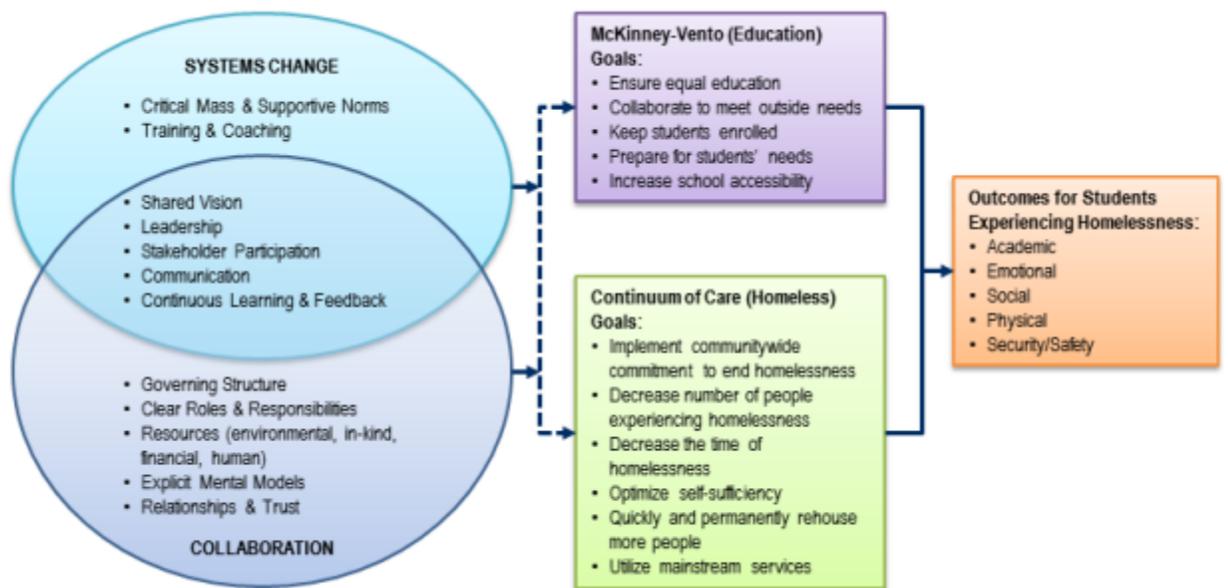
The material is divided into two sections. Part I of the document reviews the literature regarding system collaboration and integration between the education and homeless service systems to provide a useful framework for practitioners and describe the stages in developing collaborative practice.

Part II provides concrete tools for collaboration across the homeless services and education systems, specifically among homeless liaisons, school social workers, and homeless services providers. Service providers for homeless youth include members of Continuums of Care (CoCs) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), State Coordinators for Homeless Education, and local homeless education liaisons working with the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The tools include two categories: (A) those specific to homeless-education content, and (B) general tools useful for collaboration in any setting.

Framework

The framework represented in Figure 1 shows the interconnection of key goals and guiding principles in the cross-system collaboration of education and homeless services.

Figure 1. Key Goals and Guiding Principles: Collaboration of Education and Homeless Services



Note. This framework represents a high-level evaluation of core elements and is not necessarily an exhaustive list.

The framework includes:

- ▶ **Elements of systems change.** Key elements for systems change include having a shared vision among primary stakeholders to align efforts toward common goals, effective leadership that can drive the change effort, and engaging key stakeholders. Frequent change within a complex system requires clear and consistent communication, professional development, and regular “check-ins” among the different systems to ensure advancement toward goals.
- ▶ **Key elements in successful collaboration.** Systems change and collaboration share many core elements. Critical elements for any collaborative effort include clear roles and responsibilities defined among the different systems, an efficient governing structure, access to resources (environmental, in-kind, financial, human, etc.), an understanding of mental models (those assumptions and beliefs that people and organizations carry with them—internally—that can drive action or resistance), and most importantly, strong relationships and trust among the collaborators.

- ▶ **McKinney-Vento (Education) Goals.** McKinney-Vento (Education) is also referred to as the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. Collaboration between the education and homeless service systems must consider the goals of the EHCY Program and its particular emphasis on homeless education. The high-level goals of EHCY include ensuring access to equal education for students experiencing homelessness, making sure students stay enrolled in school (ideally in the student's school of origin), preparing for the students' needs in and out of school, making sure school and afterschool programs remain accessible (which may require adjusting costs or providing transportation assistance, flexibility on time requirements, and other considerations given the student's living situation), and fostering collaboration among community service providers to meet the needs of students who are homeless beyond those offered within the school system.

Continuum of Care (Homeless) Goals. The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program establishes CoCs, a group of representatives from organizations in a geographic area that are necessary to end homelessness in that geographic area (including representatives from school systems). The member organizations of the CoC are collectively responsible for carrying out the duties that enable them to meet the purposes of the CoC Program, which are (1) promoting a communitywide commitment to ending homelessness, (2) providing funding efforts to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused by homelessness, (3) promoting access to effective utilization of mainstream programs by persons experiencing homelessness, and (4) optimizing self-sufficiency among persons experiencing homelessness. Collaboration among community partners is required to effectively meet the purposes of the Program which are measured by specific system-level measures including, decreasing the number of people experiencing homelessness, decreasing the amount of time people experience homelessness, and decreasing the extent to which individuals and families who leave homelessness experience additional spells of homelessness.

Positive outcomes for homeless students. Ultimately, the goal of collaboration between the education and homeless service systems is to improve housing stability, which will consequently improve the academic outcomes and well-being (social, emotional, and physical) of students experiencing homelessness. This framework is intended to serve as a guide as you explore how to collaborate more effectively across educational and homeless service systems

Part I: Education and the HUD Continuum of Care Program

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, amended the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, creating the CoC Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program. In addition, it codified in law the CoC planning process which had previously been a longstanding part of HUD's application process requiring greater coordination amongst stakeholders (including representatives from school systems) in responding to the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in their community.

The CoC Program interim rule (24 CFR Part 578) establishes the CoC as the larger planning organization responsible for developing and implementing a plan to prevent and end homelessness in their community; however, ESG and CoC Program resources alone will not be enough. In order to develop and implement a plan that successfully ends homelessness, CoCs will need to include all of the stakeholder organizations, including representatives from school systems, that have a stake in ending homelessness locally and resources, including mainstream resources, to bring to the table.

As it particularly relates to the collaboration with local educational agencies, CoCs are required to:

- ▶ Assist in Identifying individuals and families experiencing homelessness
- ▶ Inform individuals and families experiencing homelessness of their children's educational rights and eligibility for education services
- ▶ Further, recipients that receive funding through the CoC Program are required to:
 - ▶ Consider the educational needs of children when families are placed in housing and, to the maximum extent practicable, place families with children as close to possible to their school of origin
 - ▶ Establish policies and practices that are consistent with and do not restrict the exercise of homeless students' educational rights
 - ▶ Designate a staff person to ensure that homeless children are enrolled in school and connected to services within the community
 - ▶ These requirements are further reinforced by HUD's annual CoC Program Competition funding process, which requires communities to report on system (and not program) performance measures and cross-system collaboration practices in an effort to win points and better compete for funds. In requiring more coordination and collaboration between systems, these policies take a decidedly *systemic* (as opposed to just a *programmatic*) approach. They seek to identify and resolve system overlap, improve and promote best practices, and remove siloed approaches to providing services for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.

To further a CoC's ability to efficiently and systematically address homelessness and to help communities prioritize individuals and families experiencing homelessness for assistance based on their vulnerability and severity of service needs, HUD requires each CoC to establish and operated a Coordinated Entry process. Coordinated entry standardizes the access to and prioritization for homeless system resources across the entire community and coordinates referrals to housing and service program vacancies according to community defined values and principles (as opposed to the discretion of a particular case manager or program). The process must cover the CoC's entire geographic area [of the CoC], be easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services, be well advertised, and include a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool. For many communities, these requirements demand **unprecedented** levels of collaboration. (Additional resources on the HUD Continuum of Care can be found in Part II of this document. Also, other TA resources will be added frequently over the coming months: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/toolkit/responsibilities-and-duties/>)

To ensure the coordinated entry process appropriately assesses and identifies those children, youth, and families that are eligible for education services, housing, and other homelessness related services, HUD encourages providers from the education system (such as homeless liaisons) to become actively involved in CoC discussions on how the coordinated entry process will be operated. This encouragement is based on the belief that the process can only be designed to meet the needs of both systems if the CoC and homeless liaisons collaborate and coordinate with one another. Effective collaboration between groups can be sustained by sharing information about challenges faced by the homeless population and challenges in identifying families and youth in need of services, devising possible solutions for addressing gaps in services, and developing standardized ways for evaluating the best interests of children in terms of school placement and other services (National Center for Homeless Education, 2013).

Note: A document with practical steps and considerations for CoCs to collaborate with schools was released by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth in 2013 and be accessed at <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/briefs/hud.pdf>.

Challenges of Cross-System Collaboration

Student homelessness is a pervasive issue that has an impact on urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the United States. State agencies, local public schools, and other stakeholders (i.e., nonprofit organizations and public housing agencies) play important roles in advocating and addressing the needs of homeless children and youth. Although these groups serve the same population, the differences in organizational culture and vision often create systemic barriers, preventing homeless students from achieving academically at the same rate as their nonhomeless peers (Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, 2015b; Hong & Piescher, 2012). Research conducted during the past several decades has identified cross-system collaboration as a highly effective strategy to address these barriers. One example involves services that respond to student homelessness by providing access to stable housing, education and employment opportunities, quality health care, and parenting support (Gajda, 2004; Gallagher, 2015).

To collaborate effectively, schools and homeless service systems must overcome many challenges. First, identifying students who are homeless is not an easy task for schools and the local homeless liaison. Stigmas associated with homelessness along with negative ideas or experiences with child welfare involvement prevent many families and youth from openly discussing their living conditions or seeking help (Cunningham, Harwood, & Hall, 2010; Losinski et al., 2013). The reluctance of homeless students to share information depends on the age of the student; younger students are more prone to share challenges with school personnel than older youth or unaccompanied youth who remain silent due to the fear of being detained by police or directed to social services (Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino, & Bourgeois, 2015; Wynne et al., 2014).

Reluctance on the part of homeless students to speak up could be affected by the number of episodes of homelessness that a student has experienced, particularly if child welfare was involved. The likelihood that a child would be placed into foster care increases after the first episode of homelessness that a family experiences, especially after their first shelter admission (Ernst, Meyer, DePanfilis, 2004; Farrell, Lujan, Britner, Randall, & Goodrich, 2012; Park, Metraux, Brodbar, & Culhane, 2004). Other studies have found that homelessness can delay the family reunification process for children in out-of-home care (Courtney, McMurtry, & Zinn, 2004; Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metrauz, & Culhane, 2003; Farrell et al., 2012). For families and students who do choose to receive services, the quality of those services is dependent on three key components: confidentiality, integrated data collection systems, and collaboration among service providers.

Within the school community, there can be much discussion about what information to disclose to other teachers and school personnel and what information should remain private. A survey study by Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino, et al. (2015) found that both homeless parents and school social workers were cautious of sharing their status for fear of having the children stigmatized. Consequently, failures to disclose information to school staff created limitations for collaborative practices within the school (Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino, et al., 2015). To ensure and maintain confidentiality of students, policy makers have recommended that school districts adopt coding

systems when collecting data on student homelessness (NYS-TEACHS, 2009). School districts have also adopted policies and expectations about confidentiality and sharing information. The Homeless Liaison Toolkit featured in Part II A, Content-Specific Tools, offers additional information regarding these expectations and strategies for ensuring that proper procedures are being followed when sharing students' information.

Regardless of the quality of, amount of funding for, and effectiveness of school services, the high rate of mobility that accompanies homelessness is the biggest obstacle that threatens the extent to which schools can assist homeless students. The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program provides children and families with the option of choosing whether they wish to stay at their school of origin or transfer to another public school closer to their new location. Meanwhile, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) provides little guidance on what types of regulations and accountability measures schools should use when a student wishes to transfer (Wynne et al., 2014). As a result, student support teams may end up working mainly within the school and community to address the needs of their students rather than working across school districts. Thus, the extent to which students can attend the same school consistently can significantly alter the appropriateness of the services and support they are provided in school (Hong & Piescher, 2012). Examples of services that require an extended period of consistent attendance before implementation include Individualized Education Plans, which provides academic support to students with learning disabilities, and multi-tiered response intervention plans to address mental health needs. Students experiencing homelessness often need additional academic services and supports. Among those students, the rates of learning disabilities and mental health needs are proportionally higher than that of their peers. However, high mobility rates impede the ability to receive the services they need to overcome academic challenges (Losinski et al., 2013; Sulkowski & Michael, 2014).

In response to reducing rates of mobility, several housing providers and other community organizations have begun investigating and experimenting with new ways for linking housing, healthcare, and education services to best support children (Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, 2015b; Gallagher, 2015). Although these efforts are beneficial to families, the quality and quantity of services depend on local-level autonomy and community involvement, leaving families from less organized communities disenfranchised (Gallagher, 2015; Perlman, n.d.).

Many schools are working within the school Student Support Teams (SSTs) to collaborate among the school and community professional staff and to develop an intervention plan to address the needs of each student. The SST facilitator will assign someone from the team (school or community social worker, school counselor, or mental health counselor) to ensure that the student's intervention plan is implemented and needs are addressed. The SST to refine the intervention plan as needed if new issues arise. This multi-tiered response system works to make certain that students' needs are addressed and resources are provided for the student and his or her family.

Schools might not welcome outside agencies because of trust issues or a "closed" organizational culture. Schools must create an atmosphere for outside agencies to be welcomed into the school to provide a service and invite the agency professionals (such as mental health services,

homeless services caseworkers, healthcare providers, etc.) into the school to SST meetings and consultations with school staff to plan together and work collaboratively. Conversely, service agencies may not be agreeable to working within the school setting. Agencies providing services to homeless students must be willing to move outside the clinic setting and work within the school or offsite settings where the student and family are located.

The need for schools and other agencies to work together to identify and make it possible for young people to disclose their living circumstances is apparent. Furthermore, schools need to collaborate to help ensure that young people can stay in the same community, close to family, friends, and needed support services. To improve outcomes for young people, schools must collaborate with a range of community agencies. In doing so, education and homeless service systems will need to grapple with the stubborn issues outlined as follows (Fairman, 2011):

What Are the Seemingly Incompatible Interests Across the Agencies?

- ▶ Who will contribute and share what resources? What are the benefits to each individual? Who makes decisions?
- ▶ What are the trade-offs on the key issues?
- ▶ Who gets credit for what services?
- ▶ Who is accountable for what tasks?

Is There a Clash of Values (Goals and Purpose) and Identities?

- ▶ Do parties differ in views of how the world “is” or “should be”?
- ▶ Who has moral or legal right to do something?
- ▶ Who should bear the costs or risks of public action?
- ▶ Who is respected and viewed as legitimate in the community?

Are There Preexisting Negative Relationships?

- ▶ Is there historic tension among organizations?
- ▶ Is there a lack of trust or do misperceptions exist among groups?

Are There Insufficient Synergies?

- ▶ Do the hoped-for synergies (joint resources and different talents) pan out?
- ▶ Do the transaction costs (time, money, and opportunity costs) of collaborating outweigh the benefits?

The next section offers strategies for cross-system collaboration.

Strategies for Cross-System Collaboration

A simple definition of collaboration is working together with others to achieve a goal. It is the process that groups, teams, organizations, systems, or communities can use to plan, create, solve problems, and make decisions (Straus, 2002). Collaboration is a necessary requirement of *system integration*, which requires a deeper alignment of goals, as well as the coordination of policies and procedures, communication, data sharing, and incentives that can drive action for stakeholders.

Often, schools and homeless services systems are at various earlier stages before full collaboration, engaging in simpler activities, such as networking, or coordinating with each other in informal ways. [These stages, with examples, are reviewed in the Template for Beginning Collaboration Among Homeless Education Administrators in Part II A, Content-Specific Tools.]

To achieve collaboration, however, research demonstrates that the following elements are critical.

Building a Shared Vision

A shared vision across all levels of diverse stakeholders—federal level, district level, community level, and school level—is a beacon that can help to align services across educators and homeless service providers, administrators, and others to improve academic and lifelong outcomes for children and youth. Author Peter Senge, in his classic book, *The Fifth Discipline*, defined a shared vision as “shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance” (Senge, 1994).

In 2009, Kouzes and Posner interviewed tens of thousands of working people about leadership; respondents said that they “want visions of the future that reflect their own aspirations. They want to hear how their dreams will come true and their hopes will be fulfilled” (Kouzes & Posner, 2009).

Even smaller collaborative efforts, for example, between a school and a homeless service agency, can benefit from having a well-articulated shared vision among the stakeholders involved (e.g., school administrator, student, parent, homeless liaison, and homeless services caseworker). A shared vision can be created through a focused discussion by simply asking, “What does success look like for homeless students in our community?” and digging down into people’s responses to truly understand different answers, and consider other visions to find common ground. Ultimately, a group of stakeholders that articulate a shared vision clearly will return to it regularly as an effective tool to inspire the group in its daily work and keep collaboration on track. [The Education and Homeless Jeopardy Game can be a helpful tool for the initial stages of developing a shared vision. See Part II A, Content-Specific Tools, for more information.]

Leadership

Leadership is an essential element to achieving sustainable cross-system collaboration (Burt & Anderson, 2006; Burt & Spellman, 2008; Strauss, 2002).

Significant cultural barriers exist between the shelter and homeless service systems and the education systems, which make communication difficult or ineffective. Education and homeless services leaders need to understand and address these differences (Miller, 2011). Examples include different definitions of homelessness, priorities, expectations, and guiding laws and regulations for each system. These barriers can apply to leadership at every level of collaboration, from the local school and shelter, to secretaries of ED and HUD. Among leaders, the biggest barrier is a lack of familiarity in the organizational cultures within homeless service systems and schools (Miller, 2011). Thus, boundary spanners (a particular type of leader—not necessarily always a leader in title), who can bridge these cultures, play a crucial role in maintaining and expanding capacities for effective cross-system collaboration. (See “Finding Boundary Spanners” in Part II. B. General Tools for Collaboration.)

Currently, one example of a key point of intersection is the HUD Continuum of Care (see “Education and the HUD CoC Program” section). Each community that receives HUD funding is required to establish or participate in a CoC and establish a CoC Board. This is paid for by funding through HUD’s CoC program, but stakeholders with other HUD funding (e.g., ESG, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS, or non-HUD funding) are expected to participate. Board representation requires diverse stakeholders from different sectors of society and community organizations. Leaders within the board will need to articulate the vision and mobilize others to come on board, be active listeners, establish transparency, build trust with the community, and understand the incentives and mental models that various partners bring to the table. (See the “Stakeholder Analysis” in Part II. B. General Tools for Collaboration.)

Buy-In Across Systems and Organizations

“Buy-in” is a commitment to the collaboration rather than simple compliance. Also, deeper, more sustainable collaboration, across systems, occurs when collaboration is happening at many different levels between staff in organizations or systems (e.g., leadership, mid-level staff, and front line staff) and requires organizational commitments, not just those between individuals. (Strauss, 2002, Burt & Anderson 2006). To sustain the collaboration across systems, buy-in to the collaboration goals and processes is required. Buy-in overlaps with two other categories in this section: trust and shared vision. When stakeholders trust their leaders and collaborators (see the different levels of trust in that section) and have a shared vision of where the collaboration is heading, buy-in is more likely to occur. [See the “Hypothetical CoC Meeting” in Part II. B. General Tools for Collaboration.]

Responsiveness to Stakeholder Feedback

In any complex system, no person, plan, or assumptions will remain constant. Elements will change based on shifting conditions in the community of stakeholders: funding, leadership, public perceptions, and regulations. When significant change occurs, stakeholders will need to

reassess the vision and how effective efforts are at achieving stated goals. It is vital to constantly ascertain, How are we doing? Are our shared mental models still accurate? Are we on track to our goals? These questions can be answered with data reports but should also be supported with other regular formal mechanisms, such as focus groups or interviews. Such feedback can include *technical feedback*, such as data showing student achievement or the number families placed in housing, job needs of families, experiences of trauma in the family, and health issues, as well as *nontechnical feedback*, such as trust in collaborators, faith in the process, or ways things might be improved.

It is important that leaders strategically align values, practices, policies, and resources to achieve identified outcomes; continuously monitor progress toward results through ongoing evaluation (Burt, 2006), and communicate those results to promote shared accountability to achieving outcomes. Fostering the capacity of leaders to communicate effectively has helped build bridges and ensured that there are opportunities for problem solving. All these efforts are a part of an evaluation of the cross-system collaboration and tie back to the role of effective leadership to ensure feedback freely given and received.

Mental Models

Mental models are the beliefs and assumptions each of us carry with us. Although rarely identified directly in our work with others, they can play a major role in affecting people's action or inaction (Mathieu, Goodwin, Heffner, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 2000; Senge, 1994). A person's cultural, religious, or socioeconomic status can influence his or her mental model. A mental model can also be informed by the organization or system in which a person works. Mental models, when aligned among staff across systems, can positively affect productivity of collaborators. Such alignment requires addressing mental models directly and having processes to do so (Mathieu et al., 2000). It is important to note that people within school systems have mental models and education systems might institutionalize the model(s) over time. For example, members of a school system working with homeless children might share a mental model that believes a child's educational well-being is the priority to set him or her up for a hopeful future. Given limited budgets and staff time, they might believe that focusing on educational needs should receive the most attention over other needs of a child. The caseworker at the homeless shelter where the student is living might agree that education is important but sets a much higher priority on stable housing above all else so that the student can have a stable home to decrease stress, improve health, and thus allow the child to focus on school work in a stable setting.

Mental models have three key components:

- ▶ They provide an accurate reflection of your reality.
- ▶ They serve as the basis for a plan of action.
- ▶ Collaborators need to work together using their shared mental model(s) to achieve shared goals.

Asking simple questions can help cross-system groups identify mental models. Adjusted for those serving homelessness students, they might include:

- ▶ How can we best serve homeless students complex needs?
- ▶ How well are we aligned to meet their needs?
- ▶ What differentiates our approaches?
- ▶ How will we meet our various demands (in each system) and serve homeless students effectively?

Examples of Mental Models in Practice

Systems thinker and organizational consultant, David Peter Stroh, noted that, “sometimes people’s assumptions are so deeply embedded in the overall dynamic that it is easier to list them separately” (Stroh, 2015). He worked closely with stakeholders in Connecticut committed to redesign the early childhood development and education system. Together, they explored stakeholders’ assumptions and beliefs (“mental models”) about what made the system effective, by asking the group target questions. In so doing, they were surprised to realize some of the mental models that guided their actions actually contradicted their own experiences. For example, their mental models (or beliefs) included the following (Stroh, 2015):

- ▶ “Formal structures (such as new laws or institutions) should be emphasized over informal structures (such as social networks in poor communities).”
- ▶ “State control over the new system is more crucial than local control.”
- ▶ “Quantitative measures are more important than qualitative ones in assessing what works.”

In reflection, they realized their mental models were driven more by the political sponsors affiliated with their programs. By recognizing the difference between their mental models and their experiences, they were able to adjust their mental models consciously and collectively through group discussion, and thus shift the actions of the group in a way that aligned their collaborative efforts more effectively.

In Calhoun County, Michigan, CoC members developed a map of their homeless services system. Then they went to key points on the map and (through facilitated discussion) identified some mental models that were guiding attitudes and actions within the system, some of which contradicted the espoused purpose of the system. For example, service providers wanted to increase the willingness to collaborate with one another and the time to do so. But they discovered that they held mental models that said, “We need to protect our own funding.” Funders wanted to promote long-term collaboration but held mental models that said, “Our board expects short-term results.” Members of the CoC agreed that the ultimate solution to homelessness in their community was to provide permanent supportive housing (housing plus critical services). However, emergency shelter staff and others held the mental model that, “We have to help people *now*, it is the humane thing to do.” That is not to imply that they are wrong to think that people need emergency support. But by identifying the mental model, the Calhoun County CoC realized that there were competing pressures to address short-term fixes and long-term fixes. The result was that stakeholders developed solutions to meet short-term goals that were temporary and moved people along toward permanent solutions quicker, keeping the

ultimate focus of the collaboration on the permanent solution. Similarly, funders recognized the need to incentivize grantees to collaborate and design grants accordingly.

Trust (Required to Promote Collaboration)

It may seem obvious, but trust is an essential building block to any collaboration. When developing systems of collaboration, it is important to note that creating effective collaboration takes time, because groups must first establish a basis of a trust (Miller, 2011).

Building trust often comes from building relationships over time and from regular communication. A pattern of transparency, “active listening,” and a spirit of inclusiveness are important to fostering trust. By identifying mental models of, say, a school system or a social service system as well as individuals working in those systems, a shared understanding is created of where people are coming from. In doing so people may articulate differing visions and goals, but everything is “on the table.” When people believe there are no hidden agendas, a feeling of trust can be cultivated. The four types of trust are (Gottesdeiner, 2007; Reina & Reina, 2006):

1. Contractual trust—Stakeholders are clear on goals and roles and responsibilities and share mutual interests.
2. Communication trust—Stakeholders have ongoing open communications, where mistakes are shared, confidentiality is maintained.
3. Competence trust—Stakeholders believe in one another’s ability to fulfill their responsibilities.
4. Relational trust—Stakeholders have built relationships and believe in the good intentions of one another. As mentioned in the definition of systems thinking, feedback is important in relational trust. Providing opportunities for communication among collaborators builds trust; this can be as simple as a regular meeting agenda item asking: “How are we doing?” “What needs to be improved in our meetings, in our processes to service homeless families and support academic progress among students who are homeless?” There might not be a lot to discuss each time, but knowing that there will be an opportunity to be heard is an important way to help maintain trust among collaborators.

Tips for Building Trust

Several tips for developing trust are given in the following (Jay Cone of Interaction Associates). These strategies were developed for organizational settings of any kind and apply to schools and homeless services. These tips are featured in Jay Cone’s paper “Facilitating Trust” (Cone, 2012, p. 5.):

To Increase Transparency

- ▶ Express the rationale for your actions and decisions
- ▶ Externalize your thought process: “I’m trying to figure out...and right now I’m thinking that...”

- ▶ Hold frequent meetings to communicate both what’s known and what’s not known.

To Increase Appreciation

- ▶ Focus on what is working.
- ▶ Say “thank you.”
- ▶ Learn what matters to the people with whom you work.
- ▶ Offer appropriate rewards and recognition.

To Increase Empathy

- ▶ Listen actively without judgment.
- ▶ Share your own feelings about facing uncertain situations.
- ▶ Check your understanding: “Are you saying that...?”

To Increase Rapport

- ▶ Learn about the personal histories and interests of people.
- ▶ Share personal information about yourself and your vision of success.

Inspiring Vision

- ▶ Enjoy relationship-building activities not specifically related to getting work done.

Trust is the essential glue to help keep stakeholders at the table and working together to tackle these issues is important.

Incentives

Incentives for collaboration might be modest but have a very positive impact. Incentives could include certificates for professional development, staff recognition or appreciation awards or events, or a pizza party or special meal when students achieve certain academic milestones or when a targeted number of families are housed.

Conclusion

Collaboration between the education and homeless systems is required by the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) and HUD CoC guidelines, and the complexity of the needs of homeless children and families require such collaboration. System collaboration has been shown to be more effective in reaching all the needs of homeless students to meet their educational goals. From a whole-systems perspective, we can identify the keys to successful collaboration. Keys to collaboration across systems fall into two simple categories: *hard* and *soft*. The hard categories include technical aspects to collaboration that require attention: federal definitions of homelessness, funding, laws and regulations regarding homeless people (and particularly homeless students), and data from schools, shelters, HUD (Homeless Management Information Systems and Point-in-Time Counts), and ED. The soft components of collaboration describe equally important elements such as leadership, trust, a shared vision, mental models, and incentives.

Collaboration within and across each school and community will vary and each will need to develop a different and customized approach. But a systemic framework, one that is inspired to achieve better outcomes for homeless children is and based on underlying assumptions, interconnections, and drivers of systems to achieve collaboration, is important.

Part II of this document offers specific tools to carry out various activities of collaboration.

PART II: Tools for Cross-System Collaboration

The following is a collection of tools and descriptions for practitioners who provide school and homeless services as they work to collaborate more effectively. Some collaborative efforts might only need tools with action steps; others might need to address mental models that are driving actions—or inaction—among would-be collaborators. We hope there is something of use at some level for educators and homeless service providers looking to work together more effectively.

The tools provided in this section are organized into two categories:

1. Content-specific tools—These tools are specifically geared toward education, homeless or other service systems
2. General tools for collaboration—These tools are useful to any collaborative effort.

A. Content-Specific Tools

Template for Beginning Collaboration Among Homeless Education Administrators

Bowman, D., Burdette, P., & Julianelle, P. (2008). *Homeless and special education administrative collaboration: Recommendations*. Alexandria, VA: National Association for State Directors of Special Education. Retrieved from http://nasdse.org/DesktopModules/DNNspot-Store/ProductFiles/33_f249a1ef-2bc2-4276-bcde-b2c9f76ec742.pdf

This list of recommendations could be adapted to include a list of local and state participants, specific questions regarding local and state demographics of homeless population, and issues, challenges, and questions to be addressed regarding policies, practices, and strategies for addressing the educational needs of homeless students.

Homeless Liaison Toolkit

National Center for Homeless Education. (2013). *Homeless liaison toolkit*. Greensboro, NC: Author. Retrieved <http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/toolkit2/toolkit.pdf>

The NCHE Homeless Liaison Toolkit is a resource with “clear and specific explanations of the provisions of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program and includes practices, procedures, and tools gathered from effective local homeless education programs.” There is an especially helpful chapter on Collaboration (Chapter 11).

Collaboration Between Child Welfare and Mental Health Services

James, S., & Marsenich, L. (2010). *Collaboration between child welfare and mental health services*. Berkeley, CA: California Social Work Education Center, Department of Social Work and Social Ecology, Loma Linda University. Retrieved from http://www.cibhs.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/calswec_collaboration_in_cw_and_mh_curriculum.pdf

This guide includes curriculum on levels of collaboration, continuum of collaboration, ingredients, members, structure, and process that might be used in a community as technical assistance (TA) to get everyone thinking about what it means to collaborate.

The activity shown in Table 1, adapted from James and Marsinich (2001), is fun and gets groups energized to start working together. It is intended to provide information about various aspects of the education system and homeless services system. It is a tool and group process for learning about each respective system, dispelling misconceptions and identifying areas for collaboration.

Table 1. Education and Homeless Jeopardy Game (An Exercise for Collaborators)

	1 Education System	2 Homeless Services System	3 Areas of Overlap	4 Areas of Divergence	5 Implications for Collaboration
Mission					
Values					
Organizational structure					
Knowledge base training					
Required skills					
Roles					
Primary client					
Supervision					
Caseloads					
Services					
Timelines					
Expected outcomes					
Funding					
Legal obligations					
Policy					
Organizational structure					

Source: James & Marsinich, 2001, p. 15.

Columns 1 and 2

For the columns “Education System” and “Homeless Services System” stakeholders are meant to gather descriptive information about each system. What is the mission of the Education System and the Homeless Services System, respectively? What are the predominant values of

each system? How would you describe the organizational structure of each system? When game participants have little background knowledge about each system, it may be helpful to ask stakeholders prior to coming to a meeting to complete Table 1 collaboratively with a few other participants.

Columns 3, 4, and 5

These columns can be included to explicitly address areas of overlap and divergence between each system across the multiple domains. Areas of significant divergence can serve as important demarcations and might not lend themselves to collaborative projects. As such, implications for collaboration should be part of the discussion.

Questions for Discussion and Proposed Exercises

In-Meeting Tool

1. Gather information about each system through a group discussion.
2. Divide by specialization—Education or Homeless Services—and gather information about the respective other system through small-group discussion.
3. Divide into small groups (groups may be a mix of Education and Homeless stakeholders). Each individual will be assigned several different dimensions (e.g., values, mission, and knowledge base). In groups, gather information about each system along the assigned dimensions. Then, reflect on the collaborative aspects of the exercise. For instance: What was it like to be part of your group? What worked well? Who were the leaders in the group? How were roles divided?
4. Divide into small groups (three or four members) and gather information about each or both systems along several or all dimensions prior to attending the meeting (as indicated by facilitator leading the exercise). Reflect on the collaborative aspects of the exercise when you reconvene as a group.

This discussion format was adapted from James & Marsinich (2001, pp. 15–17).

Continuum of Care Coordinated Assessment Toolkit

National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2013). *Coordinated assessment toolkit*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/coordinated-assessment-toolkit>

This toolkit is especially useful to those in the education system looking to collaborate with other service providers within the CoC. Developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, this online toolkit includes planning tools, assessment and referrals tools, handling data and HMIS, evaluation and community examples and materials. This is less about direct collaboration and more a resources for collaborators that need information about the homeless CoC. Table 2 shows the results from a hypothetical CoC meeting.

Developing the Capacity for Collaboration

In order for CoCs to carry out the four main goals of the CoC program outlined earlier in the document, CoCs conduct regular meetings that cover any of the following topics: crisis response system planning and operations, CoC competition planning, coordinated entry design, development, and implementation, sub-population specific challenges, such as a working group on challenges unique to homeless children and youth, and other topics necessary to carry out the duties of the CoC. Because a systems level approach to preventing and ending homelessness requires true collaboration among many different community stakeholders, the CoC is required to reach out and include a wide range of agencies, organizations, and individuals in its membership and as participants in its many meetings. To most effectively participate in CoC meetings, it is important for education-based stakeholders to understand that each stakeholder represents a unique community system with its own sets of priorities. Identifying and understanding each stakeholder's priorities and how they fit into (or conflict with) the broader goals of the CoC Program is crucial to effective collaboration.

The chart below (Table 2 is an example of a stakeholder priorities map. It identifies the primary and secondary priorities that a variety of stakeholders *might* bring into a meeting and is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the stakeholders who attend CoC meetings or the many priorities they may bring with them. Instead, the chart should serve as an example of how a community can map out various stakeholder priorities to better understand what each stakeholder brings to the table. By better understanding stakeholder priorities, all stakeholders are equipped with the knowledge to engage in meaningful conversations that move the community towards the common goal of preventing and ending homelessness, while addressing other needs of stakeholders when possible.

Table 2. A Hypothetical CoC Coalition Meeting

Meeting Role	Primary Priorities	Other Priorities
McKinney-Vento homeless liaison	I need to ensure that all homeless children are identified within the CoC and that everyone is aware of the rights of homeless students in the community.	I have high caseloads with many homeless students who need housing stability in order to achieve academically and have a bright future. We must do more to reduce the amount of children facing homelessness, including families living doubled-up.
School district official	I need to ensure the academic success of the homeless children in my school district and my district as a whole. Housing has a large impact on this success.	I need to meet graduation rates, ensure high test scores across my district, and reduce chronic absenteeism, among many other priorities; housing stability can help with all of these outcomes. I also need to ensure the financial health of my district and transporting homeless children from other towns is a high financial burden.
Homeless parent	I need a safe, affordable and permanent place to call home. A place where my children can have access to good schools and safe places to play.	My family also has many other needs beyond housing. I need to find stable employment and reliable transportation to get to work and to get the children around. I also need child care and quality medical care for my family. Many of these issues would be more manageable with a place to call home but I cannot afford rent right now and trying to accomplish all of this from a shelter is hard.

Meeting Role	Primary Priorities	Other Priorities
Homeless services caseworker	I need to ensure that all the homeless families on my case load are stably housed and accessing the services they need to be successful. I also need to make sure that new families are properly referred through coordinated entry to gain access to the appropriate intervention and supports that quickly re-house them or help them stay housed if unstably housed.	I have high caseloads and there are many families in need including those that are unstably housed. I need to ensure that I am advocating for my clients while also ensuring that those families most at need are gaining access to the next available housing resources. I also need to ensure they are connected to the mainstream resources and educational resources to help them stay housed and succeed.
CoC lead agency	We are charged with preventing and ending homelessness in our community. We need to ensure that we are approaching homelessness from a systems perspective and that we are actively collaborating with partners such as schools and mainstream resources. We have a priority to focus on persons who are most vulnerable and most in need of housing and services.	We need to ensure we are working within the HUD established parameters of the CoC program and that we have strong outcomes that will make us competitive for CoC funds. Among many things, we must establish a coordinated entry process that assess and prioritize all homeless individuals and families, develop the resources to quickly and permanently house families, and collaborate with partners to ensure the connection to mainstream resources and the educational stability of children and families.
Elected official	I want all my constituents to have a safe and affordable home and to have access to quality jobs and schools in healthy neighborhoods.	I have numerous other priorities beyond homelessness and must balance the needs of my homeless constituents with the needs of business, schools, and other constituency groups.
Business leader	I want our community to address street homelessness. All people should have a safe place to stay and our streets need to remain friendly for business.	Our primary concern is homeless people downtown who can hurt our local businesses. I am also concerned with taxes and the funding of our approach to addressing homelessness.
Affordable housing advocate	I believe that all people have the right to a safe and affordable home in strong communities. I want to ensure that my community has a strong plan to not only house the homeless but to ensure that housing is affordable for all people in the community to prevent further homelessness.	I need to work with elected officials, service providers, funders, schools, and business to develop affordable housing. We have to build strong communities at the same time we are developing affordable housing to ensure children and families can succeed educationally and economically and stay housed.

Meeting Role	Primary Priorities	Other Priorities
Funder	We are mission driven and have a commitment to ensuring homeless children, youth, families, and individuals have the opportunity to safe and affordable housing in healthy neighborhoods.	We are data and outcome driven and we must show our board of directors that our funding is having a measurable impact on preventing and ending homelessness.

Trauma-Informed Organizational Capacity Scale (TIC Scale)

A disproportionately high number of homeless students and their family members have experienced physically or emotionally traumatic experiences. Understanding the effects of trauma, how it presents in people, and effective ways to treat people is the essence of Trauma-Informed Care (TIC). Many organizations in the homeless service system provide trauma-informed care, and an increasing number of schools have aspects of trauma-informed care.

TIC can serve as a common language, framework, and sensibility to better facilitate collaboration across the education and homeless service systems. TIC Scale is a trauma-informed assessment tool to help organizations assess the effectiveness of the TIC being provided and make improvements if needed. It is the first psychometrically tested instrument to measure the degree of trauma-informed care in human service organizations. TIC Scale is a 35-item instrument divided into five domains: 1) Build trauma-informed knowledge and skills; 2) Establish trusting relationships; 3) Respect service users; 4) Foster trauma-informed service delivery; and 5) Promote trauma-informed procedures and policies. Each item is rated on a 4-point scale, indicating the extent to which respondents agree that their organization complies with the specific item (Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree). The measure provides domain-level scores based on respondents' ratings of individual items. The five domain-level scores can be combined into an overall score.

TIC Scale is currently designed for service agencies. A school-based version is in development for educators. To learn more visit the website www.air.org or contact Kathleen Guarino at kguarino@air.org.

B. General Tools for Collaboration

Collaboration Assessment Worksheets

Justice Center. (n.d.). *Collaboration assessment worksheets*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Collaboration_Assessment_Tool.pdf

This assessment tool was developed by Justice Center, The Council of State Governments, and the National Institute of Corrections. It includes excellent questions on common knowledge base, screening procedures, process and outcome evaluations, governing structure, memorandums of understanding, and boundary spanners, which are relevant to any system collaboration. Although it is designed for collaborations with institutes of corrections, it is 90 percent applicable to Education Systems and Homeless Services Systems looking to collaborate.

Finding Boundary Spanners

People with different histories, perspectives, cultures, and experiences reside with little contact between groups because of different types of boundaries that define the identity of each group

(Ernst & Yip, 2009; Howard, Aldrich, & Harker, 1977). To solve issues of addressing the educational needs of students who are homeless, organizations within communities need to work together. Stakeholders who can serve as boundary spanners can effectively bridge communication gaps between diverse organizations and systems. These individuals could be official leaders in title or stakeholders who have the interest, personality, experience, or skill set to effectively navigate two systems. Perhaps a person was a case manager in a family homeless shelter for years and then became a school social worker in a nearby town. This individual would be in a unique position to understand what made peers in either system “tick”: What inspired members of each system do their work? What were the relevant regulations they paid attention to every day? What were their mental models around the priority in best serving homeless youth? Someone with knowledge of these answers could play a unique role in informing leadership or guiding the collaboration process.

In some communities, an individual is hired to serve as the organizational navigator between the different groups and agencies within the community. For many communities, school administrators serve as boundary spanner leaders (Miller, 2009a). An effective boundary spanner leader is an individual or group of individuals who have multileveled knowledge of the different organizations and social groups in the community. This knowledge includes:

- ▶ An understanding and recognition of the different cultures, interests, and values of different agency organizations and social groups
- ▶ An understanding of how different agencies operate
- ▶ The ability to use this knowledge to develop long-term plans for community action (Ernst & Yip, 2009; Miller, 2009a)

Key Questions to Identify an Effective Boundary Spanner

- Does the person have an awareness of the education and homeless service systems’ organizational cultures? (*E.g., how they work, driving values, goals, etc.*)
- Does the person understand how each system or organization operates? (*E.g., where authority or power lies; key federal, state, and local regulations that guide the work; and what data are available*)
- Can the person not only understand and navigate each system effectively but also articulate key aspects of each to stakeholders from the other system? Can the person facilitate a process of shared learning and building trust? (*E.g., exercises that recognize personal and organizational mental models, group discussions, guest speakers, and site visits*)
- Can the person *facilitate* a collaborative process among stakeholders to create a plan to evolve among the Stages of Integration to ultimately effective collaboration in best serving homeless students and their families? Or, can this person work with someone who has facilitative skills and experience? (*E.g., identifying leverage points between the two systems and building a plan that identifies incentives, regulations, and mental models*)

- Is the person an active learner and can the person create an atmosphere of active learning among potential collaborators of the two systems?

Stakeholder Analysis

Too often, community leaders start to change parts of a system by implementing technical fixes rather than first establishing a shared foundation for change and understanding obstacles to change. In the case of homelessness, technical fixes include adjusting funding mechanisms, providing housing vouchers and housing units, reallocating dollars for permanent housing, and improving data systems. However, these technical changes do not necessarily consider the benefits that stakeholders receive from helping people cope with homelessness instead of end it.

Why Is This Analysis a Critical Component of Cross-System Collaboration?

Cross-system collaboration performance improves only when the relationships among the parts of the system change—not when people try to optimize their part of the system. Making the shift from a parts-oriented view to a systems view requires building specific capacities for collaboration. This begins by engaging all key stakeholders in a community organizing initiative. To engage key stakeholders, a local convening organization or group such as an individual foundation or a communitywide board needs to take a lead and clarify who should be actively involved and then develop a strategy for convening them regularly. A stakeholder analysis is a simple tool to guide the engagement process. It can be used as a comprehensive analysis of what drives each stakeholder and what role each can play in driving the particular initiative in question.

Identifying Key Stakeholders

In a HUD CoC, stakeholders are representatives from organizations who are invited to make up the CoC, the coordinating body to address homelessness in a geographic region. This group can include representatives from the following organizations:

- ▶ Child welfare services
- ▶ The criminal justice system
- ▶ Schools
- ▶ Universities
- ▶ Public transportation
- ▶ Health care professionals
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Public sector officials at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels (e.g., an education liaison at each level of government)

Affirming both a shared aspiration related to an issue and an initial common understanding of the current reality of the system builds the readiness for change. Even when people express concern about the impact of change on their particular part of the system, they are likely to come together with a shared aspiration (whether it involves ending homelessness, improving health care, or increasing food security). At the same time, they might have different images of the ideal future, and often more significantly, they are likely to have very different perceptions of the current reality—especially about why the problem of academic achievement for homeless students persists and what should be done to solve it. The next steps involve taking knowledge gained from stakeholder analyses to broaden perspectives, thinking systematically about collaboration, and holding productive conversations to develop deeper capacities of understanding responsibilities and roles.

A stakeholder map is a simple tool to guide the collaboration or engagement process (see Table 3).

Table 3. Stakeholder Analysis

Name	Current Support (-3 to +3)	Desired Support (-3 to +3)	Their Motivation	Barriers to Collaboration	What You Can Do

When applying the tool to ending homelessness as a sample issue, use column 1 (Name) to identify the names of groups or individuals who need to be involved because they impact or are impacted by local homelessness. In column 2 (Current Support), consider how supportive each stakeholder currently is of ending local homelessness. For example, a -3 indicates that they are strongly motivated to block efforts to end homelessness, a 0 indicates they are neutral, and a +3 indicates that they are motivated to take the lead in ending homelessness.

In column 3 (Desired Support), write down how you as a convener want each stakeholder to be involved in ending homelessness. For example, you might want to move a group that is currently a -3 (looking to block the effort), -2 (strongly opposed), or -1 (somewhat opposed) to a more neutral 0 position. Or, you might want to motivate a group who is currently neutral to become a +1 (somewhat supportive) or +2 (strongly supportive) contributor. Because it helps to have only

one organization or group in a formal leadership role, such as a multisector leadership board, identify one stakeholder whom you want to see in the +3 role.

In column 4 (Their Motivation), clarify the motivators for each stakeholder to participate in the way that was described in column 3. Some motivators are likely to be the same for many stakeholders, while others will be unique to specific groups. If people are resistant to change, then clarify in this column the nature of their resistance as technical, political, or cultural. Note in column 5 (What You Can Do) how you intend to engage each stakeholder depending on why they would want to be involved. Some groups might be best engaged initially through individual outreach, whereas others might be glad to be involved immediately through a communitywide gathering. In the case of people who resist the change, consider how you might address their concerns directly, influence them through others, engage them at critical phases in the process, or work around them. (This tool is taken from a draft paper created by David Peter Stroh and J. McGah in 2014.)

Identifying Mental Models

An effective tool often used to identify mental models is the Ladder of Inference (Figure 3). The Ladder of Inference was developed by organizational psychologist Chris Argyris, and it received prominence in the book *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge and others. The Ladder of Inference is a tool that is used often for collaboration. Practitioners who are beginning or are well along in a collaborative effort can benefit from using the latter inference. This tool helps partners to be conscious of what beliefs and actions they are taking are based on confirming data or incomplete mental models and assumptions.¹

¹ For a good video about the ladder of inference as part of the TED-Ed resources visit this link: <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/rethinking-thinking-trevor-maber>.

Figure 3. Ladder of Inference



The ladder describes how people perceive information (first rung), and data are filtered to select the information that aligns with our experiences and beliefs (second rung). Then, we add meaning to what we have filtered (third rung), make assumptions about others’ motivations (fourth rung), make conclusions (fifth rung), and form beliefs that with reinforce old ones or make new ones (sixth rung). Last, on the seventh and final rung, we take action based on those beliefs.

We can move very quickly up the latter of inference to “action” without realizing what data we are filtering out or how our beliefs skewed what data we observed. The theory behind the ladder suggests that we can use this awareness of these steps (or rungs) to not “rush up the ladder” or jump to conclusions. With increased awareness, as we are collaborating we can ask ourselves, “What beliefs are at play? Where did they come from? How did I filter these data? Are my assumptions supported by facts?” By checking our assumptions and mental models, we can be mindful of the thinking we go through that lead to action or how others do the same. This awareness can be very helpful especially in collaborative efforts across different systems.

The ladder of influence is largely for individuals. Organizations should also consider their mental models. Consider consciously addressing the following questions using Table 4 as a guide, or adjust it to meet your specific collaboration.

Table 4. Exploring Organizational Mental Models

Organization	What Is the Number 1 Need of Homeless Students?	What is the Number 1 Need of Families of Homeless Students?	What Is Our Biggest Priority?	What Is Our Biggest Barrier?	What Are Opportunities for Collaboration?

Appendix A: Understanding the Continuum for Cross-System Collaboration

Complex, intertwined, and systemic problems in a community, such as improving the academic success of homeless students, require collaboration throughout a community and across systems. No single organization or single system can make significant improvement without the help and cooperation of others (Moore, 2005; Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino, et al., 2015).

Organizations can work together in different ways, and all working relationships require varying levels of human resources, trust, skills, time, and financial resources. In choosing the most appropriate organizational relationship, consider what each organization wants to accomplish by working together, what type of relationship is necessary to accomplish those goals, and what resources will be necessary to achieve the organizational relationships, such as time, financial resources, and community support. Consider whether there is sufficient trust and commitment to support this kind of relationship (Axner, 2015; Gonsoulin & Read, 2011). (See the “Stakeholder Analysis” in Part II. B. General Tools for Collaboration.)

Rather than rooting the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program implementation authority in individual’s specific positions and commitment (e.g., homeless liaison), efforts to improve academic achievement for homeless students can become more robustly and stably tied to wider organizational resources and norms. Boundary-spanning collaborative practices—in which school and community-based stakeholders work together—are critical to collaboration (Gonsoulin & Read, 2011; Miller, 2009). A description of various approaches to working together along with examples for the education and homeless systems is given next.

Networking

Organizations within a community have a networking relationship when they exchange information to help each organization do a better job. Networking often provides a good starting point for people to work together, requires the least amount of commitment and time from organizations, and could have significant positive results (Axner, 2015).

Example of Networking Between Education and Homeless Systems

Homeless and education systems (and other systems and organizations in the community that support the academic progress of homeless students) can network in several ways, including by sharing information and attending training events together. Information sharing can include agency and school newsletters, e-mail networks to learn about upcoming events, and targeted information sharing, such as sending short briefs about best practices in homeless education to teachers and homeless agency staff members (citation of homeless liaison interviewed). HUD grantees can learn about local and state education laws and services, including Title I, special education, and early childhood education from the area school district(s). Likewise, educational

grantees can learn about various housing resources offered in the community. Housing providers can take actions to better network with Head Start, Early Head Start, preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and school district administrators by visiting them, setting up meetings, and inviting them to CoC meetings. Education providers can find out about local CoC meetings and can set up meetings with local homeless service providers, affordable housing providers, and local public housing agencies (Administration for Children and Families, 2014).

An example of networking includes efforts in Marion County, Indiana, in which the lead CoC agency engaged the media in sharing data on the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness, developed a video on the education challenges facing these youth, and described opportunities to help families. Because of these initiatives, access to services and federal funding awards has become more feasible for the community (National Center for Homeless Education, 2013).

The homeless services team in Prince George’s County, Maryland, prioritizes networking to a remarkable degree. By conscientiously attending community meetings and inviting service providers to meetings they host, they maintain a shared knowledge of resources available for students and a robust network that can be mobilized to support students and their families when needed. They also continually ask, “How can we be helpful to partners so the benefits of the network are always reciprocal? How can we maintain the strength of the network?”

Coordination

Organizations have a coordinating relationship when they modify their activities so that together they provide better services to homeless students. Coordination helps to fill in gaps, prevents service duplication, and improves access to necessary services. A coordinating relationship requires more organizational involvement, time, and trust than a networking relationship, but the results can significantly improve lives for the homeless students and families (Axner, 2015). [See more on Trust on in the section “Trust (Required to Promote Collaboration).”]

Examples of Coordination Between Education and Homeless Systems

Coordinating relationships between homeless and education systems can include modifying the time counselors are available to provide necessary mental health services for homeless students or changing the times of events held by different organizations intended for homeless families and youth so that they do not conflict with one another. Coordination can include schools completing student identification forms and referrals. In Mesa County, Colorado, the school district’s homeless education program identifies students in need and refers their families for the Next Step Housing program. Next Step provides up to two years of housing for homeless families, prioritized public housing authority’s Housing Choice Vouchers, and focus on education outcomes for youth so that parents review their children’s grades and other education measures with a homeless case manager (National Center for Homeless Education, 2013).

Cooperation

Organizations that cooperate with one another share resources to help each other achieve goals and provide better services. Cooperation requires more trust and a greater investment in time, and it requires that organizations are willing to share ownership and responsibility (Axner, 2015).

Examples of Cooperation Between Education and Homeless Systems

In a cooperative relationship, organizations can share staff, volunteers, expertise, space, funds, and other resources. For example, public housing authorities provide dedicated space for Early Head Start and Adult Education Services (Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, 2015b). Special education buses can be used for homeless students. Other school districts practice cooperative efforts with community agencies by sharing bus passes and gas vouchers to improve transportation supports for homeless students.

Collaboration

In a collaborative relationship, organizations help each other expand or enhance their capacities to do their jobs. In collaborative relationships, people begin to view each other as partners rather than competitors. This shift in view is profound, as then organizations can share risks, responsibilities and reward, and credit. Collaboration implies a much higher level of trust, risk taking, sharing space, and commitment to accomplish goals together (Axner, 2015). Collaboration exists when several people from different organizations pool their common interests, assets, and professional skills to promote broader interests for the community's benefit (Gajda, 2004).

Multisector collaboration is more complex and challenging than other organizational relationships because it requires that all parties put aside narrow interests and give priority to common goals. In multisector collaboration, community members become equal players with businesses and government to make decisions that affect community members and human service needs.

Examples of Collaboration Between Homeless and Education Systems

In a collaborative effort, education and school systems can jointly apply for a grant to train staff and plan together to cosponsor a large public event to expand involvement of other organizations in the community to support the academic success of youth.

Systems Integration

Systems integration is achieved when separate systems work together to create a new shared identity or shared product or service. Systems integration often involves a legal partnership that is a contractual relationship involving close cooperation between two or more parties having specified joint rights and responsibilities. Beyond collaboration, systems integration can include sharing system resources such as data or staff. Each party has an equal share of the risk as well

as the reward. An example of effective community collaboration is the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

Examples of Systems Integration

Minneapolis Public Schools' School Success Program for Highly Mobile Students and the Madison, Wisconsin, Metropolitan School District's Transitional Educational program systematically integrate the education of homeless students into the district's overall mission. The Minneapolis program aims to support student enrollment, transportation, and academic success during periods of homelessness. The Madison program efforts to help students all students meet the high academic, behavioral and attendance expectations of the district reveal that the districts believes in the integration of homeless student's experiences with those of the wider student bodies (Miller, 2012b).

School–community partnership models create greater access to integrated services that address obstacles to academic achievement, including academic intervention, dropout prevention programs, counseling, health services, and specialist instructional support. A strong partnership would engage the public in strengthening homeless student achievement by integrating existing services. An example of this is Promise Neighborhoods, a comprehensive school and community-based initiative funded by the ED designed to help at-risk children reach college and transform the communities they in which they live.

The DeKalb Kids Home Collaborative is a successful partnership among homeless service providers, the school system, and an employment service program to help children avoid or quickly exit homelessness. The partnership provides families with blended, coordinated services to promote housing and education stability while improving families' economic security by helping parents connect to employment. The partnership leverages the expertise and resources that each organization provides. A governing committee made up of representatives from each of the organizations oversees their collective work and has the authority to develop budgets and make decisions (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013). They use universal practices of assessment across the state that focus on what the child needs instructionally to decrease time spent on reassessment when the child changes service providers or schools.

Burt and Anderson (2006) created a five-stage framework for systems integration. The stages build on one another and include the following: (1) isolation, (2) communication, (3) coordination, (4) collaboration, and (5) coordinated community response. Outlining the steps for the processes involved in systems collaboration can be useful for identifying capacities and relationships among collaborators and for developing comprehensive blueprint plans for the community indicating procedures from the initial recognition of the problem up through the actual execution of action (Burt & Spellman, 2007). These levels or stages are progressive: One builds into the other. For collaborative efforts that are not communitywide, you can end at “Stage 4: Collaboration.” Each stage includes the following characteristics:

Stage 1: Isolation

- ▶ No communication occurs among stakeholders.

- ▶ A need for communication is not recognized.
- ▶ Although ineffective, isolation is not as detrimental as hostile communication, suspicion, and distrust (Burt & Anderson, 2006; Burt & Spellman, 2007; Burt et al., 2000).

Stage 2: Communication

- ▶ Stakeholders talk and share information in a helpful way.
- ▶ Participants are informed of what counterparts do, resources available, and services offered.
- ▶ Communication may occur among front-line workers, mid-level workers, and/or agency leaders

Stage 3: Coordination

- ▶ Staff from different agencies work together on case-by-case basis.
- ▶ Cross-training is provided to appreciate others' roles.
- ▶ Coordination may occur among front-line workers, mid-level workers, and/or agency leaders.

Stage 4: Collaboration

- ▶ Collaboration entails organizational commitments, so that when people who made connections leave their positions, the collaboration survives.
- ▶ Stakeholders work together to develop shared goals.
- ▶ Protocols are given for each agency to do its work in a way that complements work by other agencies.
- ▶ Collaboration cannot happen without commitment from high-level officials from each organization.

Stage 5: Coordinated community response²

- ▶ A coordinated response incorporates all systems within the community.
- ▶ It requires mechanisms for overseeing, monitoring, and responding to individuals and households receiving services.
- ▶ Check-in meetings and using other methods are established for following up with all stakeholders involved in ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals and holds the same vision:
 - A coordinated response can also involve developing a task force or council to motivate others and ensure that the initiative goals are being accomplished and new ones are being set as needed.

² This level is required only for communitywide collaborative efforts and might go beyond just two systems collaborating.

- It is useful for identifying remaining gaps and strategizing ways to improve the system.

Appendix B: Definition of Terms

This appendix gives an alphabetical list of terms referred to in the literature review and a brief definition to explain how they are used.

Alignment

Generally, *alignment* refers to the state in which stakeholders, organizations, or systems have (a) common goal(s), have a similar strategy, hear the same key communications, assure data systems interact, and have similar incentives, rewards, and values. Stakeholders, organizations, and systems can have different cultures and still be aligned.

Boundary Spanner

A *boundary spanner* refers to the capabilities of individuals and organizations to establish cross-system collaborative practices. To achieve this, individuals must learn to understand how others think and interact. Boundary-spanning leaders are individuals who can “move freely and flexibly within and between organizations and communities” (Miller, 2009a, p. 622). In other words, it is someone who can navigate between organizational cultures of different systems—for example, a school social worker or social worker team that can reshape relationships with families, students, school personnel, and homeless service providers by collecting information from each and appropriately and using it to develop strategic relationships between groups in service of the student in need (Honig, 2006; Miller, Pavlakis, Samartino, et al., 2015; Miller, 2009a). In other areas, it would include the ability to understand how people in the different systems they interact with think and understand things: their mental models, their values, and their approaches to problems. As collaboration across systems occur, it is important to identify who has the qualities of a boundary spanner leader in the community.

Collaboration

Collaboration is working together with others to achieve a goal. It is the process used with groups, teams, organizations, systems, or communities to plan, create, solve problems, and make decisions (Straus, 2002). Although similar to cooperation and coordination, collaboration is a progressively higher level of working together because it involves organizational change (Burt & Anderson, 2006; Burt & Spellman, 2008; Osher, 2001), that is, transforming the way the organization functions. When working across systems, collaboration suggests an ongoing process of strategic relationship building between different groups. This process enables groups to experience a “transformative” state in which people within and policies between each system begin to unify (Gajda, 2004). This definition also applies to cross-system collaboration.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to the way an organization or system operates based on values, incentives, experiences, and mental models (Schein, 1984). Ways of operating may include levels of transparency, trust, how information is shared, openness of decision making, empowerment and forgiveness (Ali, Pascoe, & Warne, 2002). Many definitions of *organizational culture* in the literature also apply to systems. Here is one formal definition:

“Organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration and have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1984, p. 3.)

Different components of an organization can make up its culture: dress, physical environment, technology, stories, legal regulations, rituals, and routines. It might be easy to notice differences between homeless shelters and schools where the dress code, integration of technology, or physical buildings are very different. In addition, each has different ultimate goals: stably housing a student and his or her family versus providing an education equal to housed students. Perhaps the most important aspect of defining a culture is the organizations or system’s values (Schein, 1984, Cameron and Quinn, 2006). Values drive, and are driven by, the mental models we all carry with us.

Mental Models

Mental models are the beliefs and assumptions each individual carries. Although rarely identified directly in our work with others, they can play a major role in affecting people’s action or inaction (Mathieu et al., 2000; Senge, 1994). Mental models can be influenced by one’s cultural, religious, or socioeconomic status. They can be informed by the organization or system of which a person is part. In regard to cross-system collaboration, mental models help people understand the system they are part of, its purpose, and how it will react moving forward (Mathieu et al., 2000). Addressing differing mental models can be one of the most effective leverage points toward effective collaboration. (See Part II of this document for a simple tool to identify mental models.)

System

Author, teacher, and systems writer Donella Meadows (2008) defined a *system* as an “interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.” A system therefore contains three things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose (Meadows, 2008, p. 11.). Elements of a system include all the components have create a cause and effect, including people, laws, mental models, and structures.

The systems we discuss are differentiated mainly by their purpose. The education system’s purpose is to educate students effectively, and in the case of homeless students, it is to make sure they have the same level of opportunity and education as their housed counterparts.

“Elements” of the system include the ED, state education agencies, local school districts, schools, teachers, administrators, parents, and students, as well as laws about education, school cultures, and school funding.

Similarly, the homeless *system* is driven by a purpose and includes a wide range of elements. Its purpose is to provide permanent housing and a stabilizing service to prevent homelessness and/or sustain housing once attained. “Elements” of the homeless systems include people experiencing homelessness, shelter staff, case managers, funders, funding streams, HUD,³ state government agencies that oversee homeless issues, homeless advocates, shelters and other homeless service providers, caseworkers, and people experiencing homelessness. Systems can overlap, have sub systems (e.g., a school or shelter is its own system), and be nested in larger systems (e.g., the federal government). These large systems are complex and often have their own cultures, reward systems, organizational structures, and rules and regulations that govern how they function.

Systems Integration

Simply put, *systems integration* refers to collaboration and alignment across one or more systems of goals, policies and procedures, communication, data, and incentives. It can occur in various degrees and at various levels between two or more systems. For example, systems integration between the education and homeless services systems can occur at the local, state, or federal levels. At each of those levels, systems can integrate across top leadership, midlevel staff, and front-line staff. Because integration across systems involves collaboration and alignment, deeper integration will involve a high level of trust, shared vision, and shared data to be sustainable.

Systems Thinking

A handful of disciplines are characterized as “systems thinking.” Perhaps the one most associated with the term comes from the field of System Dynamics, which evolved out of M.I.T. in the 1950s and continually evolved in various fields and organizations. Systems thinking is a way of looking at the world holistically and trying to understand how the parts of a system relate to one another, identifying feedback loops of cause and effect within a system. It is based on an understanding that system behavior (any complex system from the human body to social organizations) is predicated more on the system *structure* than any data points or trends the system exhibits. Therefore, to affect change within a system, we must first identify the structure and look to change it. For example, simply changing leadership of a system without addressing the structure could have cosmetic or short-term improvements, but it might not address the root causes of why a system is not reaching desired results. A systems thinking approach includes looking to determine the behavior of the system over time (e.g., improved and sustainable

³ Other federal agencies significantly overlap with HUD in serving people experiencing homelessness: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Justice, and ED. Each of these agencies has a guiding purpose other than housing people. The overlap is significant, hence the need for cross-system collaboration and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness for collaboration at the federal level.

educational outcomes, improved and sustainable housing outcomes, and no homeless youth), mapping the dynamics among system elements in a shared visual (or systems map) with stakeholders, finding unintended consequences of actions and policies, and identifying mental models that influence people's behavior within the system. With that systemic perspective, Systems thinkers can find leverage points that can effect desired systems change.

Vision

A vision is a picture of success in the future. A vision can be personal, or it can be shared among members of a group or community. A personal vision can inspire an individual; but to galvanize and inspire collaboration within an organization or across systems, a shared vision is required. A shared vision is developed best through an iterative process among stakeholders with input from many stakeholders as opposed to simply being dictated by a leader. A vision is a key early step for collaborating effectively. From a vision, policies and models can be developed, from which action plans, laws, and strategies can be implemented (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 1994; Strauss, 2002).

Alternative Text

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 provides guidelines for creating accessible documents for distribution or posting on the Internet. These guidelines require images and objects that convey information to have alternative (alt) text descriptions. Alt text helps people with screen readers understand the content of pictures. Information on adding alt text to images in a Word document is found at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/add-alternative-text-to-a-shape-picture-chart-smartart-graphic-or-other-object-HA010177841.aspx?CTT=1#BM14>. Tips on producing accessible Word documents can be found at <http://webaim.org/techniques/word/>.

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